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On the Recitation of "Amen" Between Ge'ulah and Tefillah of the Shaharit Service*

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This paper was approved by the CJLS on March 5, 2003, by a vote of 14 in favor, none against, and none abstaining (14-0-0). Voting in favor: Rabbis Kassel Abelson, Elliot Dorff, Paul Drazen, Jerome Epstein, Robert Fine, Myron Geller, Vernon Kurtz, Aaron Mackler, Daniel Nevins, Paul Plotkin, Joseph Prouser, Mayer Rabinowitz, Avram Reisner, and Joel Roth.

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שאלה

The practice is widespread that during the Shaharit service that the *shali'ah tzibbur* becomes silent during the *berakhah "ga'al yisrael,"* just before the beginning of the Shaharit Amidah. This is presumably for the purpose of avoiding a break between the blessing and the beginning of the Amidah.[1] However, this custom appears contrary to the whole purpose of having a *shali'ah tzibbur* in the first place, i.e., to enable one who does not know the prayer to fulfill his/her obligation by responding "amen" to the blessing of the *shali'ah tzibbur*.

Shall the one leading services fall silent for the blessing just before the Amidah, in accordance with this custom? Or should s/he say the blessing *audibly* so that those who hear the blessing (including those who do not know the blessing or have not yet recited it) can respond "amen" to the blessing?

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* Several colleagues read a draft of this teshuvah. I would like to recognize and thank in particular Rabbis Joel Roth and David Golinkin, who made numerous suggestions, particularly with regard to Halakhic reasoning; additionally, they directed me to many primary sources and secondary studies that would otherwise have escaped my attention. Their impact may be found on every page. Rabbis Shaul Magid and Jeremy Kalmanofsky gave unstintingly of their time in directing me to Kabbalistic sources and explaining passages in those works to me, and in general discussion about the relationship between Kabbalah and Halakha. My gratitude to them both cannot be expressed in words. Rabbi Burton Visotzky and Professor Edward Greenstein also read the draft and suggested improvements, and I would like to thank them both. Finally, the members of the CLJS who were present at the meeting of March 14, 2001, when a draft of this teshuvah was first presented, made many additional suggestions; still other colleagues corresponded with me afterwards. I acknowledge all of their contributions with gratitude.

1 Thus R. Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1979), 20: "It has become customary for the reader to say the concluding words of the benediction quietly lest the congregation have to respond with Amen and thereby interrupt the sequence of prayer."

תשובה

On the surface, the question would appear to be quite easily answered. R. Yosef Karo (Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 66:7) addresses the issue succinctly, and decides the question in the negative:

אינו אומר אמן אחר גאל ישראל משום דהוי הפסק.

> One should not say "amen" after [the blessing] "who redeemed Israel," because it constitutes an interruption.

Thus, the principle of "joining *ge'ulah* with *tefillah*" (**סומכין גאולה לתפילה**) is considered by R. Karo to be so absolute that even the mere recitation of the word "amen" would be enough to violate it. Presumably, the custom of falling silent just *before* the blessing is to avoid tempting the congregation to respond "amen," even though R. Karo does not state this explicitly here.[2] Although R. Moshe Isserles provides a gloss that diverges somewhat from R. Karo, his ruling does not seem to have affected the prevalent custom:

הגה: ויש אומרים דעונין אמן, וכן נוהגין לענות אחר השליח צבור אמן. אבל אם התפלל לבד, אין עונין אמן.

> Gloss: There are those who say that we do respond "amen," and so is it the custom to answer "amen" after the *shali'ah tzibbur*. But one who has prayed alone should not respond "amen."[3]

R. Karo repeats his ruling in a subsequent section of the Shulhan Arukh (111:1):

צריך לסמוך גאולה לתפלה ולא יפסיק ביניהם אפילו באמן אחר גאל ישראל, ולא בשום פסוק חוץ מה שפתי תפתח.

> One must join *ge'ulah* to *tefillah* and not interrupt [with any words] between them, neither with [the response of] "amen" after [the blessing] *ga'al yisrael* nor with [the recitation of] any verse other than "O Adonai, open my lips…" (Psalm 51:17).[4]

Likewise, as he had done earlier, Isserles demurs from R. Karo's ruling:

הגה: ויש אומרים שמותר לענות אמן על גאל ישראל, וכן נוהגין.

> Gloss: And there are those who say that it is permissible to respond "amen" for [the blessing] *ga'al yisrael*, and such is the custom.

In both instances (66:7 and 111:1), Isserles relied upon the ruling of the Arba'ah Turim for his position. We will have occasion to review the ruling of this source below.

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2 See previous footnote, and also Max Arzt, Justice and Mercy: Commentary on the Liturgy of the New Year and the Day of Atonement (New York, etc.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), 80–81: "This blessing… is recited by the reader in an undertone, to obviate the necessity of the congregations's responding 'Amen.'" Likewise, see Daniel Sperber, *Minhagei Yisrael* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1989), 4:26–28. Sperber reasons as Klein and Arzt do, i.e., that the *shali'ah tzibbur* lowers his voice so that no one will respond "amen." However, he found no source accounting for that part of the custom! See esp. p. 26, n. 9 and p. 28 (בכתובים אמנם, כאמור, טרם מצאתי את הדברים). The custom of the *shali'ah tzibbur* falling silent before the blessing *ga'al yisrael* is related to the practice of not reciting "amen" after the blessing. Below, we will analyze the Bet Yosef to Orah Hayyim 66, which cites the Zohar in connection with this latter issue.

3 I.e., to his own blessing. The Mishneh Berurah (n. 34) observes that some believe that even a lone worshipper would respond "amen" at this point to his/her own blessing, since it marks the conclusion of the segment of the service entitled "the Shema and Its Blessings" (כיון שהוא סיום של סדר ברכות של קריאת שמע).

4 See BT Berakhot 4b for the explanation of why the recitation of this verse and, likewise, the recital of the *hashkivenu* prayer in the evening service, are not considered to be interruptions between the blessing *ga'al yisrael* and the beginning of the Amidah.

The prevalent custom, i.e., of not responding "amen" after the blessing of the *shali'ah tzibbur*, is indeed reflected in the Mishnah Berurah (Orah Hayyim 66:7, paragraph 32):

אינו אומר אמן: בין אחר עצמו ובין אחר הש״ץ.

> One should not say "amen": i.e., whether in response to one's own [blessing] or in response to [the blessing of] the *shali'ah tzibbur*.

Likewise, the Arukh Hashulhan (66:14–16) essentially agrees with the position that the obligation to juxtapose *ge'ulah* with *tefillah* includes the prohibition against reciting "amen" at that point in the service. While he admits that there are differences of opinion on the subject (**ובענין עניית אמן של גאל ישראל, יש מחלוקת...**), and as well reviews many opinions on the various occasions in which answering "amen" is either permitted or required, he nonetheless rules in this instance that—whatever logic or correctness there may be in reciting "amen"—one should maintain the opinion of R. Karo in not so reciting (**מכל מקום מנהגינו אינו כן**).

