

A *Birkat HaGomeil* After Experiencing Misogyny in the Workplace **Cantor Sarah Grabiner**

Birkat HaGomeil is recited when one comes through a dangerous journey or situation with a sense of wholeness, safety, and relief. There are four specific events enumerated in Babylonian Talmud Brachot 54b after which one should say this blessing of gratitude: having completed a sea-journey, having travelled through a wild land, on recovering from an illness, and on being released from prison. These are derived from various verses in Psalm 107.

I see it as fitting to return to the originating psalm to consider other circumstances in which we might feel driven to express thanksgiving and relief amongst our community today. Psalm 107 frequently returns to the word “*tsar*,” which means “adversity,” or, more literally, “a narrow/constricted state.” In verse 10, the psalmist notes that these situations might be experienced as “*choshech tsalmavet*,” (“deepest darkness”) and, in verse 12, that it might feel as if “*ein ozeir*,” there is no one who can help. The psalm continues to use words such as “*ozet ra’ah v’yagon*,” meaning “oppression, misery, and sorrow” in verse 39. We know today that members of our communities can feel such darkness, isolation, and oppression as a result of all kinds of events, experiences, or situations.

Fearing for one’s job, safety, or integrity at work as a result of misogynistic abuse or harassment might be one of the most ubiquitous and unattended-to sorrows for women today. While there may be the veneer of equality, egalitarianism, and fair treatment, workplace misogyny remains present in so many people’s everyday lives. For those who feel that “*ein ozeir*,” and for those who sit in “*chosheich tsalmavet*,” reciting *Birkat HaGomeil* in the midst of a supportive community, ready to hear their sorrow and their gratitude at being heard, seen, and held, can be a powerful moment of healing and acknowledgment. As Rabbi Sheila Peltz Weinberg writes,

At the mysterious edges of life we seek the embrace of our community past and present... This process can build community as news is communicated and support mobilized. Most significantly it counteracts the devastating possibility of isolation in times of vulnerability. The practice gives voice to gratitude and anxiety in a forum where it can be shared and transformed into connectedness and faith.¹

A ritual for the reciting of *Birkat HaGomeil* can be found on the following page.

¹ ed. David A. Teutsch, *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim* (Wyncote PA: Reconstructionist Press, 1998), 155

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Individual recites the *gomeil* blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁגָּמְלָנִי אֶת הַטּוֹבָה הַזֹּאת.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam sheg'malani et hatovah hazot

Blessed are You Eternal our God, Ruler of the universe, who has gifted me this goodness.

Colleagues respond:

אָמֵן. מִי שֶׁגָּמְלָךְ אֶת הַטּוֹבָה הַזֹּאת הוּא יִגְמְלֶךָ יוֹתֵר טוֹב סְלָה.

Amen. Mi sheg'maleich et hatovah hazot, hu yigmaleich yoteir tov selah.

Amen. May the One who enabled you to receive this gift of goodness continue to bestow even more goodness upon you.

From Psalm 13

וְאֲנִי בְּחַסְדְּךָ בְּטַחַתִּי יִגַּל לִבִּי בְּיִשׁוּעָתְךָ

Va'ani b'chas'd'cha vatachti yageil libi biy'shu'atecha

אֲשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי גָמַל עָלַי

Ashirah la-Adonai ki gamal alai

I have relied upon Your graceful kindness. My heart rejoices in Your saving power. Let me sing out to God because God has enabled me to be here right now.