

Tehillat Hashem and Other Verses Before Birkat Ha-Mazon

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In this article we investigate the origin and development of saying various Psalms and selected verses from Psalms before *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. In particular, we will attempt to explain the practice of some Ashkenazic Jews to add Psalms 145:21, 115:18, 118:1 and 106:2 after Ps. 126 (*Shir Ha-Ma'alot*) and before *Birkat Ha-Mazon*.

Psalms 137 and 126 Before *Birkat Ha-Mazon*

The earliest source for reciting Ps. 137 (*Al Naharot Bavel*) before *Birkat Ha-Mazon* is found in the list of practices of the Tzfat kabbalist R. Moshe Cordovero (1522–1570). There are different versions of this list, but all versions include the practice of saying *Al Naharot Bavel*.¹ Some versions specifically note that this is to recall the destruction of the Temple,² some versions state that the Psalm is supposed to be said at the meal, though not specifically right before *Birkat Ha-Mazon*,³ and some versions state that the Psalm is only said on weekdays, though no alternative Psalm is offered for Shabbat and holidays.⁴ Although the exact provenance of this list is not clear, the parts of it referring to the recitation of Ps. 137 were already popularized by 1577.⁵

The mystical work *Seder Ha-Yom* by the 16th century Tzfat kabbalist R. Moshe ben Machir was first published in 1599. He also mentions saying *Al Naharot Bavel* at a meal in order to recall the destruction of the

¹ Moshe Hallamish, *Kabbalah in Liturgy, Halakhab and Customs* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2000), pp. 349, 353 (Hebrew).

² Hallamish, p. 349, MS 1691, item 13.

³ Hallamish, p. 349, MS 1961, item 13.

⁴ Hallamish, p. 353, MS 1955, item 22.

⁵ Hallamish, p. 347.

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Temple, and adds that “on Shabbat and holidays, when sorrow and sighing should not be mentioned, mention verses of the comfort of Zion and Jerusalem and the Psalm ‘When the Lord brought back those that returned to Zion’ (*Shir Ha-Maalot*, Ps. 126).”⁶

The recitation of *Al Naharot Bavel* before *Birkat Ha-Mazon* was next included in the work *Seder Ha-Shulhan* by R. Naftali ben David Zecharia, published in 1603, as the introductory part of a small bencher, making it the earliest bencher to include this custom.⁷ There he writes that the custom is based on the *Zohar* in *Terumah* 157b which states, “One who has pleasure at his table, and has pleasure from the food, should remember and worry about the holiness of the Holy Land and the Palace of the King which is destroyed; and on account of the sorrow which he experiences at his table along with the same joy and feasting which is there, The Holy One, Blessed be He, will consider it as if he built His House and built all of the ruins of the Temple, fortunate is his lot.”⁸

This practice was then included in *Shnei Luhot Ha-Brit* by R. Isaiah Horowitz (Shelah ha-Kadosh, c.1555–1630), first published in 1648 by his son. He puts together all the elements previously seen, bringing the quote from the *Zohar* as the source of the idea, and explains, “We recite the Psalm ‘By the rivers of Babylon’ (*Al Naharot Bavel*, Ps. 137) before *Birkat Ha-Mazon*...and on Shabbat and holidays we recite the Psalm ‘When the Lord brought back those that returned to Zion’ (*Shir ha-Ma’alot*, Ps. 126).”⁹

This idea was quoted in the name of Shelah by halachic authorities already in the 1600s, *Magen Avraham* (*Orah Hayyim* 1:5)¹⁰ and *Eliab Rab-*

⁶ Moshe ben Machir, *Seder Ha-Yom* (Venice: 1599), p. 29b. Some *kabbalists* already refrained from reciting Ps. 137 from Friday afternoon; see Moshe Hallamish, *Kabbalistic Customs of Shabbat* (Jerusalem: Orchot, 2006), p. 49, note 21 (Hebrew); *Mishna Berura* 267:1.

⁷ Abraham Berliner, *Ketavim Nivcharim, vol. 1* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1969), p. 31; Yissachar Jacobson, *Netiv Bina, vol. 2* (Tel Aviv: Sinai, 1987), p. 134. Note that R. Naftali ben David Zecharia only brings the custom to recite *Al Naharot Bavel*, not *Shir ha-Ma’alot*. On R. Naftali, see Reuven David Gershon and Moshe David Shvicha, “Seder Ha-Shulhan l-Rabbi Naftali” in *Birkat Menachem* (Cleveland: Machon Nahor Safra, 2007), pp. 77–79.

⁸ R. Naftali ben David Zecharia, *Birkat Hamazon* (Venice: 1603), p. 13a. *Al Naharot Bavel* is brought there on pp. 16a–16b.

⁹ R. Isaiah Horowitz, *Shnei Luhot ha-Brit* (Jerusalem: Machon Shaarei Ziv, 1993), *Shaar ha-Otiot, Kuf – Kedusbat ha-Akhlila, siman* 88, p. 369.

¹⁰ R. Avraham Gombiner in his *Magen Avraham* often includes *kabbalistic* works as halachic sources, see Chaim Tchernowitz, *Toldot Ha-Poskim vol. 3* (NY: 1947) p. 172.

bab (181:9), popularizing it outside of mystical circles. *Magen Avraham* was in turn quoted in *Mishna Berura* (*Orah Hayyim* 1:11). For this reason, popular works often attribute the origin of this practice to Shelah.¹¹

Other Psalms were suggested to fulfill the purpose of recalling the Temple. For example, for Shabbat and holidays, Maharshal says to recite Ps. 87,¹² and R. Yaakov Emden writes that Ps. 122 is recited.¹³ Different Psalms were suggested in other *kabbalistic* sources.¹⁴ Still, Ps. 137 and 126 proved to be the most popular. Even so, many early prayer books and benchers did not include any Psalms before *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, demonstrating that it was not a universal custom.¹⁵ For various reasons, some persisted in omitting *Al Naharot Bavel*¹⁶ and even *Shir ha-Ma'alot*.¹⁷

¹¹ See for example, Eliyahu Munk, *Olam haTefilot – vol. 1* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1992), p. 227; Macy Nulman, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1996) 304n2; Nosson Sherman, *Zemiros and Bircas Hamazon* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1998), p. 260.

¹² R. Menachem Mendel Landa, *Siddur Tz'luta d-Avraham*, vol. 2 (Tel-Aviv: Grafika, 1961) p. 389.

¹³ R. Yaakov Emden, *Amuddei Shammayim* (1962 facsimile edition), p. 23b.