Background of R. Karo's Ruling

The reason for R. Karo's ruling that the response of "amen" is prohibited at this point in the service is ostensibly based on the principle of **סומכין גאולה לתפילה**, the necessity to "juxtapose the blessing *ga'al yisrael* with the beginning of the Amidah." The principle is articulated in the following Talmudic text (PT Berakhot 2d [6a])[5]:

ד[א]מר ר׳ זעירא בשם ר׳ אבא בר ירמיה: שלש תכיפות הן: תכף לסמיכה שחיטה; תכף לנטילת ידים ברכה; תכף לגאולה תפילה....

> For Rabbi Zeira said in the name of Abba bar Yirmiya: Three things should follow one immediately upon the other: immediately after the laying-on of hands, the sacrifice should be slaughtered; immediately after the washing of hands, the blessing for food should be recited;[6] immediately after [the blessing] *ga'al yisrael*, the prayer (i.e., the Amidah) should be recited....[7]

Juxtaposing the blessing *ga'al yisrael* with the beginning of the Amidah is also praised in the Babylonian Talmud (BT Berakhot 9b). Just as we saw in the Yerushalmi, so, too, in the Bavli the suggestion is followed by aggadic-type comments promising rewards to those who follow the ruling:

דאמר רבי יוחנן: ותיקין היו גומרין אותה עם הנץ החמה. תניא נמי הכי: ותיקין היו גומרי אותה עם הנץ החמה, כדי שיסמוך גאולה לתפילה ונמצא מתפלל ביום... העיד רבי יוסי בן אליקים משום קהלא קדישא דבירושלים: כל הסומך גאולה לתפילה אינו נזוק כל היום

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5 See the parallel text in BT Berakhot 42a.

6 There is a controversy between the Bavli and the Yerushalmi whether this statement refers to the washing of the hands before a meal, to be followed by the *motzi* blessing; or if it refers to the *mayyim aharonim* at the end of a meal, to be followed by the blessings after food. See Louis Ginzberg, *A Commentary on the Palestinian Talmud* [Hebrew] (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1971), 1:71–72.

7 The continuation of this text describes many of the benefits accruing to those following the rule, e.g., **וכל מי שהוא תוכף גאולה לתפילה אין השטן מקטרג באותו היום**, "and everyone who juxtaposes *ge'ula* to *tefillah*—the Satan may not indict him that day." Louis Ginzberg explains that Jews in Rabbinic antiquity were expected to "pray" five times a day, if one counts the two readings of the Shema and the three recitations of the Amidah. The Yerushalmi is thus proposing in this passage that the total number of required prayers be limited to three, by joining the Amidah in the morning and the evening to the prescribed Shema of that time of day. See Ginzberg (1971), 1:72–75; see also p. lxxii.

כולו... אמר ליה רבי אלעא לעולא: כי עיילת להתם שאיל בשלמא דברב ברונא אחי במעמד כל החבורה, דאדם גדול הוא ושמח במצות; זימנא חדא סמך גאולה לתפילה ולא פסיק חוכא מפומיה כוליה יומא.

For R. Yohanan said: the clever ones[8] used to finish it [the recital of the Shema] with sunrise. It was (also) taught thus as a tannaitic teaching: the elders used to finish it [the recital of the Shema] with sunrise, in order to join the *ge'ulah* with the *tefillah*, and say the *tefillah* in the daytime... R. Yosi b. Eliakim testified in the name of the holy community of Jerusalem: if one joins the *ge'ulah* to the *tefillah*, he will not meet with any mishap for the whole of the day... R. Ela said to Ulla: When you go up there [to Eretz Israel], give my greeting to my brother R. Berona... once he succeeded in joining *ge'ulah* to *tefillah*, and a smile did not leave his lips for the whole day.[9]

The Yerushalmi found Biblical precedent for the principle, in that the final verse of Psalm 19 (**יהיו לרצון אמרי פי והגיון לבי לפניך ה' צורי וגאלי**), which it considered to signify the blessing *ga'al yisrael*, was "immediately" followed by the beginning (not counting the superscription) of Psalm 20 (**יענך ה' ביום צרה**), which signified the beginning of the Amidah.[10] However, none of the foregoing aggadic texts in any way indicates that the principle of joining *ge'ulah* to *tefillah* explicitly prohibits the recitation of "amen," or indicates that its recitation constitutes a kind of prohibited interruption.[11]

Halakhic Sources in Disagreement with R. Yosef Karo

Earlier, we noted that R. Moshe Isserles, in his glosses on the Shulhan Arukh, had disagreed with R. Karo's ruling. Relying on the Tur, Isserles had decided that the response of "amen" after the blessing *ga'al yisrael* did not constitute a prohibited interruption. Here is the relevant text of the Tur (Orah Hayyim 66):

...וחותם: ברוך אתה ה' גאל ישראל, ואומר אמן - אפילו יחיד אחר ברכותיו - כיון שהוא סיום של סדר ברכות.

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8 See David Golinkin, "The Meaning of the Terms 'Vatikin,' 'Vatik' and 'Talmid Vatik' in *Ben Sira* and Rabbinic Literature," *Sidra* 13 (1997), 47–60.

9 See the analogous text in BT Berakhot 4b: "For R. Yohanan says: who inherits the world to come? The one who follows the *ge'ulah* immediately with the evening *tefillah*... Mar b. Rabina raised an objection. In the evening, two blessings precede and two blessings follow, the Shema. Now, if you say he has to join *ge'ulah* with *tefillah*, behold he does not do so, for he has to say *hashkivenu* in between! Then I reply: since the rabbis ordained the blessing, *hashkivenu*, it is as if it were a long *ge'ulah*. For, if you do not admit that, how can he join in the morning seeing that R. Yohanan says: in the beginning [of the *tefillah*] one has to say: O Adonai, open my lips, etc. (Psalm 51:17) and at the end one has to say: Let the words of my mouth be acceptable (Psalm 19:15). [The only explanation] there [is that] since the Rabbis ordained that 'O Adonai, open my lips' should be said, it is like a long *tefillah*. Here, too, since the Rabbis ordained that *hashkivenu* should be said, it is like a long *ge'ulah*."

10 PT Berakhot 2d [6a]: יהיו לרצון אמרי פי - מה כתיב בתריה? יענך ה' ביום צרה.

11 R. David Golinkin directs my attention to the additional objections to reciting "amen" raised in R. Gedaliah Felder's *Sefer Yesodei Yeshurun* (Toronto, 1954), 284. The most serious of these is R. Felder's claim that the *Seder Rav Amram* prohibits the recitation of "amen" after *ga'al yisrael* (כתב רב עמרם גאון שאין עונין אמן אחר גאל ישראל משום הפסק, ושצריך לסמוך גאולה לתפלה). Were this to be true, it would be a most serious impediment to the contention of this teshuvah. However, I cannot locate a text within the *Seder Rav Amram* that addresses our specific issue. Indeed, in its presentation of the liturgy at the transition between the Shema and Its Blessings and the Amidah, the *Seder Rav Amram* essentially reaffirms the general rule of not making an interruption between *ge'ulah* and *tefillah* that we have already reviewed. See Daniel S. Goldschmidt (ed.), *Seder Rav Amram Gaon* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1971), 20: ברוך אתה ה' גאל ישראל... ואין להוסיף דבר על ה' ימלוך... ואין אומרים דברים אחר אמת ויציב, כדי שיסמוך גאולה לתפלה. The Seder invokes here Tosefta Berakhot 3:6 (אין אומר דברים אחר אמת ויציב, אבל אומר דברים אחר תפלה...). Professor Lieberman has, of course, already explained this passage as referring to the prohibition of reciting piyyutim at this point in the service (אין לפייט ולומר קילוסין לפני תפלת שמונה עשרה אחרי אמת ויציב, מפני שאינו סומך גאולה לתפלה); it does not address the question of whether the recitation of "amen" is permitted or prohibited. See Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Tosefta: Order Zera'im, Part I* [Hebrew] (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1955), 31.

