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{ TOPIC }

Reciting *Hagomel* after a Sickness



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► Halachically Speaking is a monthly publication compiled by Rabbi Moishe Dovid Lebovits, a former *chaver kollel* of Yeshiva Torah Vodaath and a *musmach* of Harav Yisroel Belsky *zt"l*. Rabbi Lebovits currently works as the Rabbinical Administrator for the KOF-K Kosher Supervision.

► Each issue reviews a different area of contemporary *halacha* with an emphasis on practical applications of the principles discussed. Significant time is spent ensuring the inclusion of all relevant *shittos* on each topic, as well as the *psak* of Harav Yisroel Belsky, *zt"l* on current issues.

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Reciting *Hagomel* after a Sickness

During these difficult times, many people are sick with the COVID-19 virus or other ailments. This article will discuss the obligation to recite *hagomel* after recovering from an illness.¹

The Source

The Gemara² says that there are four categories of people who recite *hagomel*: 1. those who travel by sea; 2. those who walk through a desert; 3. those who are freed from prison; 4. those who recover from an illness.

The *Aruch Hashulchan*³ explains the nature of this *berachah*. When an open miracle occurs, one is required to recite the *berachah* of “*She’asah li neis*.” When one experiences an “ordinary” miracle, such as in the realm of *parnassah* or health (which we call nature), there is no *berachah*. This is because we thank Hashem for these things during *davening* when we recite *Modim* and *V’al kulam*. There is a third category of miracles that *birkas hagomel* covers: it is natural, but also a bit unnatural. For example, traveling on the sea is a natural occurrence. However, when winds blow and one is saved from capsizing, it is still *teva* (under the realm of nature), but not totally. The same concept applies to the rest of the criterion for which one recites the *berachah* of *hagomel*.

1 I would like to thank my dear friend, Harav Zvi Ryzman, author of the multi-volume series *Ratz Katzvi*, who sent me his extensive article in Hebrew on this subject.

2 *Maseches Brachos* 54b. Refer to *Tur* 219, *Shulchan Aruch* 219:1, *Levush* 1.

3 219:3-4.

The *berachah* is an expression of our thanks to Hashem for the kindness He showed by saving us, even though we might not have deserved to be saved. The *Ben Ish Chat*⁴ says that reciting this *berachah* reminds a person that everything is from Hashem and there is no such thing as “chance.” The *poskim* say that this *berachah* is a *reshus* rather than an obligation.⁵

Healed from Illness

The Shulchan Aruch⁶ says that one of the four categories for which one recites *hagomel* is upon being healed from illness. However, he does not discuss what it means to be healed. Does this mean that one is healed completely?

The Elya Rabbah⁷ says that being healed means free of pain. This is the opinion of other *poskim* as well.⁸ The Divrei Yatziv⁹ says that the *brachah* should not be recited until one is fully healed from the sickness and has no weakness from it, and he feels the same way he did before he became sick.

Harav Elyashiv *zt”l*¹⁰ says that if one was in danger and feels better, but he is still weak, since the weakness is a result of the danger he was in it is advisable to wait until he is no longer weak to recite *hagomel*.¹¹

4 Eikev 1:pages 242-243.

5 Magen Avraham 219:1.

6 219:1.

7 219:1.

8 Shulchan Aruch Harav (Seder Birchos Hanehenin) 13:5; Mishnah Berurah 2; Aruch Hashulchan 5.

9 O.C. 86.

10 Yisa Yosef 1:51.

11 Mishneh Halachos 11:177. Refer to Tzitz Eliezer 14:77, who discusses whether one who is healed from a sickness when sitting *shivah* should recite *hagomel* during *shivah* or wait until it is over. Also see Yalkut Yosef 219:33.

What Kind of Sickness?