¹⁴ Avraham Landa, *Siddur Tz'luta d-Avraham*, vol. 2 (Tel Aviv: 1961) p. 495. Ps. 87 was chosen for this purpose among Karlin-Stolin Chassidim, Yaakov Yisraeli, *Beit Karlin-Stolin* (Tel Aviv: Keren Yaakov v-Ra'el, 1982) p. 90.

¹⁵ Although the earliest bencher was published before the time of Shelah (Prague: 1515), even much after, these Psalms were not included. For example, they are not found in *Birkat Ha-Mazon* (Amsterdam: 1723); *Birkat Ha-Mazon k-Minhag Ashkenaz u-Polin* (Frankfurt am Main: 1727); Yitzchak Stanov, *Siddur Vayearer Yitzhak* (Berlin: 1785), p. 151a; *Birkat Ha-Mazon* (Dyhernfurth: 1811); Naftali Hertz Ha-Levi, *Siddur ha-Gra* (Jerusalem: 1895), p. 157b.

¹⁶ In certain circles it is rare to find people who say *Al Naharot Bavel* before *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, see Pinchas Ben Harush, *Mei Pinchas* (Ashdod: 2011) 134n13. Some only said it on the eve of the Ninth of Av, see Aharon Pinchuk, *Mateh Aharon* (Jerusalem: 1980) p. 17. R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach is also reported to not have said *Al Naharot Bavel*. See Shlomo Aviner, *Piskei Shlomo, vol. 1* (Beit El: Sifriat Chava, 2013) p. 89. R. Zvi Yehuda Kook replaced *Al Naharot Bavel* with *Shir Ha-Ma'alot*, which according to R. Yaakov Ariel, *rav* of Ramat Gan, is something that many in Israel do. See Mordechai Zion, *Kum Hithalekh b-Aretz* (Maale Adumim, 2015) p. 394. Regarding Chassidim who do not say Ps. 137, see the oft repeated anecdote regarding Reb Hillel Paritcher (1795–1864) in R. Hillel m-Paritch-Sippurim (Heichal Hanegina, 2015) pp. 56–57; *Kovetz Sippurim*, vol. 2 (Brooklyn: Beit Midrash Lubavitch, 1988), *siman* 63, p. 45. On the Chassidic custom, reported in the name of the Baal Shem Tov, to always say *Shir Ha-Ma'alot* instead of *Al Naharot Bavel*, see the comprehensive discussion in Yosef Lowy, *Minhag Yisrael Torah vol. 1* (Brooklyn, 1994) 1:4, pp. 43–44; Also Natan Perlman, “Minhag Rabboteinu sh-Ein Omrim ha-Piyut Dvai Haser,” *Kovetz Beit Aharon v-Yisrael*, vol. 180, Elul 5771 (2011) 155n28; Meir Yisrael,

We can now understand the development of this custom. At first it was noted that one should recall the destruction of the Temple during the meal, and reciting Ps. 137 was used to fulfill this. Since this Psalm was considered sad and thus inappropriate for Shabbat and holidays, a different Psalm was chosen to fill this role on those festive days.¹⁸ The Psalms then moved to being said immediately before *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. These Psalms do not have any particular connection to *Birkat Ha-Mazon* specifically,¹⁹ and they were given a specific location just to ensure that they would be said during the meal and not forgotten. However, there is a natural connection between these Psalms and parts of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, as the second blessing of *Birkat Ha-Mazon* (*Birkat Ha-Zan*) is focused on thanking God for the Land of Israel, and the third blessing (*Birkat Neḥama*) focuses on Jerusalem and the Temple, ideas central to Psalms 137 and 126, so it was reasonable to view them all as one extended unit.

Additional Verses Before *Birkat Ha-Mazon*

Some people say additional verses after Ps. 126 before *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, the most prevalent being Ps. 145:21 (תהלת ה' ידבר פי ויברך כל בשר שם קדשו לעולם ועד, My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord; and let all flesh bless His holy name forever and ever) and Ps. 115:18 (ואנחנו נברך יה

Birkat Ha-Mazon Ha-Mevoar (Bnei Brak: Keter Chaim, 2011) p. 144; Levi Yitzchak Raskin, *Seder Birkat Ha-Mazon* (London, 2013) 4n3. See also Zev Goldberger, *Darkhei ha-Yashar v-ha-Tov* (1910) p. 23b who reports that R. Zvi Hirsch Friedman of Lesko (d. 1874) always said *Shir Ha-Ma'alot* before *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, even on weekdays.

¹⁷ It is reported that R. Chaim of Volozhin would not say *Shir Ha-Ma'alot*, as it is still referring to exile and so not appropriate for Shabbat; Avraham Halevi Horowitz, *Orkhot Rabbeinu, vol. 1* (Bnei Brak, 1991) p. 115. The Ḥatam Sofer said neither Psalm; Yehuda Nachshoni, *Rabbenu Moshe Sofer* (Jerusalem: Masha-bim, 1981) p. 441, *siman* 75. Regarding Chassidim who do not say Ps. 126, see Eliezer Brandwein, *Degel Maḥane Yehuda* (Brooklyn, 2011) 360n26; Eren Moshe Margalit, *Haggadat Likutei Sfat Emet* (Or Etzion, 2009) 201n129. See also *Rebbe Vehel* (Bnei Brak: 2003) p. 335.

¹⁸ See Moshe Hallamish, *Kabbalistic Customs of Shabbat* (Jerusalem: Shalem, 2006) p. 354 (Hebrew).

¹⁹ See Moshe Barzam, *Imrot Moshe* (Bnei Brak: 2004) p. 134, *siman* 3; Natan Einfeld, *Minchat Natan – Aggada* (Bnei Brak: 2007) p. 48; Moshe Shlezinger, *Zimrat ha-Levi* (Zikhron Meir: 2010) p. 27, *siman* 3. Attempts have been made to show a conceptual connected between these two chapters of Psalms and *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. See for example, Yitzchak Etshalom, “Al ha-Dim’a ve-al ha-Rina – Iyyun b-Mizmor 126,” *Meggadim* vol. 42 (2005) pp. 58–59.

יה ועד עולם הללו יה מעתה ועד עולם הללו יה, But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and forever, Hallelujah). This is often reported as the Ashkenazic custom.²⁰ What is the source for this addition?