…and he completes (the blessing *emet ve-yatziv*, following the Shema, with the words): "Praised are you, O Adonai, Who has redeemed Israel," and says "amen"—i.e., even an individual after (having recited) his blessings—since this is the conclusion of the order of the Blessings (surrounding the Shema).

In a second passage, after reviewing many of the blessings (recounted in the two Talmudim) accruing to one who joins *ge'ulah* to *tefillah*, the Tur enlarges upon its earlier ruling (Orah Hayyim 111):

...אבל אמן אחר גאל ישראל לא הוי הפסק, ומצווה לענותו כיון שהוא אחר סיום ברכות של קריאת שמע....

…But the (recitation of) "amen" after *ga'al yisrael* does not constitute an interruption, and it is a commandment to respond with it, since it follows the conclusion of the blessings surrounding the Reading of the Shema.

These two rulings of the Tur themselves have earlier medieval precedents. Let us begin by examining the ruling of the Rif, R. Yitzhak Alfasi on BT Berakhot, Chapter 7 (33b).[12]

...תני: הפורס על שמע והעובר לפני התיבה... והמברך על כל אחת מכל מצות האמורות בתורה, לא יענה אחר עצמו אמן. ואם ענה הרי זה בור. אית תנא דתני: הרי זה חכם. אמר רב חסדא: מאן דאמר הרי זה בור, בעונה על כל ברכה וברכה; ומאן דאמר הרי זה חכם, בעונה בסוף.

A baraitha teaches: the one who leads [congregation in reciting] the Shema, and the one who passes before the ark [to lead the congregation in the Amidah]… and the one who says a blessing with regard to any of the commandments mentioned in the Torah, should not respond "amen" after himself (i.e., after his own blessing). And if he did respond, he is a boor. There is a tanna who teaches: he is a wise man. Said Rav Hisda: the one who said "he is a boor" [said so] with regard to one who responded ["amen"] to any individual blessing; the one who said "he is a wise man" [said so] with regard to one who responded ["amen"] to the end of [an entire section of the liturgy].

The students of Rabbenu Yonah extrapolate *ad. loc.* from this ruling of the Rif that the recitation of "amen" after *ga'al yisrael* does not in fact constitute an interruption:

ונמצאנו למדים שצריך שיאמר האדם אמן אחר סיום התפלה כשיגיע להמברך את עמו ישראל בשלום אמן. וכן צריך לומר אמן אחר גאל ישראל שהוא סיום, ואין בזה הפסקה, כיון שצריך לאומרו.

It follows from this that we learn a man must say "amen" after the conclusion of the Amidah, when he reaches to "the one who blesses his people Israel with peace—amen. And so must he say "amen" after (the blessing) *ga'al yisrael,* which is also an ending—and this does not constitute an interruption, since he must say it.

The Shiltei Hagibborim (on the same passage in the Rif here) rule similarly:

הגאונים כתבו דכל ברכה שהיא סוף הענין אפילו אינה רק ברכה א'..., יש לענות אמן. ורבינו יונה ורש"י כתבו דדוקא אחר ברכה שהיא סיום ברכות, כגון אחר סיום י"ח ואחר גאל ישראל....

12 Its source is T. Megillah (3:27) and Yerushalmi Ber. 5:4; see also BT Ber. 45b. I am grateful to Rabbi Joel Roth for calling these sources to my attention.

> The Ge'onim wrote that every blessing that marks the end of a [liturgical] section, even though it only is one blessing, one must respond "amen." And Rabbenu Yonah and Rashi[13] wrote that [this is the rule] specifically after a blessing that is the end of [a series of] blessings, as in the case of the end of the Amidah and after *ga'al yisrael*....

Thus, from all of these sources one could reasonably conclude that the Halakha should be decided in favor of those who would permit or even require the recitation of "amen" after the blessing *ga'al yisrael,* since that blessing constitutes the conclusion of a major liturgical unit.

It would seem that Rambam, R. Moses Maimonides, would also rule in this fashion (Hilkhot Berakhot 1:16):

> **...והעונה אחר ברכה שהיא סוף ברכות אחרונות הרי זה משובח, כגון אחר בונה ירושלים בברכת המזון ואחר ברכה אחרונה של קריאת שמע של ערבית. וכן בסוף כל ברכה שהיא סוף ברכות אחרונות עונה בה אמן אחר עצמו.**
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> ...And the one who responds ["amen"] after a blessing that is the end of last blessings, such a one is praiseworthy, as in the case of [responding "amen" to] "who builds Jerusalem" in the Birkat Hamazon, and after the last blessing of the evening Reading of the Shema. And so it is with regard to the end of every blessing that is itself the end of last blessings, he responds "amen" after himself.

It must be admitted that Rambam explicitly mentions the individual reciting "amen" after his own blessing, regarding the final blessing before the *evening* Amidah; this is because he doesn't allow it for a single blessing, and in the *morning* service there is only one blessing after the Shema. Nonetheless, one can surely infer the position of Rambam that the community responds "amen" after the blessings of the Shaharit Shema, since he rules at Hilkhot Tefillah 8:5:

> **וכן לא יהיה אחד מברך ברכת שמע והכל שומעים ועונין אחריו אמן אלא בעשרה.**
>
> And so one should not recite a blessing of the Shema, with everyone responding "amen" after the recitation, except when a minyan is present.

Likewise, Rambam's ruling seems clear at Hilkhot Tefillah 9:1, which gives the prescriptions for the leader of community prayer and includes the following provision:

> **ומתחיל ופורס על שמע בקול רם, והם עונים אמן אחר כל ברכה וברכה.**
>
> He begins to lead the Shema [section of the liturgy] aloud, and they (the congregations) respond "amen" to each blessing.[14]

A crucial source for some of the medieval discussions on the subject is found in the Talmud (BT Berakhot 45b):

> **תני חדא: העונה אמן אחר ברכותיו, הרי זה משובח. ותניא אידך: הרי זה מגונה. לא קשיא: הא בבונה ירושלים, הא בשאר ברכות.**

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13 We will examine Rashi's position, below.

14 The continuation of the Mishnah Torah here reads in our editions: והיודע לברך ולקרות עמו קורא עד שמברך גאל ישראל, "and the one who knows how to bless and read with him (the leader) reads until he recites the blessing *ga'al yisrael*." R. Karo notes that some manuscripts he has examined include the word "amen" at the end of the sentence. R. Karo rejects that reading as a scribal error, and declines to draw any Halakhic implications from it. See Kesef Mishneh *ad. loc.,* and on Hilkhot Berakhot 1:16; also see Bet Yosef on the Tur, Orah Hayyim 66. See also Moses Hyamson (ed.), *Mishnah Torah, By Maimonides, Edited According to the Bodeleian (Oxford) Codex...* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1965), *ad. loc.*; there, the text likewise reads without the word "amen."

