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Digest
Mishna Berura
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סימן רי"ט סעיף א'

Halacha Highlight

A child reciting hagomel

Shulchan Aruch Siman 219 Seif 1

ארבעה צריכים להודות

Four categories of people must give thanks

Shulchan Aruch introduces the topic of the recitation of the beracha of hagomel. He writes that there are four categories of people who are obligated to recite this beracha. Those who travelled by sea or through the desert, were ill or imprisoned. In all of these circumstances once one is no longer in danger he recites the beracha of hagomel. Mishnah Berurah (סק"ג) in the name of later authorities writes that a child is not obligated to recite the beracha of hagomel even for chinuch purposes. The origin of this opinion is Teshuvas Maharam Mintz (סי' י"ד) who writes that a child cannot say the phrase לחייבים טובות—good upon the guilty – since it implies that child was liable for punishment and in fact, children cannot be liable to punishment. If one were to suggest that the child became ill due to his father's transgressions it would be disrespectful for a child to recite the beracha and blame his condition on his father's wickedness. It is also not possible to skip those words since that would involve changing the wording as composed by Chazal.

Other authorities disagree and see no issue with a child reciting the beracha of hagomel. The phrase חייבים does not mean that the one reciting the beracha is declaring that he was guilty; rather it is a general statement that Hashem bestows kindness even on the guilty. It is a praise of the way Hashem conducts Himself in this world. Evidence of this is that even someone known to be a tzadik recites the beracha of hagomel. Ben Ish Chai writes that the matter is subject to the local custom and when there is no known custom the child should recite the beracha without mentioning Hashem's Name or His Kingdom (חיי משה). In the event that a child became ill and recovered after he became a bar-mitzvah it is uncertain whether he is obligated to recite hagomel (שו"ת מנחת שלמה ח"ב סי' ד' אות ל"א). Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach rules that whenever there is a doubt whether hagomel should be recited one should say the beracha of הגומל חסדים טובים in the presence of ten people (הליכות שלמה תפלה פכ"ג הלכה ח' וברשימות).

Overview

Siman 219 Seif 1:

Four categories of people must give thanks, those who travel by sea upon the completion of their journey, those who travel through the desert when they reach an inhabited place, someone who was ill and recovered and someone released from prison. The mnemonic device to remember this is וכל החיי"ם יודוך סלה and the word חיי"ם stands for ח'בוש, י'סורים, י'ם מ'דבר.

- The beracha is recited only when one completes his journey but when the ship stops in a port for a day or two before continuing the journey he does not recite the beracha. The same is true regarding those who travel through the desert. (M.B. 1)
- One who was ill recites the beracha only when he has fully recovered. (M.B. 2)
- According to Magen Avrohom Shulchan Aruch refers to someone imprisoned for a capital crime but many other authorities disagree, see Biur Halacha. Later authorities write that one who went through all four experiences recites only one beracha. (M.B. 3)
- A child is not obligated to recite הגומל even for chinuch purposes. The custom is also that women do not recite the beracha and later authorities explain that since it should be recited in the presence of ten people it is not proper for a woman to recite it in the presence of ten men. Some write that it should be recited in the presence of women and one man. (M.B. 3)