The earliest reference to reciting these particular verses before *Birkat Ha-Mazon* is found in the work *Sha'ar ha-Mitzvot* by the Tzfat kabbalist R. Chaim Vital (1542–1620).²¹ There he reported that R. Isaac Luria (the Ari) told him that certain verses should be said after washing *mayim aḥaronim* and before *Birkat Ha-Mazon*.²² First Ps. 67 should be recited in its entirety. This is followed by Ps. 34:2 (אברכה את יהוה בכל עת תמיד תהללו) (בפי), which functions to banish the forces of evil (*sitra aḥra*) present at the table, then Eccl. 12:13 (סוף דבר הכל נשמע את האלהים ירא ואת מצותיו) (שמור כי זה כל האדם), Ps. 145:21 and 115:18, and the end of Ezekiel 41:22 (וידבר אלי זה השלחן אשר לפני ה'). Thus, these two verses popularly recited are actually the middle part of the Ari's *kabbalistic pre-Birkat Ha-Mazon* prayer.

This Lurianic practice was also reported by R. Meir Poppers (c. 1624–1662),²³ who wrote many works based on the teachings of R. Isaac Luria. It was later noted by the prominent Sefardic authorities R. Yosef of Baghdad (*Ben Ish Chai*, 1832–1909)²⁴ and R. Yaakov Hayyim Sofer (*Kaf ha-Hayyim*, 1870–1939).²⁵ This entire pre-*Birkat Ha-Mazon* recitation is found in many prayer books and benchers, particularly those reflecting Sefardic practice.²⁶ Some sources are particular not to add any other Psalms or verses to the ones listed by Ari.²⁷

Note that all of the customs to say Psalms and verses before *Birkat Ha-Mazon* originated with Tzfat kabbalists in the 1500s: Ari, R. Moshe Cordovero, R. Chaim Vital and R. Moshe ben Machir. While the recitation of Psalms mentioned by Cordovero, Moshe ben Machir and Shelah

²⁰ Avigdor Unna, “Customs of the Jews of Germany”, in Asher Wasserteil, ed., *Yalkut Minbagim* (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education, 1996), p. 71.

²¹ This book is the fifth of the *Shemoneh Shearim*, which as a whole are sometimes referred to as *Etz Hayyim*.

²² R. Chaim Vital, *Sha'ar ha-Mitzvot* (Jerusalem: 1905), *Ekev*, p. 45a.

²³ R. Meir Poppers, *Or Tzadikkim* (Warsaw: 1889), p. 59, *siman* 23, item 35. This book was first published in Hamburg, 1690.

²⁴ *Ben Ish Hai, Shlah*, first year, *siman* 15.

²⁵ *Kaf ha-Hayyim*, 157:22.

²⁶ *Zmirot Shabbat v-Seder Birkat Ha-Mazon* (New York: Otzar Hasefarim, 1968), p. 30; Michael Peretz, *Siddur Ohalei Shem* (Jerusalem: 2007), p. 255; Zvi Yevrov, *Birkat Ha-Mazon im Biur Mimiran Hagrah Kaniefsky* (Bnei Brak, 2009), p. 4; *Siddur Kavanat ha-Lev* (Machon Shira Chadasha, Elad, 2014), p. 423.

²⁷ See Baruch Cohen, *Barukh Ha-Shulḥan*, vol. 4 (Bnei Brak, 1986) 50n25 there.

is focused on a remembrance of the destroyed Temple, those chosen by Ari, Ps. 67 and the five verses, are focused on the theme of blessing, praising God and an awareness of His Presence.²⁸ The current custom of reciting two of these verses before *Birkat Ha-Mazon* can be understood to be a remnant of the custom of Ari, appended to the end of the Psalm that R. Moshe ben Machir said to recite.²⁹ Thus it is a kind of amalgam of both *kabbalistic* practices. This development of different versions of additional mealtime prayers would then parallel the development of the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service, where Cordovero and Ari each chose additional Psalms to be recited as *Kabbalat Shabbat*, our current practice being a combination of both customs.³⁰

Some sources suggest that these verses function to fulfill the obligation to say words of Torah at a meal,³¹ but that was not the original intent expressed in the first sources to mention these practices. In fact, works which give lists of verses to say in order to fulfill saying words of Torah at a meal give entirely different verses from the ones brought in the name of Ari.³² Shelah also discusses the idea of saying words of Torah at the meal, but as distinct from the Psalms said to remember the Temple. He specifically mentions that ideally Psalms should not be used for this purpose, and if Psalms are used, as in the case of unlearned people, they should pick something having to do with the meal.³³

²⁸ R. Shem Tov Gagín, *Keter Shem Tov* (Jerusalem: 1960), vol. 1, 141n188.

²⁹ See Daniel Goldschmidt, *Yeshuat Daniel* (Modiín Illit, 2013) p. 264, *siman* 185n1.

³⁰ Moshe Hallamish, *Kabbalah in Liturgy, Halakhah and Customs* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2000), p. 319 (Hebrew).

³¹ See *Avot* 3:3. Seligman Baer, *Seder Avodat Yisrael* (Rodelheim: 1901), p. 553; R. Shem Tov Gagín, *Keter Shem Tov* (Jerusalem: 1960), vol.1, p. 141, note 188; Eliyahu Munk, *Olam ha-Tefilot, vol. 1* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1992), p. 227. See also *Arukh ha-Shulhan, Orah Hayyim* 170:1, who states that even *Al Naharot Bavel* and *Shir ha-Ma'alot* can function as the words of Torah at a meal, although actual Torah study is preferable.

³² See Yechiel Michel Epstein, *Kitzur Shnei Lehot ha-Brit* (Amsterdam: 1721) p. 23b. This became popularized by being included in Abraham Sperling, *Sefer Ta'amei ha-Minhagim u-Mekorei ha-Dinim* (Lemberg, 1928) p. 23a. For the development of the practice to be careful about saying words of Torah at a meal, see Ze'ev Gries, *Safrut ha-Hanbagot* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1989) pp. 18-22 (the upshot of which is quoted in Daniel Sperber, *Minhagei Yisrael, vol. 2* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1991) pp. 46-47) and Daniel Sperber, *Minhagei Yisrael, vol. 3* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1994) pp. 162-165.

³³ R. Isaiah Horowitz, *Shnei Lehot ha-Brit* (Jerusalem: Machon Shaarei Ziv, 1993), *Shaar ha-Otiot, Kuf - Kedushat ha-Akhlila*, p. 385.