> One baraitha taught: the one who responds "amen" after his own blessings—such a one is praiseworthy. Another baraitha taught: such a one is disgraceful. This [contradiction] is not a problem: one [is teaching] about [the blessing in Birkat Hamazon] "Who builds Jerusalem," and the other one [is teaching] about all other blessings."[15]

Thus, according to this source it would appear that the baraitha regards one who answers "amen" after his own blessing, in every case *other* than the blessing "Who builds Jerusalem" in Birkat Hamazon, as a boor. However, this text does not refer to one who responds "amen" after another's *berakhah*.

In his commentary on this Talmudic passage, the Rosh, Rabbenu Asher, rules similarly to the Rif and his interpreters; like them, he regards the recitation of "amen" at the conclusion of a major unit of liturgy as an obligation (on BT Berakhot, Chapter 7, para. 10):

> **תני חדא העונה אמן אחר ברכותיו הרי זה משובח, ותני אידך הרי זה מגונה. לא קשיא - הא בשאר ברכות והא בבונה ירושלים... דלאו דוקא נקט בונה ירושלים אלא כל סיום ברכה כעין בונה ירושלים, דליכא למימר דוקא בונה ירושלים... אלא ודאי כל סיום ברכות כעין ישתבח, דהוי סיום ברכה לסוף פסוקי דזמרה; וכן יהללוך דהלל, וסוף ברכות דשמונה עשרה; וכן אמן אחר גאל ישראל, ואין בזה הפסק, כיון דצריך הוא לאומרו.**
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> One baraitha taught: one who answers "amen" after his own blessings—such a one is praiseworthy; another baraitha taught that this is disgraceful. It is not a difficulty—one rules with regard to all blessings, while the other speaks specifically about "Who builds Jerusalem"... [That baraitha] did not rule specifically about "Who builds Jerusalem," but rather about every concluding blessing along the lines of "Who builds Jerusalem," for one should not say that [the ruling] was specifically with regard to "Who builds Jerusalem"... But certainly [one *should* respond "amen" after] every concluding blessing like *yishtabakh*, since it marks the end of *pesukei dezimrah*; likewise with regard to the blessing *yehalelukha* [since it marks the end of] Hallel; and so [it should be at] the end of the blessings of the Shemoneh Esrai. And so it should be after the blessing *ga'al yisrael*. This [recitation of "amen"] does not constitute an interruption, since one must say it.

Thus, Rabbenu Asher comes down squarely on the side of those who would obligate worshippers to respond "amen" after the blessing *ga'al yisrael*.[16]

With similar reasoning, Rashi rules in favor of reciting "amen" after *ga'al yisrael* (on BT Berakhot 45b, "**הא בבונה ירושלים**"):

> **הא בבונה ירושלים: שהיא סוף הברכות, הרי זה משובח. וכן בסוף ברכות דקריאת שמע שחרית וערבית...**

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15 With regard to the expression **הא... והא**, it should be noted that the expression is somewhat ambiguous; thus in this instance, it is not entirely clear which practice is "praiseworthy" and which "disgraceful."

16 In this context, we may also refer to a liturgical variant that adds at least historical, if not necessarily halakhically relevant, weight to our argument. It is found in a manuscript of the prayer **אמצ ויציב**, and is cited in Ismar Elbogen, Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History. trans. Raymond Scheindlin (Philadelphia-Jerusalem-New York: The Jewish Publication Society and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1993): 21. The conclusion of the citation of the alternative version reads: **בא"י צור ישראל וגואלו אמן**, "Praised are you, Adonai, Rock of Israel and its Redeemer. Amen." It would seem that the practice indicated by this variant would include the recitation of "amen" following the blessing (whether by the congregation alone or also by an individual worshipper is unimportant for our purposes).

> This is in regard to "who builds Jerusalem": [This is so] since it is at the end of the [section of statutory] blessings; thus it is praiseworthy [to say "amen"]. It is also true at the end of the blessings of the Reading of the Shema, both in the morning and the evening service.

In fact, R. Yosef Karo himself cites Rashi's position, in his commentary (Kesef Mishnah) on Hilkhot Berakhot 1:16:

> **וכתב רש"י שאחר סיום כל ברכות עונה אמן, ואפילו אחר גאל ישראל דשחרית ערבית. ולא הוי הפסקה בין גאולה לתפלה, כיון שצריך לאומרו.**

> Rashi wrote that after the end of all of the berakhot one responds "amen," even after (the blessing) *ga'al yisrael* of the morning and the evening service. And this does not constitute an interruption between *ge'ulah* and *tefillah*, since one must say it.

R. Mordecai Jaffe, author of the *Levush* and a younger contemporary of R. Karo, provides a useful contrast to R. Karo's approach. He, too, recognizes that the halakha as decided by the Rishonim would be to say "amen" after *ga'al yisrael* (Orah Hayyim 66:7): **ומן הדין היה לו לענות אמן אפילו יחיד אחר ברכת עצמו, כיון שהיא סיום של סדר ברכות של קריאת שמע**, "it is reasonable to think that one should respond 'amen'—even an individual after his own blessing, since it is the end of section of blessings surrounding the Reading of the Shema." Likewise, he understands that there are people who do not wish to say it on account of the **סוד גדול**, or "deep (kabbalistic) secret" represented by the principle of "joining *ge'ula* and *tefillah*."[17] However, in spite of his understanding of the kabbalistic ramifications, he rules in both paragraphs that the recitation of "amen" does not constitute an interruption, and should be recited in communal prayer after *ga'al yisrael* (**אבל עם הצבור חייב לענות אמן אחר ברכת החזן אפילו אחר גאל ישראל, ולא הוי הפסק בין גאולה לתפלה**).

So far we have seen that, while all authorities presumably uphold the Rabbinic principle of **סומכים גאולה לתפילה**, many Rishonim specify that the response of "amen" to the blessing *ga'al yisrael* before the Shaharit Amidah does *not* constitute an interruption. Among these Rishonim, we may note, are Rashi, and R. Yitzhak Alfasi,[18] Rabbenu Asher and Rambam. These last named *poskim* are of particular importance, we may add, since they are ostensibly the halakhic determinants followed by R. Yosef Karo in the Bet Yosef, and consequently, in the Shulhan Arukh. We also cited the Arba'ah Turim in support of this position, and we may add R. Mordecai Jaffe, even though we recognize that he is not considered as authoritative a decisor as R. Yosef Karo.

Kabbalah as the Source of R. Yosef Karo's Ruling

Why, then, would R. Karo move in the direction of the law he enacted, prohibiting the recitation of "amen," in the face of this considerable Rabbinic opinion to the contrary? Let us examine the Bet Yosef on Orah

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17 R. Mordecai Jaffe, *Sefer Levush Malkhut* (reprint of Prague ed., 1623). See his presentation of the halakha at Orah Hayyim 111:1, where he slightly expands on his understanding of the "secret."

18 In determining Alfasi's view, let us recall, we relied on the understanding of the Shiltei Hagibborim and the students of Rabbenu Yonah.

