

**"Minhag Yerushalmi"** – a title given to the custom (followed most commonly in Jerusalem) of starting the public Shabbat morning service at *Baruch She-amar*, rather than with the *Birkot Ha-Shahar*.

Why do these people skip the prayers before *Baruch She-amar* – or, more accurately, why do others include these initial prayers (often referred to collectively as *Birkot Ha-Shahar*)?

(First, some nomenclature conventions: The term *Birkot Ha-Shahar* can mean: (1) more specifically, that collection of ~fourteen blessings including, e.g., "*pokeah ivrim*" & "*ha-noten la-yaefkoah*," which often open the public morning service," or (2) collectively, the entire collection of blessings and prayers from the start of the morning liturgy until the set of psalms called "*Pesukei D'Zimra*."

In turn, the term "*Pesukei D'Zimra*" can refer specifically to: (1) those psalms sandwiched between *Baruch She-amar* and *Yishtabah* [and including these opening and closing blessings], or more generally, to: (2) the entire preliminary morning service that includes both the *Birkot Ha-Shahar* and *Pesukei D'Zimra* "sections." These usages will be relevant to the following discussion.)

Back some 1000-1500 years ago, public davening began with the preliminary psalms that constitute *Pesukei D'Zimra* in the more specific sense. The earlier blessings are meant to be said as you do each corresponding act for the first time each day: (e.g., open eyes, go to bathroom and wash hands, put on clothes, etc.) (Some additional things were added to this early part for historical reasons: [–a preliminary recital of the opening of *Shema*; –the psalm for the day; –other essential daily passages] which were said in private to avoid persecutors or spies, or to meet time requirements).

Thus, this "collective" *Birkot Ha-Shahar* was by definition to be said in private before coming to shul. . . . Nu, so why are they now said in shul?

The reality was that many people did not know these by heart, or were not meticulous in saying these. So communities started having the public davener [*shaliah tzibur*] say them "to make sure" that everyone at least said them vicariously [by saying "amen"]. Better late than never. (Remember: this was the era before the printing press.)

Not everyone did this. In particular, Maimonides disapproved of this and directed his followers to be meticulous about saying *Birkot Shahar* at the proper (and logical) times, and to continue starting public prayer at *Baruch She-amar*. However, only the Yemenite & some Sephardi communities heeded him. Including *Birkot Ha-shahar* publicly became normative in Ashkenazi communities.

Many congregations in Jerusalem (including Ashkenazi ones) have resumed the practice of starting at *Baruch She-amar*. This was based on the (probably accurate) presumption that most of their members were careful enough to say the blessings at their proper times upon awakening. Whence the title "Minhag Yerushalmi" has arisen (although of course it extends way beyond Jerusalem, to the aforesaid Sephardic communities and other groups who decide to follow Maimonides).

Practical impact: If you arrive just a little late (say, 10-20 minutes), the service will be much further along than you'd expect. (I learned "the hard way" – hoping to catch a lot of PDZ singing at Shira Hadasha, I was greatly disappointed to arrive 10 minutes late and see the congregation was at *Nishmat!*)

[The impact of this minhag is even more pronounced, because in Sephardic liturgy, *Baruch She-amar* is not said just after Psalm 30 (*Mizmor Shir Hanukat haBayit...*), but much later, just before Psalm 92 (*Mizmor Shir L'Yom Ha-Shabbat*). Those passages in between (*Hodu*, psalms 19, 33-34, 90-91, 135-136, and in Sephardic: 98 and 121-124) become "*Pizmonim*" rather than part of *Pesukei D'Zimra*. ]

So – in recognition of the many additions to the service on Seventh Day Pesach – I will follow Minhag Yerushalmi. Practical advice: (1) get there early! (2) if you want to say the *Birkot Hashahar* blessings, do them at home or before 10 am.