Additional pre-*Birkat Ha-Mazon* verses are found in other works,³⁴ for example, a list of ten verses to be said before those of Ari, which are “a *segulah* that one will not lack sustenance all the days of his life,”³⁵ the two verses (Lev. 26:5 and Ex. 23:26) which R. David of Lida reported that the great men of Jerusalem would say before the five verses of Ari,³⁶ and the verses brought in *Kitzur Shnei Luhot ha-Brit* that were traditionally recited both after completing a *masekhet* and also after completing a meal.³⁷ However, those of Ari proved to be the most popular.

The Two Verses

The question is: why were only these two verses retained from the five that Ari said should be recited? There is no clear explanation for this found in the literature,³⁸ but when certain factors are taken into account, possible explanations can be theorized.

First of all, these two verses are much more familiar to people than the other three in the group of verses, as they form the ending of *Ashrei*, recited three times a day during prayers. The addition of Ps. 115:18 to the end of *Ashrei* is already noted in the first siddur, *Seder Rav Amram Gaon*, where it is explained that this was done so that *Ashrei* will end with “Halleluyah” like the parts of *Pesukei d-Zimra* which follow.³⁹ If any verses were to survive out of a list to be recited, it would be this very familiar duet.

Another factor is seen in the *Shulhan Arukh* of Ari, where it says to recite the four verses, and then discusses holding the cup of wine, and then says that one should recite the end of Ezekiel 41:22 just before placing the cup in his right hand.⁴⁰ This version of the custom was pop-

³⁴ Moshe Hallamish, *Kabbalistic Customs of Shabbat* (Jerusalem: Orchot, 2006), pp. 354, 355 (Hebrew); Adin Steinsaltz, *ha-Siddur ve-ha-Tefilla* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Acharonot, 1994), p. 266.

³⁵ Eliyahu Ha-Cohen, *Shevet Mussar* (Jerusalem: 1989), 31:37, pp. 442–443; *Siddur k-Minhag Polin* (Ostroh: 1876) p. 95a; *Siddur Otzar ha-Tefillot* (Vilna, 1911) vol. 1, p. 474.

³⁶ David ben Aryeh Leib of Lida, *Divrei David* (Brooklyn: Tiferet Bahurim d-Bobov, 2006) p. 16, *siman* 77.

³⁷ Yechiel Michel Epstein, *Kitzur ha-Shelah* (Zikhron Tzaddikim Edition) pp. 43–44.

³⁸ Yitzchak Satz, David Yitzchaki, David Salmon, eds., *Birkat Ha-Mazon l-Moreinu Ha-Rav Shabbtai Sofer* (Toronto: Otzreinu, 2002), p. 2, note 1.

³⁹ Shlomo Goldschmidt, ed., *Seder Rav Amram Gaon* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 2004), p. 9.

⁴⁰ *Shulhan Arukh shel Rabbeinu Yitzhak Luria* (Frankfort: 1691), p. 34b. These instructions are also found in Daniel Reimer, ed., *Siddur Tefillat Hayyim* (Beitar:

ularized by being quoted in *Eliab Rabbah* (183:7). The custom is also described that way also in the popular *Likkutei Maharik*.⁴¹ We can see from these sources that the Ezekiel section was considered a somewhat distinct element, separated from the other four verses.

Many sources have the Ezekiel verse separated from the others, describing it as being recited after *mayim aḥaronim* while the four others are said before,⁴² even though R. Chaim Vital reported that Ari said all should be recited after *mayim aḥaronim*.⁴³ Probably this verse alone was shifted by some to after *mayim aḥaronim* to minimize any perceived interruption between *mayim aḥaronim* and *Birkat Ha-Mazon*.⁴⁴

Once the Ezekiel verse was considered a separate unit, we find that it was completely omitted in some prayer books and benchers, with no explanation offered.⁴⁵ Another reason to leave out the Ezekiel section is that it is not a full verse, and recitation of incomplete verses is avoided.⁴⁶

Thus, the group of verses to be said before *Birkat Ha-Mazon* can be viewed as a unit ending with Ps. 145:21 and 115:18, with Ezekiel 41:22 coming after on its own, if at all. Additionally, since the *Shulḥan Arukh*

Tzrur Ha-Hayyim Publications, 2004) p. 108, a siddur based on the teachings R. Chaim Vital received from R. Luria.

⁴¹ Yisrael Chaim Friedman, *Likkutei Maharik*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 2013) p. 506, first published in 1900.

⁴² Yaakov Emden, *Siddur Ya'avetz, Amudei Shamayim* (Altona, 1745), p. 296b; *Siddur Tefilla im Likkutei Torah* (Vilna: Romm, 1912); Moshe Yair Weinstock, *Siddur ha-Geonim v-ha-Mekubalim v-ha-Hassidim*, vol. 18 (Jerusalem: 1981) pp. 90–91; Levi Bistrizky, *Siddur Sha'ar Menahem* (Tzfat: Hasdei Lev, 2008) pp. 283, 127; *Birkat Ha-Mazon v-Sheva Berakhot* (Brooklyn: Empire Press) p. 2; *Megillat Esther u-Birkat Ha-Mazon* (Brooklyn: Empire Press) p. 54. The Chabad custom is to recite this verse after *mayim aḥaronim*, see Yehoshua Mondschein, *Otzar Minhagei Chabad, Nissan Iyyar Sivan* (Jerusalem: Heikhal Menahem, 1996) p. 189.

⁴³ R. Chaim Vital, *Sha'ar ha-Mitzvot* (Jerusalem: 1905) *Ekev*, p. 45a. See also Lior Rosenruas, *Birkat ha-Shulḥan* (Bnei Brak, 2011) p. 113, 4:7. The ruling of Ari was not universally accepted, and some sources indicate that all the verses should be said before *mayim aḥaronim*. See, R. Avraham Hayyim Nach, *Ketzot ha-Shulḥan* (Jerusalem: 1928) p. 29b, vol. 2, *siman* 43:1.

⁴⁴ Levi Yitzchak Raskin, ed., *Siddur Rabbenu ha-Zaken* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 2004), 365n2 and 366n9; Levi Yitzchak Raskin, *Seder Birkat Ha-Mazon* (London: 2013) 3n2.

⁴⁵ Israel Ricardo, *Tefillat Kol Peb* (Amsterdam: 1993), p. 184; Yitzchak Satz, David Yitzchaki, David Salmon, eds., *Birkat Ha-Mazon l-Moreinu Ha-Rav Shabbtai Sofer* (Toronto: Otzreinu, 2002) p. 4; Chanoch Vidiselsky and Aryeh Leib Pepper, eds., *Birkat Ha-Mazon–Pninei Maharal* (Ashdod: Mechon Maharal Tzintz, 2010) p. 8.