Hayyim (66), and review the evidence it offers. After reviewing the positions of many of the authorities cited above,[19] R. Karo writes:

> **ועכשיו נהגו העולם שלא לענות אמן אחר גאל ישראל... אלא טעמא משום דחשבי ליה הפסק בין גאולה לתפלה. וכבר כתבתי בסעיף נ"א שעל פי הזוהר נהגו שלא לומר אמן אחר גאל ישראל....**
>
> But now the whole world is accustomed not to respond "amen" after *ga'al yisrael*...[20] Rather the reason is that they consider it to be an interruption between ge'ulah and tefillah. And I have already written in Section 51[21] that it is according to the Zohar that they became accustomed not to say "amen" after *ga'al yisrael*.... [22]

It is on the basis of this one source that the question turns, according to R. Karo: the Zohar, in his mind, overrules all of the other Halakhic opinions and precedents.

However, R. Karo appears to misrepresent the Zohar in his affirmation that the custom of not responding "amen" after *ga'al yisrael* can be traced to that source: no text corresponding specifically to R. Karo's ruling has been found in the Zohar.[23] While the possibility always exists, of course, that he was referring to some version of a Zohar text no longer extant, it is also possible that R. Karo's reference to "the Zohar" was for public consumption only, as that work was already an authoritative text within the Jewish community. Indeed, , as we shall see, it seems that the tradition to which he was referring originated not within the Zohar itself but in his own mystical experience.

Nevertheless, let us consider what the Zohar does teach regarding the principle of **סומכין גאולה לתפילה**, i.e., the "juxtaposition of the blessing *ga'al yisrael* with the beginning of the Amidah." It should come as no surprise that the Zohar places a high value on maintaining this rule. The Zohar, of course, is following in the footsteps of the Talmudic tradition we examined above. However, it invests that ancient Rabbinic instruction with mystical insight. In several passages,[24] the Zohar holds that when the Shema and its blessings are recited, followed by the Amidah without interruption, the worshippers enact the moment of union between female

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19 Rabbenu Asher, Rashi, and the students of Rabbenu Yonah. R. Karo also refers to Rambam, Hilkhot Berakhot 1:18, in which it is stated: **ואין עונין אמן אלא אחר ברכה אחרונה שקדמה אותה ברכה אחרת**..., "...one only recites 'amen' after a final blessing that was preceded by another blessing." According to R. Karo, then, Rambam would not allow the recitation of "amen" after *ga'al yisrael* since the liturgical section beginning *emet ve-yatziv* contains only one blessing; thus, "amen" would only be allowed in the case of a liturgical section containing at least two successive berakhot. See also R. Karo in the Bet Yosef to Orah Hayyim 51.

20 This clause ("now the whole world is accustomed...") remains an enigma at this point in my research. Since I have not found antecedent to R. Karo a source prohibiting the recitation of "amen" after the blessing *ga'al yisrael*, it appears to me rather that R. Karo is essentially an innovator in this regard. A thorough perusal of siddurim, sifrei minhagim, aharonim and responsa would be required to determine which communities at the time of the writing of the Bet Yosef recited "amen," and which did not.

21 In truth, in the long note he writes in the Bet Yosef to Orah Hayyim 51, R. Karo doesn't explain this reference to the Zohar at any greater length than he does in 66. He writes, simply: **אבל אחר גאל ישראל נהגו שלא לענות אמן על פי הזוהר**, "but after *ga'al yisrael* they were accustomed not to respond 'amen,' according to the Zohar." See also the judgment about this case of Moshe Hallamish, *Kabbalah in Liturgy, Halakha and Customs* [Hebrew] (Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar Ilan University Press, 2000), 165: **שכן אין שום מקום בבית יוסף ציון מדויק לדברי הזוהר**...

22 Note *ad. loc.* that the commentaries Darkhei Moshe (of R. Moshe Isserles) and Derishah both rule against R. Karo, and affirm the recitation of "amen" after *ga'al yisrael*.

23 In another case, with regard to the degree to which women may participate in funerals, R. David Golinkin has demonstrated that R. Karo exceeded the clear ruling of the Zohar, upon which his own more stringent ruling is ostensibly based. See R. David Golinkin, "The Participation of Women in Funerals" in *The Rabbinical Assembly of Israel: Va'ad Halakha Responsa 5747* (Jerusalem, 1987), 2:31–40; see esp. p. 35, n. 13, where Golinkin discusses the issue of the relative weight of Talmud and Zohar in Halakhic decisions.

24 E.g., Zohar 1.132b; 1:205b; 1:228b; 2.238b.

Shekhina and male Yesod—and it is understood that nothing must interrupt that *yihud*, or "union." However, the Zohar mentions nothing with regard to the recitation of the word "amen," let alone stating that it constitutes an interruption.

While various Aharonim mention customs predicated on R. Karo's ruling, none can find a supporting source antedating the Shulhan Arukh; we will consider this material below, in the conclusion to this teshuva. The *Kaf Ha-haim* of R. Yaakov Haim Sofer[25] provides the key for finally explaining how it came to be that R. Karo considered the recitation of "amen" to constitute a prohibited interruption between *ge'ulah* and *tefillah*. R. Sofer suggests that the basis for R. Karo's decision is not, in fact, the Zohar itself. He refers his readers instead to the *Sha'ar Hakavvanot*, the Lurianic Kabbalistic work of R. Haim Vital, and as well to the *Maggid Mesharim*; this latter work describes the visitations and instructions of R. Karo's own *maggid*, or heavenly messenger. In this case, the *maggid*, representing the personified voice of the Mishnah, is reported to have instructed R. Karo[26] specifically not to respond "amen" after the blessing *ga'al yisrael*.

Let us examine these passages. R. Sofer directs us to the end of the Lurianic expounding of the Reading of the Shema (end).[27] The relevant passage reads as follows:

> ובזה יובנו דברי רז״ל שאמרו כל הסומך גאולה לתפלה כו׳ והי׳ צ״ל כל הסומך תפלה לגאולה שכן הוא האמת שצריך לסמוך ולעלות ולחבר את התפלה שהיא המלכות למעלה עם הגאול׳ שהוא היסוד. אמנם יובן עם הנז׳ שהנה בתחילה אנו מורידין הארת היסוד הנקרא גאולה למטה אל המל׳ הנקרא תפלה העומד׳ בברי׳ וזהו ממש סמיכות גאולה לתפלה ואח״כ עולה התפל׳ למעל׳ עם הגאולה באצ׳ ואז איננו סמיכות והארה בלבד רק גאולה עצמיות ולא סמיכות לבד....

> And in this way the words of our Sages, may their memory be a blessing, be understood when they said "all who juxtapose *ge'ulah* to *tefillah*, etc."[28] And they should have said, "all who juxtapose *tefillah* to *ge'ulah*," since that is the truth,[29] that one must juxtapose and to cause to ascend and to join the *tefillah*—which is the *malkhut*, upwards with the *ge'ulah*—which is the *yesod*.[30] Consequently, it will be understood with that which was mentioned, that at the outset we cause to descend the illumination[31] of the *yesod*, that is called *ge'ulah*, downwards into the *malkhut*, that is called *tefillah*, standing in the *beriah*.[32] And this constitutes the actual "juxtaposition" of

25 *Kaf Ha-haim* (Jerusalem, 1964), comment on Orah Hayyim 66:7.

26 ...שצווה המגיד לבית יוסף ליזהר שלא לענות.

27 "Kabbalistic Yeshiva," *Sha'ar Hakavvanot* (Jerusalem, 1997), 246. It should be noted that this type of literature encompasses much coded language, meant to be understood only by the initiate.