The Shulchan Aruch¹² says that one should recite *hagomel* for all sicknesses, even if one is not in danger. Even according to this opinion, if one was not bedridden and just had a headache or discomfort in his throat, he would not recite *hagomel*.¹³ However, the Rema¹⁴ says that the custom is to recite *hagomel* if one was so sick that his life was in danger and he was healed (e.g., he suffered an injury to an internal organ)¹⁵. The Aruch Hashulchan comments that the custom is like the Rema. Some *poskim* say that even the Rema would agree that if one breaks a leg or hand he would recite *hagomel*,¹⁶ while others are not convinced.¹⁷

The *Mishnah Berurah*¹⁸ says that if one is in danger, even if he is in bed for less than three days, he should recite *hagomel* when he is healed.¹⁹ The Taz²⁰ says that if one is in bed for more than three days (even if he is not in danger), he should recite *hagomel* when he recovers.²¹

Harav Elyashiv *zt"l*²² was asked whether one should recite *hagomel* after eye surgery. He replied that since the doctor said this particular surgery did not pose a danger to one's

12 219:8. Refer to *Yalkut Yosef* 219:22-23.

13 *Mishnah Berurah* 24. See *Oles Yitzchak* 2:79.

14 8.

15 For example, problems with the kidney or heart (*Vezos Habrachah*, page 158; *Halichos Shlomo Tefillah* 23:2).

16 *Mein Omer* 1, 11:12.

17 *Yalkut Yosef* 3, page 588. See *Tzitz Eliezer* 21:64:2 regarding eye surgery and *hagomel*. Also see *Tzitz Eliezer* 12:18 for a discussion on eye surgery and surgery for hemorrhoids.

18 219:28.

19 Refer to *Birchos Habayis* 27:1. See *Ohr L'tzion* 2:14:44; *Avnei Yushpei* 4:33:2.

20 219:5.

21 Refer to *Biur Halachah* 219, "kegon."

22 *Yisa Yosef* 11:51.

life, *hagomel* is not recited. He also said that if one undergoes general anesthesia for more than an hour, *hagomel* is recited.²³

Before Being Healed

Although we mentioned opinions that maintain one should not recite the *brachah* of *hagomel* until one has been completely healed, there is another line of reasoning that takes a different approach.

The *Shevet Halevi*²⁴ is of the opinion that as long as one came out of the situation of danger and he still needs to follow up with his doctor after the dangerous sickness passed, he should recite *hagomel*.²⁵

Some *poskim* say that if one is out of danger but he needs additional therapy for certain injuries, then he may recite *hagomel*.²⁶

Mental Health

If one suffered from mental health issues and was healed, he should recite *hagomel* as well.²⁷

COVID-19 and Hagomel

Most of the opinions mentioned above do hold that

23 *Nishmas Avraham* 219, page 166; *Teshuvos Avigdor Halevi, O.C.*, page 240:67. Refer to *Nishmas Avraham* (ibid.), who questions this. See *B'shvilei Orasia (B'shvilei Birchos Hagomel*, page 110), who says that since today there are medications to treat many illnesses, the *brachah* of *hagomel* is not recited unless a patient's situation is unique and the doctors do not have a clear protocol to heal him.

24 4:152:2.

25 For a discussion on this, see *Tzitz Eliezer* 10:25:27.

26 *Sheilas Shlomo* 4:75; *Piskei Teshuvos* 219, footnote 5. Refer to *Osusa* (Deborkis), pages 30-31. See *Divrei Binyahu, O.C.* 8:11, who discusses a case of someone who underwent surgery to fix a kidney issue. Although the surgery was successful, the patient was not fully back to the way he was before the surgery. Should he still say *birkas hagomel*?

27 *Nishmas Avraham* 219, page 174.

one recites *hagomel* after one is completely healed from an illness. One who suffers from COVID-19 experiences symptoms for a few weeks that may be severe, but there are lingering symptoms that last for much longer — e.g., having no taste or smell. Some people also tire very easily for a long time after the illness. Whether one recites *hagomel* in this situation depends on which opinion one follows regarding when the *brachah* should be recited. The opinion of Harav Herschel Shachter *shlit"a* is that if one had severe symptoms that passed, he may recite the *brachah* even though he may not be able to smell or taste.²⁸ However, one should not recite *hagomel* until the pandemic is over, since it is unclear whether one can be affected again with this virus, *R"l*.