⁴⁶ This is the reason R. Shmuel Aharon Yudelvit (1907–1979) omitted the part from *Ezekiel*. See Shalom Meir Wallach, *Meilo shel Shmuel* (Bnei Brak: 1998) p. 275.

of Ari has this verse associated with lifting the cup for *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, and other sources have it recited after *mayim aḥaronim*, people who did not do these things prior to *Birkat Ha-Mazon* may have left out the verse associated with these practices. In fact, some siddurim preface the recitation of Ezekiel 41:22 with directions that can be understood as instructing one to say this verse only if *Birkat Ha-Mazon* is being said over a glass of wine.⁴⁷

Another verse that could be considered a distinct element is Ps. 34:2, which R. Chaim Vital writes functions to remove the *sitra aḥra* that is present at the table, “and in order to banish it you must say ‘*hav lan v-navarich*’...that is why we say *אברכה את ה' בכל עת*.”⁴⁸ Based on this, when people say “*rabbotai nevarech*” as is customary today, Ps. 34:2 may not be necessary,⁴⁹ and so this verse would also be omitted.

Furthermore, some sources indicate that some people only recited some of the Ari verses rather than all of them.⁵⁰ Additionally, it is not difficult to imagine a scenario where the first verses in the group were said quietly and only the last two aloud, in the style of Ashkenazic *pesukei d-zimra*, thus focusing attention on these two verses to the exclusion of others that came before. Based on this understanding, the current Ashkenazic recitation of Ps. 145:21 and 115:18 is a remnant of the five verses given by Ari.

Another Two Verses

Some benchers add two additional verses to Ps. 145:21 and 115:18, Ps. 118:1 (הודו ליהוה כי-טוב: כי לעולם חסדו), Give thanks unto the Lord, for He

⁴⁷ See for example, Menachem Mendel Landa, *Siddur Tzḥuta d-Avraham*, vol. 2 (Tel Aviv, 1961) pp. 495–496, אים מברכים על הכוס, מוזגים קודם ואח"כ נוטלין הידים, ואומרם: וידבר אלי זה השלחן אשר לפני ה'.

Yechezkel Bing, *Siddur ha-Rashash* (Bnei Brak: Divrei Shalom, 2009) p. 79, כשיש לו כוס, יקח הכוס בידו ויאמר: וידבר אלי זה השלחן אשר לפני ה'.

See also Yitzchak Satz, David Yitzḥaki, David Salmon, eds., *Birkat Ha-Mazon l-Moreinu Ha-Rav Shabbtai Sofer* (Toronto: Otzreinu, 2002), 2n2 at the end.

⁴⁸ R. Chaim Vital, *Sha'ar ha-Mitzvot* (Jerusalem: 1905) *Ekev*, p. 45a.

⁴⁹ Yitzchak Satz, David Yitzchaki, David Salmon, eds., *Birkat Ha-Mazon l-Moreinu Ha-Rav Shabbtai Sofer* (Toronto: Otzreinu, 2002) 2n2. In Chizkiya Dachbash, *Tiklal* (Shami) (Rosh Ha-Ayin, 2005) p. 706, the instructions are to say the verse when there is no *zimmin*. See the discussion of omitting the *zimmin* when reciting this verse in *Or Torah*, Elul 5762 (2002), vol. 12 (418), *siman* 138, pp. 788-792.

⁵⁰ See Shushan Hacohen, *Perach Shushan* (Jerusalem, 1977) p. 17 in the biographical section, where only Ps. 34:2, Eccl. 12:13 and the end of Ezekiel 41:22 are said.

is good, for His mercy endures forever) and Ps. 106:2 (מי ימלל גבורות ה' / Who can express the mighty acts of the Lord, or make all His praise to be heard). No source is ever provided for the recitation of these particular verses.⁵¹ For example, the verses appear in *Siddur Aliyot Eliyahu*, a modern day siddur which is intended to represent the rulings of the Vilna Gaon and *Mishna Berura*; however, no references are brought there as to the source or reason for their inclusion.⁵²

The addition of these two verses is generally referred to as a German custom.⁵³ It should be noted that Joseph Juspa Hahn included the recital of *Al Nabarot Bavel* and *Shir ha-Maalot* before *Birkat Ha-Mazon* in his book *Sefer Yosef Ometz*, an important collection of the customs of the Frankfurt am Main community.⁵⁴ This work was completed around 1630, before *Shnei Luhot ha-Brit* was published, although it was only published afterwards in 1723.⁵⁵ This attests to the early acceptance of the practice of saying *Al Nabarot Bavel* and *Shir ha-Ma'alot* among German Jews. However, there are no early references to these additional verses.

In *Seder Zemiroth Yesburun*, a work meant to represent the German Ashkenazic tradition, three different versions of this custom are brought. In all versions, two additional verses are added after *Shir ha-Ma'alot* and Ps. 145:21 and 115:18, the difference is which two verses are said and in what order. In one version, Ps. 118:1 and 106:2 are recited. The other has Ps. 106:2 followed by Ps. 150:6 (כל הנשמה תהלל יה הללויה) / Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord, Hallelujah). The Amsterdam custom reported there has the order switched; Ps. 150:6 is said

⁵¹ Shlomo Riskin, *Around the Family Table* (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2005), p. 12; *The Koren Birkon* (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2010) p. 153; Natan Zvi Yarom, *Birkat Ha-Mazon Be-mechitzat ha-Hafetz Hayyim* (Moddin Illit: Mechon Mishnat ha-Hafetz Hayyim, 2014) p. 5; Aaron Perlov, *Birkat Ha-Mazon—Karnei Hod* (Jerusalem: 2014), p. 9; *Birkon Koren—Shir Zion Edition* (Jerusalem: Koren, 2016) p. 178. Regarding the Tunisian custom to say Ps. 118:1 before *Birkat Ha-Mazon* on holidays, see David Setbon, *Alei Hadas* (Kiryat Sefer: 2010) p. 586, *siman* 13.

⁵² *Siddur Aliyot Eliyahu* (Jerusalem: Machon Aliot Eliyahu, 2013) p. 141. When contacted, the various bencher and siddur editors replied that although they do not know the source of these verses, they included them because they are commonly said. This response is illustrative: לא מצאתי כעת מקור פסוקים האחרים, אבל היות שדשו בו רבים לא נמנענו מלהביאם.