28 I.e., that all who juxtapose *ge'ulah* to *tefillah* will be blessed; the reference is to the Talmudic passages cited above.

29 In other words, that is what the worshipper actually does—juxtaposes *tefillah* to *ge'ulah*, and not the other way around as the oft-cited principle expresses it.

30 These two, *malkhut* and *yesod*, are mystical terms denoting, respectively, the female and male parts of the Godhead.

31 I have translated the term הארה as "illumination." R. Jeremy Kalmanofsky (private email communication, June 22, 2000) alerts me to the possibility of "significant wordplay" in the text at this point: the term הערה means "penetration," and that in fact reflects the Kabbalistically-contemplated "act" taking place between the *malkhut* and the *yesod*.

32 From R. Jeremy Kalmanofsky I learn that "Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzira and Asiya are the four 'worlds,' or ontologically unfolding dimensions of creation, each one more physical and less divine than the one before. There are ten sefirot in each, so the Lurianists always speak of, for example, '*Yesod d'Asiya*, i.e., the 'Yesod level of the Asiya realm.' Atzilut is the realm of the godhead and the sefirot as they are. The lower realms are derivative. So Shekhina/Malkhut 'standing in the *beriah*' would mean that she (her 'legs,' her 'train' or something approximating that) stand at the border of the world of divine unity and the world of extra-divine/angelic/demi-god diversity" (private email communication of June 22, 2000). I am most grateful to R. Kalmanofsky for his learned insight.

> *ge'ulah* to *tefillah*. And after this the *tefillah* ascends upwards with the *ge'ulah* in the *atzilut*. And thus it is not "juxtaposition" and illumination alone; rather, it is [the] *ge'ulah* of *atzmiyut*[33] and not mere "juxtaposition."[34]

The implications of this passage are clear: if the Lurianic position is indeed that there ideally should be not only a "juxtaposing" of *ge'ulah* to *tefillah*, but rather a (sacramental) act by the worshipper that causes an actual "superimposition" of that part of the Godhead represented by *ge'ulah* into or onto that part of the Godhead represented by *tefillah*, then *any* interruption—even of momentary silence!—of that event by the worshipper is fraught with danger and sin, and hence, should be avoided. While the passage does not explicitly teach this with specific regard to the recitation of "amen," it seems reasonable to conclude that with such a momentous theurgic event in process, the author would consider even this type of otherwise-sanctioned interruption to be forbidden. Moreover, sources such as this help us to understand the mystical milieu in which to consider the following, more significant, text.

The passage in the *Maggid Mesharim* actually provides the immediate source of R. Karo's ruling. It is remarkable in its own right, and deserves to be cited in its entirety:

> אור ליום שבת ח״י לכסליו השכמתי כמנהגי לקרות במשניות וקריתי כמו מ׳ פרקים ועוד הלילה גדולה וחזרתי וישנתי עד שהשמש זרח על הארץ וחזרתי לקרות והייתי מצטער אולי נשכחתי מלהפקד כפעם בפעם ותמיד הייתי קורא בלי הפסק ובתוך זה נאמר לי חזק ואמץ אל תערוץ ואל תחת שאעפ״י שחשבת כי נטשתיך עזבתיך שכחתיך מן הדין כן היה ראוי לעשות יען כי שכחתני ונטשתני עזבתני והפרדת מחשבתך ממני ואותי השלכת אחרי גווך והנה אתה מתפלל לפני הקב״ה שיורד דרכי תשובתו ואני מדריכך בדרך זו תלך ותשלך דברי אחריך והנה לא נכון הדבר אשר אתה עושה לכן שוב אלי ואני אשיבך ככל אשר דברתי לך. ותמיד תהרהר בתורתי ויראתי ועבודתי ולא תפסיק מחשבתך אפי׳ רגע והטוב בעיניך מה שעשית אמש להפסיק בין גאולה לתפלה כי באותה שעה גרמת שתפול כ״י על ידך והפרדת אותה מן זוגה. ובעבור זה קמו מקטרגי עליך לולא שאני וחיילותי התפללנו לפני הקב״ה שירחם עליך **לכן מכאן והלאה הזהר מאוד אל תפסיק כלל ואפי׳ בעניית אמן** וחוץ מכבוד ר׳ יעקב שאמר מצוה לענות אמן אחר גאל ישראל לא ירד לעומקן של דברים אדרבה עבירה היא בידו ולא מצוה ולכן אין להפסיק כלל. ועל אודות האיש ההוא אשר דברת הנה תקנתיו לך מהרה תראה פלאות ותתמה לכן השלך על ה׳ יהבך. ומחר בעת הזאת אבא אליך ואדבר עמך הסוד ההוא יותר בארוכה ועתה תראה היקרך דברי אם לא תדבק בי ובתורתי ובמשניותי וכו׳ בהתהלכת תנחה אותך ובשכבך תשמור עליך בשכבך ממש כמא דאת אמר בשכבך ובקומך דהא כד את נאים מגו הרהורא דמתנייתא ז׳ עולמין דילי נטרין יתך וכד את מיקץ מגו דאת נאימת׳ בהרהורא דמתנייתא היא היא ממללא בפומך ורחושי מרחשן שפוותך:

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33 Or "redemption of the essences." By this phrase (גאולה עצמיות), I think he means an actual "folding over" or "superimposition" of the male and female sefirot into one independent and unified whole. In other words, in the Lurianic sense the term סמיכות, that we have been translating all along as "juxtaposition," really indicates not a linear closeness but a four-dimensional, theurgic event. I am thinking along the lines of the "parallel universe" concept in science fiction (!), but I do not think I am too far off the mark!

34 The text I have presented and translated here, describing the assimilation of *malkhut* into *yesod*, reflects a major Kabbalistic theme. See Elliot Wolfson, "Crossing Gender Boundaries in Kabbalistic Ritual and Myth," in *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism* (SUNY Press, 1995), 79–121. Wolfson's work endeavors to demonstrate that Kabbalah seeks *shekhina's* reintegration from independent female to the newly androgynous phallus. I am grateful to R. Jeremy Kalmanofsky for directing me to this source.

On the Eve of the Sabbath, the 18th of Kislev,[35] I arose early as is my custom to recite *mishnayot*, and I recited approximately forty chapters.[36] And while the night was yet long, I returned and slept until the sun was already shining on the earth. And I returned and recited, and I was disappointed that perhaps I had been forgotten from receiving my usual visitation. And I would always read[37] without interruption. And in the midst of this, it was said to me: "be strong and of good courage; *do not be terrified or dismayed* (Josh. 1:9), for even though you thought that I had abandoned you, left you, forgotten you, it would have been appropriate for that to have been done! For indeed you have forgotten me and abandoned me; you have left me and have caused the separation of your thoughts from me! It is me whom you have cast away behind your back! And take heed: you pray before the Holy One, Blessed be God to cause to descend[38] the ways of returning to God.[39] And I am guiding you on this path, [whereas] you cast and send forth my words behind you! And take heed: it is not correct, that thing that you are doing! Therefore, return to me and I will cause you to return, according to all that which I had spoken to you. And always meditate in my Torah and my Awe and my Worship, and do not interrupt your thoughts, even for a moment. Was it proper in your eyes what you did last night, to interrupt between *ge'ulah* and *tefillah*?! Indeed, in that very moment you caused 'the Congregation of Israel'[40] to fall by your hand, and you separated it from her mate. And on account of this my detractors arose against you (and would have been victorious) were it not that I and my forces prayed before the Holy One, Blessed be God to have compassion upon you. Therefore, from now on be extremely careful: do not interrupt at all, even with the recitation of "amen." And seek forgiveness on behalf of R. Yaakov, who said it is a mitzvah to respond 'amen' after *ga'al yisrael*.[41] He did not descend to the (true) depths of the matters. The opposite is the case: it is a sin at his hand, and not a mitzvah! And therefore, one must not interrupt at all. And as regards that man of whom you spoke, take heed: I have corrected him for you; quickly you will see wonders and be astonished. Therefore, *cast your burden on the LORD and He will sustain you* (Ps. 55:23). And tomorrow at this time I will come to you and I will speak with you that secret additionally, at great length, and you will see if my words come [true?] to you or if you do not adhere to me and to my Torah and to my Mishnayot, etc. Upon your walking it will guide you, and upon your lying down it will guard you. At your actual lying down, as [the Torah] says: *at your lying down and your rising up* (Deut. 6:7). For when you doze[42] in your meditation in the Mishnah, its seven worlds will protect you; and when you awaken from your dozing in the meditation in the Mishnah, it is that which will fill your mouth and cause your lips to flutter."[43]

