

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BH

WHY ARE THE BLESSINGS AFTER THE HAFTARAH READING SO DARN LONG? AN ANSWER FROM THE MINOR TRACTATE SOFRIM

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Have you ever been sitting in services and wondered why the blessing after the haftara reading seems to go on forever? (It's cited below, after our discussion questions). It seems especially strange because the blessings before and after the Torah reading, and even the blessing before the haftara reading, are relatively short.

Well, the sages had a reason:

And why did [the Rabbis] enact all these [benedictions]. In order to establish a correspondence between the seven benedictions [of the haftarah] and the seven readers. You may also similarly explain the reason for the twenty-two verses read in the [Book of a] Prophet: twenty-two corresponding to the seven readers, each of whom must read [a minimum of] three verses, and one corresponding to the superintendent of the Synagogue services. (Sofrim 14:1)

So the explanation here is that it corresponds to the Torah readers. Excuse my hutzpah...but I'd like to offer a different explanation. The Amidah on Shabbat has seven blessings in it.

Discussion Questions:

1. Could it be that people came late to services in ancient days (as they do today) and that this blessing could fill in as their Amidah? What do you think?
2. Especially now that we're moving into the High Holiday season, let's think about the time we spend in synagogue. Do longer services help you pray or do you come late on purpose so that you don't have to be in synagogue so long? What are the arguments for and against lengthier services?

I look forward to your answers!

RULE 10. And at the end [of the portion from the Prophets], one says the following benedictions: 'Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Rock of all worlds, righteous through all generations, O faithful God, Who sayest and doest, Who speakest and fulfilllest, all Whose words are truth and righteousness'. The people forthwith stand and say: 'Faithful art Thou, O Lord our God, faithful are Thy words, ever faithful, living and enduring are Thy name and remembrance; and do Thou reign continually over us for ever and ever'. ...

RULE 11. After that the maftir resumes his recital and says, 'Faithful art Thou, O Lord our God, and faithful are Thy words, and not one of Thy words shall return void, for Thou art a faithful God and King. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, the God Who art faithful in all Thy words'.

RULE12. 'Comfort, O Lord our God, Zion Thy city, for it is the home of our life, and save her that is

grieved in spirit speedily, even in our days. [40b] Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Who makest Zion joyful through her children.'

RULE 13. 'Gladden us, O Lord our God, with Elijah the prophet, Thy servant, and with the kingdom of the house of David, Thine anointed. Soon may he come and rejoice our hearts. Suffer not a stranger to sit upon his throne, nor let others any longer inherit his glory; for by Thy holy name Thou didst swear unto him, that his light should not be quenched for ever. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely, and this is his name whereby he shall be called: the Lord is our righteousness. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Who causest the horn of salvation to flourish for Thy people Israel.'

RULE 14. 'For the Torah, [for the divine service], for the prophets and for this holy...which Thou, O Lord our God, hast given us for holiness and for rest, for honour and for glory. For all these things, O Lord our God, we thank Thee, and continually bless Thy name, O God of our salvation. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Who sanctifiest Israel and such and such a day.'

An exception is made on the Sabbath when 'Israel' is not mentioned in the conclusion but only 'Who sanctifiest the Sabbath'; because the Sabbath preceded Israel, as it is written, For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He ceased from work and rested, and it is further said, See that the Lord hath given you the Sabbath, which implies that the Sabbath had already been in existence. (Sofrim 13:10-14)