⁵³ Yitzchak Satz, David Yitzchaki, David Salmon, eds., *Birkat Ha-Mazon l-Moreinu Ha-Rav Shabbtai Sofer* (Toronto: Otzreinu, 2002) 2n1.

⁵⁴ Joseph Juspa Hahn, *Sefer Yosef Ometz* (Frankfurt am Main, 1723), p. 21b, *siman* 154.

⁵⁵ Dean Phillip Bell, *Jewish Identity in Early Modern Germany: Memory, Power and Community* (NY: Routledge, 2016) pp. 48–49.

first, followed by Ps. 106:2.⁵⁶ In this work as well, no sources are given for the recitation of these verses.⁵⁷

This custom is brought without any source in the contemporary work *Otzar Ta'amei Ha-Minbagim*, with the explanation that these particular verses may have been chosen because each parallels one of the four blessings of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. Ps. 145:21 and the first blessing both contain the phrase “all flesh” (כל בשר), Ps. 115:18 and the second blessing both have the term “we” (אנחנו) referring to blessing or thanking God, Ps. 118:1 and the third blessing both contain the phrase “forever” (לעולם), and Ps. 106:2, which refers to “all the praises” (כל תהלתו), parallels the multiple descriptions of praise accorded to God in the fourth blessing (מלכנו, אדירנו, בוראנו, גואלנו).⁵⁸ Some of these connections are clearly forced, as the terms “we” (אנחנו) and “forever” (לעולם) are fairly common in liturgical contexts.

The kabbalistic work *Hemdat Yamim* gives extensive and detailed lists of Psalms and verses that are to be recited before *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, with different selections based on the day and time. For example, on Shabbat night a selection of verses is said followed by Ps. 87,⁵⁹ Shabbat day the Psalms are 121, 45, 24, along with the verses from the night meal,⁶⁰ with different selections from Psalms for *seuda shlishit*.⁶¹ Holidays have their own Psalms as well, for example, on Purim Ps. 98 is to be recited before *Birkat Ha-Mazon*.⁶²

For *Rosh Hodesh*, the verses chosen begin with the letters that spell out the Hebrew word Adonay in its “*milui* (filled)” form. For example, the first letter of the word, *alef*, is divided into the three letters that spell the word *alef: alef, lamed, peh*. Then each of these letters is itself spelled out, *alef* becomes *alef, lamed, peh*; *lamed* becomes *lamed, mem, dalet*; *peh* becomes *peh, heb*. A verse is chosen beginning with each letter of this expanded spelling. In this list of verses, Ps. 106:2 (מי ימלל) is the verse for

⁵⁶ Shlomo Hofmeister, *Seder Zemirot Yeshurun* (Vienna: Yeshurun, 2016) p. 57.

⁵⁷ Personal queries to the editor of *Seder Zemirot Yeshurun* went unanswered. The additional verses are also found in the new edition of the German prayer book, Joseph Scheuer, ed., *Siddur Schma Kolenu* (Basel: Morascha Verlag, 2000), p. 106, but not in early editions.

⁵⁸ Shmuel Gelbard, *Otzar Taamei Haminbagim* (Petach Tikva: Mifaal Rashi, 1996) pp. 105–106.

⁵⁹ *Hemdat Yamim*, vol. 1 (Bnei Brak: Machon Hemdat Yamim, 2011) p. 192.

⁶⁰ *Hemdat Yamim*, vol. 1 (Bnei Brak: Machon Hemdat Yamim, 2011) p. 291.

⁶¹ *Hemdat Yamim*, vol. 1 (Bnei Brak: Machon Hemdat Yamim, 2011) p. 332.

⁶² *Hemdat Yamim*, vol. 2 (Bnei Brak: Machon Hemdat Yamim, 2011) p. 347.

the *mem* in the middle of the *lamed*, and Ps. 118:1 (הוֹדוּ) appears as the verse for the *heb* at the end of the *peh* of *alef*. Furthermore, Ps. 145:21 (תהלת) also appears here as the verse for the *tav* from the spelled out *dalet*.⁶³

Hemdat Yamim is a *kabbalistic* work of unclear authorship first published in Turkey in the early 1730s under the auspices of R. Israel Yaakov Algazi. For years, the book was the subject of much controversy stemming from allegations that it represents Sabbatean ideas. This controversy continues to this day. However, the current state of scholarship seems to understand that the work is a collection of customs and practices based on the students of Ari, often brought without attribution, and is not necessarily a Sabbatean work.⁶⁴ Thus there is a *kabbalistic* source for reciting these verses before *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. However, this cannot be the source of the addition of the two verses, as *Hemdat Yamim* instructs that they are for *Rosh Hodesh*, not for other occasions, and furthermore they appear in a very long list of verses, the rest of which are not recited.

Possible Explanations: Melodies and Zionism

A possible explanation for the addition of two verses may be indicated by the fact that although there are variations in the verses and order of the verses among German and Amsterdam customs, in all cases it is totals four verses added to Psalm 126. This has led to speculation that the additional verses are connected to the tunes used for *Shir Ha-Ma'alot* among German Jews. Many of the popular Ashkenazic *Shir ha-Ma'alot* tunes work well with a song divided into four line stanzas. Once two of the Ari verses are added, the tune no longer fits well, and an addition of two more verses would make the tune fit nicely.⁶⁵ This would be the reason that although different verses are added in different Ashkenazic communities, it is always two more verses that are added to the standard two. Why these particular ones?

It is documented that the German Jewish community had distinct tunes for *Shir Ha-Ma'alot* for different holidays, special Shabbatot and certain times of year.⁶⁶ These tunes were not only used for *Shir ha-Ma*

⁶³ *Hemdat Yamim*, vol. 2 (Bnei Brak: Machon Hemdat Yamim, 2011) p. 51.

⁶⁴ See Moshe Fogel, "The Sabbatean Character of Hemdat Yamim: A Reexamination," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 16:2 (2001): pp. 365–422.

⁶⁵ See Steve Epstein, "The Source of the Addition of Tehillat Hashem after Shir ha-Maalot" (Heb.) in *Chiddushei Torah@NDS*, vol. 12 (2011) 163n16.