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35 I do not know the year of the vision that R. Karo relates.

36 The implication is that R. Karo recited the Mishna chapters by heart and at great speed, in order to induce the mystical visitation of his *maggid*.

37 I.e., he would read the Shema and its blessings, along with praying the Amidah; this understanding is made clear further in the narrative.

38 Understanding יוריד for יורד.

39 I.e., the ways for R. Karo to repent of his error and restore his closeness to God.

40 This term, i.e. כנסת ישראל, is another mystical term denoting *malkhut* or *shekhinah*. Once again, I am indebted to R. Jeremy Kalmanofsky for this observation.

41 Thus, the text alludes in passing to a difference of opinion among the Safed Kabbalists about whether or not to recite "amen" at this point in the service.

42 Perhaps, "enter your mystical trance."

43 R. Yosef Karo, *Maggid Mesharim* (Jerusalem: 1960), 162-163.

At last we understand the basis for R. Karo's *pesak*: his own private instrument of mystical vision instructed him of the dire consequences, regarding that which occurs within the Godhead, of reciting "amen" between *ge'ulah* and *tefillah*.[44] In his important study of R. Yosef Karo and the *Maggid Mesharim*, R. J. Zvi Werblowsky points to the remarkable similarity between this passage and the apocryphal teshuvot ascribed to R. Yosef Gikatila, and in fact he considers this work to be the source of the *Maggid* in this instance.[45]

The question still remains as to why, in the Bet Yosef, R. Karo referred to the Zohar as the source underlying his ruling. It may be that R. Karo understood that the Zohar was already recognized in his own day as an authority that may have Halakhic resonance, as his own private visions did not; if he were to prevent those dire consequences, of which the Maggid warned him, from occurring, he would need to invoke the authority of the Zohar. It must be recognized that although this is a somewhat mercenary view of R. Karo's decision-making, it is nonetheless a plausible explanation. It is also possible, and more charitable, to imagine that once the Maggid had given him the instruction regarding the recitation of "amen," R. Karo understood that interpretation to actually inhere in the text of the Zohar.[46] The fact that he acquired this knowledge through the intervention of his Maggid did not mean in his mind that it was an independent revelation, but rather that the vision-acquired report, received within the context of his own mystically-informed consciousness, became for R. Karo the one and only possible meaning of the Zohar. It was therefore not disingenuous for R. Karo to attribute to the Zohar what was in reality his own contribution.

Thus, the Shulhan Arukh rules that even responding "amen" between the Shaharit blessing *ga'al yisrael* and the beginning of the Amidah constitutes a *hefseq* (a proscribed "interruption"), and therefore the congregation should omit that response. Subsequent poskim—and, indeed, almost universal practice—echo this ruling.

Several possible conclusions emerge from our discussion of the sources considered thus far; any one of these may legitimately serve as the basis for halakhic observance:

1. Since in considering this liturgical question, no ethical dilemma presents itself, congregations may surely choose to maintain the mystically-based custom of falling silent at the transition from the Shema and Its Blessings to the Amidah.[47] Even though this determination would assuredly contradict the sources and discussion presented in this responsum (as well as the sentiments of its author!), it must nonetheless be recognized that no actual "harm" befalls any person following what has by this time become the traditional practice. Therefore, despite the precedents R. Yosef Karo overturns in arriving at his pesak, it may serve as the basis for continued practice.

However, in this case, an important caveat must be noted: I do not think I have to emphasize the danger to any legal system when important legal decisors can claim that legal decisions may be rendered on the basis of explicit Divine instructions—especially when those instructions so directly contradict the inherited legal

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44 While it is surely not the purpose of this teshuvah to delve into the question of the role of "the prophetic spirit" in post-Biblical Judaism, interested readers may wish to consult Benjamin Sommer, "Did Prophecy Cease? Evaluating a Reevaluation," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115/1 (1996), 31–47 (see especially the excellent bibliographic footnotes).

45 R. J. Zvi Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1977), 180–181. This judgment is reaffirmed by Hallamish (2000), p. 165: אין ספק שמקור הדברים הוא בשו"ת המיוחסים לר' יוכף ג'קטילה.

46 A similar view is suggested by Hallamish (2000), p. 165: או שאין הזוהר אלא סמל של אוטוריקה קבלית....

47 This is *unlike* the situation encountered, for example, by R. David Golinkin in the teshuva relating to women's participation in funeral practices, considered above.

tradition! Despite the tremendous prestige and halakhic authority of R. Yosef Karo, considering him to be in effect his own halakhic validator is itself a dangerous jurisprudential precedent. Whatever liturgical beauty and/or comfort may be adduced in favor of retaining the liturgical custom based on his ruling should not be construed as providing the basis for additional halakhic decisions in cases where there would be any deleterious ethical implications or possibility of human exploitation.

2. In contradistinction to the preceding, Magen Avraham relates a stringent position, practised by "particularly careful worshippers" (Orah Hayyim 66:7):

> **והמדקדקים ממתינים בצור ישראל כדי לענות אמן ובס"ט משמע שיש להמתין בשירה חדשה.**
>
> And particularly careful worshippers pause at Tzur Yisrael in order to respond "amen," and in paragraph nine[48] it is made explicit that one should pause at Shira Hadasha.

It should be empasized that the *first* suggestion reported by this important *aharon* is to wait specifically *in order to be able* to respond "amen" to the blessing of the *shali'ah tzibbur*!

3. Another solution, that averts any disruption in the liturgy whatsoever, is to encourage the congregation to recite the blessing *ga'al yisrael* aloud and together with the *shali'ah tzibbur*. This is the suggestion personally advocated by the Magen Avraham (also on Orah Hayyim 66:7, immediately following his report about the **מדקדקים**):

> **ונראה לי דאם ירצה יוכל לכוין לסיים עם הש"ץ ואז אינו מחויב לענות אמן.**
>
> And it seems to me that if the worshipper wishes, he may plan to finish together with the *shali'ah tzibbur*, and then he is not obligated to respond "amen."