If one was negligent and went to crowded places, and subsequently became sick with COVID-19, he should still say *hagomel* if he was healed.

Traveling for Surgery

If one is flying from Eretz Yisrael to a country in *chutz la'aretz* for surgery, one should not recite *hagomel* until after the surgery since the flying is a result of the surgery.²⁹

Young Boy

Harav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *zt"l*³⁰ was uncertain whether a boy who was healed from a sickness before his bar mitzvah should recite *hagomel* when he becomes a bar mitzvah if he is back to his former state of health.

If a young child was sick and recovered, his father can recite *hagomel* on his behalf.³¹

²⁸ As mentioned by Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz (personal communication 11-23-20). Refer to *Bigdei Chamudos* (Corno), O.C. 14.

²⁹ *Ashrei Haish*, O.C. 1:40, page 269:18. See *Asichah* 1, page 378.

³⁰ *Halichos Shlomo Tefillah* 23:6.

³¹ *Bach* 219; *Avnei Derech* 3:89. See *Shulchan Aruch* 219:4, *Rema*, *Magen Avraham*

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Hagomel on Zoom

At the onset of COVID-19, shuls were shut down and people attended *shiurim* on Zoom. This is still done today. May one recite *hagomel* on Zoom if there are ten people hearing the *brachah*? Although most shuls are open and one can recite *hagomel* if necessary, there may be some people who still wish to social distance.

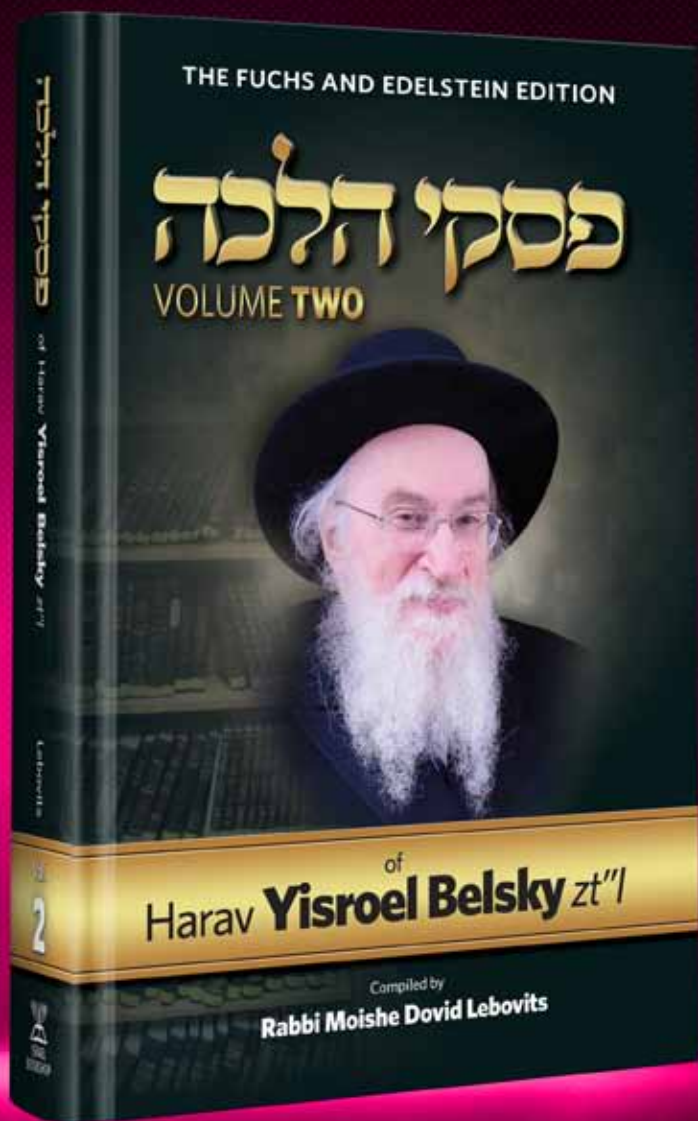
Harav Hershel Shachter³² is quoted as saying the following in this regard:

Birchas Hagomel is meant to be recited in the presence of a minyan. It is best to recite this *brachah* within three days of recovering from a potentially life-threatening situation, and it is improper to delay the recitation beyond thirty days. If it becomes clear that due to danger it will be impossible to be in the presence of a minyan within 30 days, then one should recite the *brachah* over Zoom or on a phone conference with ten men watching or listening. This is possible because the requirement for a minyan is not the same as for *tefillah b'tzibur* or *krias haTorah*, which are *devarim sh'bekedushah* and require a minyan gathered in one place. In the case of reciting *hagomel*, the purpose of the minyan is to publicize the miracle, and this can be accomplished even if the ten individuals are listening without being present in one room.

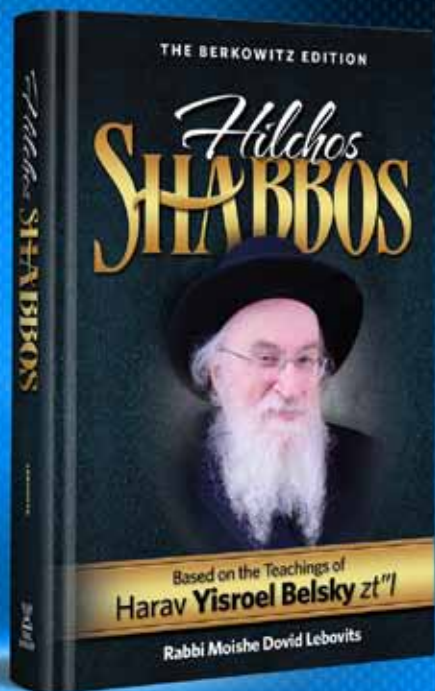
4; Mishnah Berurah 10; Yechaveh Daas 2:25; Shevet Halevi 3:163. The Aruch Hashulchan 219:9 says the custom is that a father does not make the *brachah* for his son. See *Mein Omer* 1:11:1.

32 In a responsa written on the subject, available at www.yutorah.org.

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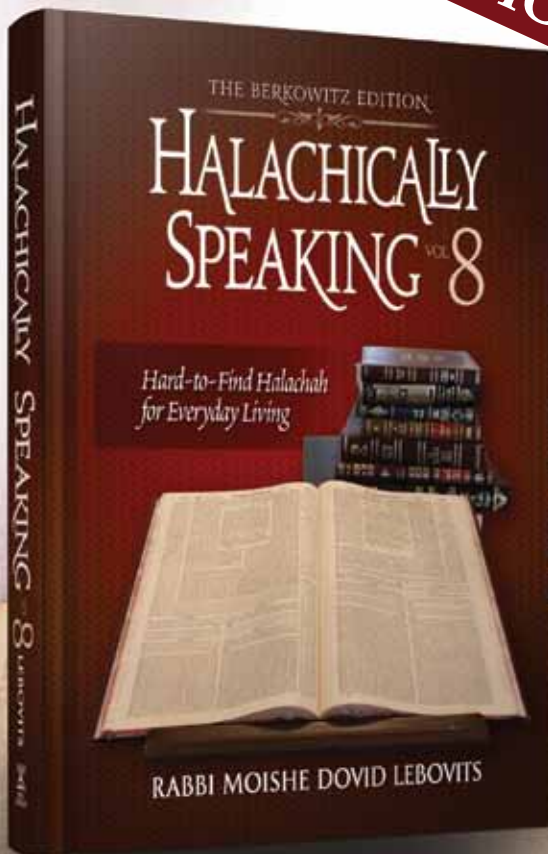
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