⁶⁶ Yaakov Rothschild, "Shabbat Zemirot of the Jews of Southern Germany and the Customs Connected to Them," *Duchan* 7, 1964, p. 100 (Hebrew). For a list

'alot, but also for other liturgical elements on that Shabbat, for example, *Lekha Dodi*.⁶⁷ The *Shir ha-Ma'alot* tunes for Sukkot, Pesach and Shavuot were often the same tunes used for the responsive sections of *Hallel* said on those days, which includes the refrain *כי לעולם חסדו יהיה* כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֶסֶד וְהוֹדוּ.⁶⁸ Thus, among German Jews, there was a natural connection between *Shir ha-Ma'alot* and *Hodu*: they shared the same tune on festivals. Therefore, if melodically a verse should be added to make the *Shir ha-Ma'alot* tune fit, this would seem to be a very appropriate verse. These tunes even outlasted their original liturgical context].

By the second half of the twentieth century, when many German Jewish liturgical traditions fell into oblivion, the original melodies of the festive *piyyutim* were no longer performed in synagogue services. Therefore the survival of these melodies as a marker of liturgical time remained alive through their continuous practice in the domestic sphere among families of German origin.⁶⁹

Ps. 106:2 (*מי ימלל גבורות יהוה ישמיע כל תהלתו*) is also a reasonable verse to add to make up a four verse stanza, as it indicates that in our recitation of these verses we have in no way said all the praises due to God. This verse is also appended to *Anim Zemirot* where it serves a similar function.⁷⁰

Another popular explanation for the addition of these verses is that they were chosen to stress that God should be praised irrespective of any connection of returning to the Land of Israel. Thus, the verses were

with sound samples, see Naomi Cohn-Zentner, "Shir Ha-Ma'alot—the Umbilical Cord Between Liturgical and Domestic Soundspheres in Ashkenazi Culture," July 2014, Jewish Music Research Center, Hebrew University, <http://www.jewish-music.huji.ac.il/content/shir-hama%E2%80%99alot-umbilical-cord-between-liturgical-and-domestic-soundspheres-ashkenazi-culture>.

⁶⁷ Uri Aharon, "Melodies for Shir Hamaalot in Frankfurt Am Main," *Duchan* 16, 2005, pp. 296–297 (Hebrew); Yair Goldreich, "Sidrei Tefilla ba-Kehilla," *Sbnot Hayyim* 2007, p. 71, detailing the practices of the Mekor Hayyim community in Petach Tikvah, following the Frankfurt am Main customs.

⁶⁸ Aharon, pp. 302–304.

⁶⁹ Naomi Cohn-Zentner, "Shir haMa'a lot – the Umbilical Cord Between Liturgical and Domestic Soundspheres in Ashkenazi Culture," July 2014, Jewish Music Research Center, Hebrew University, <http://www.jewish-music.huji.ac.il/content/shir-hama%E2%80%99alot-umbilical-cord-between-liturgical-and-domestic-soundspheres-ashkenazi-culture>

⁷⁰ See Elchanan Adler, *Zvi Tifara* (Passaic, 2017) p. 145.

added as an “anti-Zionist” expression, to lessen the focus on Israel found in *Shir ha-Ma’alot*.

We saw that the *kabbalistic* addition of Psalms 137 and 126 to the meal was to emphasize “the holiness of the Holy Land and the Palace of the King” (*Zohar, Terumah* 157b), themes already found in the second and third blessings of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*.⁷¹ *Shir ha-Ma’alot* in particular, with its description of actually returning to the Land of Israel especially resonated with the early Zionists. Rav Kook noted that the “secret” behind reciting this Psalm before *Birkat Ha-Mazon* is to demonstrate a yearning to come to Israel, thus tapping into the *shefa* (bounty) of the Land of Israel even when eating food from outside of Israel.⁷² Connections were also made between *Shir ha-Ma’alot* and the national anthem of Israel, the *Hatikvah*. It has been reported many times that early Zionists would sing *Shir ha-Ma’alot* before *Birkat Ha-Mazon* to the tune of *Ha-Tikvah*,⁷³ and there were authorities who opposed this.⁷⁴ The exchange of melodies worked both ways, it is reported that Bialik wanted to use Yossele Rosenblatt’s tune for *Shir ha-Ma’alot* for *Ha-Tikvah* after hearing

⁷¹ See Avi Erlich, *Ancient Zionism: The Biblical Origins of the National Idea* (NY: Free Press, 1995) p. 14.

⁷² Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot Ha-Kodesh* vol. 3 (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1950) p. 295. See on this Moshe Tzuril, *Otzrot ha-Raya*, vol. 3 (Rishon Letzion: Yeshivat Hesder Rishon Letzion, 2002) p. 362; Chaim Drukman, *Netivot Ha’aretz* (Kfar Darom: Makhon ha-Torah v-ha-Aretz, 2004) p. 185.

⁷³ See for example, Yaakov Efrati, *Vavim l-Amudim*, vol. 3 (Jerusalem, 2002), 153n1; Michael Englishman, *163256: A Memoir of Resistance* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007) p. 4; Joseph Reider, “Secular Currents in Synagogal Chant in America (1918),” in Jonathan L. Friedman, ed., *The Value of Sacred Music* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2009) p. 146; Raymond Apple, *Let’s Ask the Rabbi* (AuthorHouse, 2011) p. 140. Ps. 126 sung to the tune of *Hatikvah* became part of the *Yom Ha-Atzmaut* evening service, right from the very first *Yom Ha-Atzmaut*, see R. Maimon, “Pirkei Zikhronot al ha-Tzionut,” *Sinai* vol. 34 (1953) p. 277. See also, *Seder ha-Tefilot v-ha-Hodiot* (Jerusalem: Ministry of Religion, 1952) p. 9 and Shmuel Katz, ed., *ha-Rabbanut ha-Reishit l-Yisrael: Shivim Shana l-Yisoda* vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 2002) p. 839.

⁷⁴ R. Avraham Weinfeld, *Lev Avraham, part one* (Brooklyn: Balshon, 1977) *siman* 133, pp. 229–230. This was vehemently opposed in the Neturei Karta literature, as expected, see *Mishmeret Homoteinu* vol. 8 (1956) p. 37 (5). See the description of a dispute that broke out over singing *Shir Ha-Ma’alot* after a meal to this tune on the first *Yom Ha-Atzmaut* in Miriam Sperber, *mi-Sippurei ha-Santa* (Jerusalem: 1986) p. 143.

him sing it on a trip to Israel.⁷⁵ *Shir ha-Ma'alot* was even suggested to be the national anthem instead of *Ha-Tikvah*.⁷⁶

It is reported that Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Halevi (Markus) Horovitz (1844–1910), the Hungarian born Orthodox rabbi of Frankfurt from 1878–1910, although regarded among the most prominent *Protest Rabbi* against organized Zionism,⁷⁷ would sing the first stanza of *Ha-Tikvah* after *Shir ha-Ma'alot*.⁷⁸ Also, it is reported among some Amsterdam Jews that *Ha-Tikvah* was sung at the end of the Shabbat meal.⁷⁹

Even with these connections, there is no documentation that verses were ever added after *Shir ha-Ma'alot* specifically to mitigate any Zionist message, and historically this explanation cannot be accurate as two of these verses were added already in the 1600s.⁸⁰

The Purpose of Additional Verses

There may be another explanation for the added verses. They all have a common theme; they talk about praising God. This might not seem particularly special, but note that *Al Naharot Bavel* and *Shir ha-Ma'alot* were instituted to recall the destruction of the Temple. They refer either to the destruction of Israel at the hands of the Babylonians or the future redemption, but not specifically to praising God.

We have records of other verses and Psalms said by different communities right before *Birkat Ha-Mazon*. For example, Ps. 34:2 (אברכה את ה' בכל-עת תמיד תהלתי בפי, I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth) and Neh. 9:5 (ויברכו שם כבודך, ומרומם, על כל ברכה ותהלה, Let them bless Thy glorious Name, that is exalted above all blessing and praise) among some Yemenites,⁸¹ or Ps. 33 among

⁷⁵ Shmuel Rosenblatt, *Yossele Rosenblatt* (2007) p. 248.

⁷⁶ Goel Rappel, *Moresbet Am v-Aretz* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Acharonot, 2002) p. 134.

⁷⁷ Matthias Morgenstern, *From Frankfurt to Jerusalem* (Leiden: Brill, 2002) p. 18.

⁷⁸ Mordechai Halevi (Markus) Horovitz, *Rabbanei Frankfurt* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1972) p. 340, in the additional material added by Joseph Unna after the passing of R. Horovitz. On this work and this description of R. Horovitz, see the review by Ernest Simon in the Joseph Unna memorial volume, *Zikhron Yosef* (Kfar Haroeh, 1983) p. 498.

⁷⁹ Suzanne Mehler Whitley, *Appel is Forever: A Child's Memoir* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999) p. 25.

⁸⁰ See the discussion in Steve Epstein, "The Source of the Addition of Tehillat Hashem after Shir ha-Ma'alot" (Hebrew) in *Hiddushei Torah@NDS*, vol. 12 (2011) pp. 161–163, particularly note 16.

⁸¹ Yitzchak Mualem, *Agadata d-Pischa* (Beitar Illit: Machon Ohalei Avraham Yaakov, 2003) p. 120. Regarding the various Psalms and verses added into the

the Skolye Chassidim,⁸² and Ps. 111 and 121 among some Jews of Amsterdam.⁸³ All of these have the common element of blessing or calling out to God.

The idea that it is particularly important to recall that in reciting *Birkat Ha-Mazon* one is thanking and praising God is specifically noted in a number of sources, most popularly with the statement of R. Yitzchak Meir Alter (1799–1866), the first Ger Rebbe. He stated that “if a person eats before God and then recites *Birkat Ha-Mazon* and known before Whom he is blessing, and thanks the One who gave him the food, there are no greater words of Torah than this.”⁸⁴ We have seen that some sources relied on the verses said before *Birkat Ha-Mazon* to fulfill the idea to say words of Torah at the meal. Those verses are even more significant when they also remind us that God is the source of our food and it behooves us to praise and thank Him for that. In fact, many of the verses prescribed by Ari fulfill this purpose as well. The recitation of these four verses after *Shir Ha-Ma’alot* would therefore not necessarily be a conscious selection of two verses from Ari along with two additional verses, but rather another collection of verses referring to praising God, two of which happen to be the same as two verses of Ari.⁸⁵

This is the explanation offered by R. Yosef Tzvi Halevi Dunner (1913–2007), regarding the various additional verses recited by German and Amsterdam Jews after *Shir Ha-Ma’alot*. He was a graduate of the Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin and Chief Rabbi of East Prussia before moving to England and ultimately serving as head of the

Yemenite liturgy before *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, see Moshe Gavra, *Mehkarim b-Siddurei Teiman* (Bnei Brak: HaMakon l-Heker Hakhmei Teiman, 2010) p. 365; Moshe Gavra, *ba-Tiklal ba-Madai ha-Mehudar* (Bnei Brak: Ha-Makhon l-Heker Hakhmei Teiman, 2012) p. 365.

⁸² Yissachar Ringel, *Adir Ba-Marom* (Brooklyn: Makhon Tal Orot, 2003) p. 231, *siman* 509.

⁸³ Yehuda Brillman, *Minhagei Amsterdam* (Jerusalem: Makhon Yerushalayim, 2001) p. 235, 2:3.

⁸⁴ Yoetz Kim Kadish Rakocz, *Siah Sarfei Kodesh* vol. 3 (Bnei Brak, 1989) item 16, p. 16; Yehuda Leib Levin, *Hidushei ba-Rim* (Jerusalem: Nachliel, 1965) p. 300. This idea is brought in many sources, see for example, Yehuda Arye Leib Heina, *Likutei Yehuda, Dvarim I* (Jerusalem, 1972) p. 68; Elchanan Printz, *She’elot u-Teshvot Arnei Derech* vol. 7 (Jerusalem, 2014) p. 85.

⁸⁵ It is interesting to note, *le-handil*, that among Lutherans, the blessing before the meal includes selections from Ps. 145, and the thanksgiving after includes selections from Ps. 106, indicating that these Psalms are particularly meaningful in the context of praising God at a meal. See Frank Senn, “Lutheran Spirituality” in his *Protestant Spiritual Traditions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 200) p. 37.

Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations. A family member reports that once at a meal R. Dunner explained that in his father's family

they were accustomed to say Ps. 150:6 (כל הנשמה תהלל יה) (הללויה) and other verses, and today it is customary to say Ps. 145:21 (תהלת ה' ידבר פי ויברך כל בשר שם קדשו לעולם ועד) and others, but the point of all these verses is the same, to awaken us to understand and feel that we are coming to bless and thank the Holy One Blessed be He.⁸⁶

We can now understand that there were different verses and Psalms used by various communities to fulfill the dual function of words of Torah at a meal and a reminder that we are now blessing God. Which verses to add varied, and may have been chosen either with or without regard to the verses of Ari. The particular number of four verses popular among the German and Amsterdam Jews is probably related to the tunes used for singing *Shir Ha-Ma'alot*. ❧

⁸⁶ *Kol ha-Torah*, vol. 65 (Nissan 5768, 2008), p. 173.