Likewise, when R. Solomon Ganzfried, author of the Kitzur Shulhan Arukh, articulates the need to juxtapose *ge'ulah* and *tefillah*, he apparently is aware that the recitation of "amen" does not exactly violate that need. He recommends the proposal of the Magen Avraham:

> **לא יפסיק בין גאל ישראל לשמונה עשרה, אפילו לקדיש וקדושה וברכו, מפני שצריך להסמיך גאולה לתפלה. וטוב שיצמצם לגמור ברכת גאל ישראל עם השליח צבור בשוה, כי אם יגמור הוא תחלה, ואחר כך השליח צבור, יש ספק אם יענה אמן על בברכת השליח צבור או לא, אבל כשהוא גם כן גומר את הברכה, ודאי אין צריך לענות אמן, דאין עונים אמן על ברכת עצמו.**
>
> One should make no interruption between *ga'al yisrael* and the Amidah, even for kaddish and kedusha and barkhu,[49] since one must juxtapose *ge'ulah* and *tefillah*. It is best to arrange it to conclude the blessing *ga'al yisrael* together with the *shali'ah tzibbur*, simultaneously. For if he should finish it first, and afterwards the *shali'ah tzibbur*, it is unclear whether he should respond "amen" to the blessing of the *shali'ah tzibbur* or not. But if the worshipper finishes together with the *shali'ah tzibbur*, it is certain that there is no obligation to respond "amen," since one is not obligated to respond "amen" after one's own blessing.[50]

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48 I.e., Orah Hayyim 66:9.

49 Note that in listing things for which one must make no interruption, Ganzfried does not include the recitation of "amen" between *ga'al yisrael* and the beginning of the Amidah.

50 Solomon Ganzfried, *Code of Jewish Law (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch)* [Hebrew], trans. Hyman E. Goldin (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1927), 1:56. I have modified Goldin's translation. See also the opinion of R. Shneur Zalman cited below.

4. However, the avowed purpose of this teshuvah is to suggest a return to the understanding of the Talmudic tradition by the Rishonim and several later authorities. It maintains that the blessing *ga'al yisrael should* be recited aloud by the *shali'ah tzibbur*, and that congregations should be instructed to respond "amen" in the manner usual with all other blessings.

The response to R. Karo's ruling in the Bet Yosef advocated in this teshuva is to ask—whether or not he is correct in his citation of the Zohar—to what extent is it halakhically tenable to rely on a mystical work like the Zohar to override the rulings of the significant Rishonim who preceded him? And how much the more so ought this question be raised if in fact the halakhic decision is rooted not in a source sanctioned by tradition but in the private meditative experience of an individual, however great his authority?! In the face of such strong precedent among a wide representation of Rishonim, it is reasonable to at least suggest that R. Karo was not justified in rejecting them in favor of one that was more sympathetic to his own mystical inclinations. Thus, a congregation that would prefer to encourage worshippers to respond "amen" to the *shali'ah tzibbur* today should feel free to revert to the position held by this majority of authoritative Rishonim.

It is my firm opinion that mystically-inclined sources such as the ones reviewed in this teshuvah should not be considered in the Halakhic process (when these depart from the tradition of the Talmud, the Rishonim and the early Codes), from an historical point of view they only serve to strengthen the position taken in this teshuvah: R. Karo's pesak is an anomaly, without precedent or parallel in the Halakhic process; we shall urge its rejection as the basis for liturgical practice.

As R. Karo himself makes clear in the Bet Yosef, his ruling based on an idea that he attributes to the Zohar. In fact, all three of the major poskim on whom he generally relies (i.e., R. Yitzhak Alfasi, Rambam and Rabbenu Asher) rule that the response of "amen" does *not* constitute a *hefseq*; thus, as is the case with any *berkahah*, one *should* respond by saying "amen." In addition, such authorities as Rashi, R. Yaakov ben Asher (the author of the Arba'ah Turim) and R. Moshe Isserles, and others, all rule that the recitation of "amen" does not constitute an interruption between *ge'ulah* and *tefillah*.

Although they were cited above, let us repeat both texts containing Isserles' rejection of R. Karo's ruling (on Orah Hayyim 66:7 and 111:1):

> **הגה: ויש אומרים דעונין אמן, וכן נוהגין לענות אחר השליח צבור אמן. אבל אם התפלל לבד, אין עונין אמן.**
>
> Gloss: There are those who say that they may respond "amen," and so is it the custom to answer "amen" after the *shali'ah tzibbur*. But one who has prayed alone should not respond "amen."[51]
>
> **הגה: ויש אומרים שמותר לענות אמן על גאל ישראל, וכן נוהגין.**
>
> Gloss: And there are those who say that it is permissible to respond "amen" for (the blessing *ga'al yisrael*, and such is the custom.

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51 I.e., to his own blessing. The Mishneh Berurah (n. 34) observes that some believe that even a lone worshipper would respond "amen" at this point to his/her own blessing, since it marks the conclusion of the segment of the service entitled "the Shema and Its Blessings" (íéôöÄâòóâôöÖãòÅòÉëâôçÖâëÄÖÑôèÖâã).

Since Isserles remains the principal late authority (at least for Ashkenazic Jewry), his opinion, bolstered by the Tur and the Rishonim cited above, may be considered authoritative by those wishing to revert to the liturgical practice of reciting "amen" after the *ga'al yisrael* blessing.[52]

Moreover, additional support for our ruling may be adduced through reference to many *aharonim*. Even were one to be of the opinion that kabbalah and other forms of Jewish mysticism are sources that *ought* to inform our liturgical practice, and so be inclined to reject the tenor of this teshuva, one should consider that many mystically-inclined halakhic decisors nevertheless reject R. Karo's opinion on this specific issue, and rule that "amen" must be recited after the *ga'al yisrael* blessing. Even though it is the contention of this teshuvah that sources of Jewish mysticism such as the Zohar should not be considered as the basis of *pesak* (when such a source flies in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary in texts far more authoritative in the Halakhic decision-making process, such as the Talmud, the Rishonim and the Codes), it would still be worthwhile to examine Jewish legal sources that often rely on mystical literature. As we shall see, this further study will only serve to make the problematic nature of R. Karo's *pesak* even greater.

R. Mordecai Moshe Hakohen Karfman, in his commentary (**מראה כהן**) on the *Shulhan Arukh of R. Yitzhak Luria*, calls attention to the fact that "many Kabbalists" cite the Zohar as the source for not responding "amen" to the blessing *ga'al yisrael*. However, he, too, cannot find any explicit source which would account for the practice. He writes:

> **והנה באמת המקובלים הביאו בשם הזוהר שלא לענות אמן, ואנו לא מצאנו זה בזוהר בשום מקום בפירוש, כי אם במשמע מכמה מקומות אשר תפלה מיושב ותפלה מעומד מדמה לתפלה של יד ותפלה של ראש. ומכאן בודאי למדו: מה שם אין עונין אמן ביניהם גם כאן אין לענות... ומה בין אמן לאדני שפתי תפתח, שהוא כתפלה אריכתא כיון שתיקנו רבנן, אמן נמי תיקנו רבנן... על כן נראה שיש לכל בעל נפש לענות אמן... ואני נוהג בעצמי כדברי הטור והרא"ש ז"ל, לענות בכל סיומי ברכות אמן אחר ברכת עצמי, ומכוון אני לענות עם הש"ץ יחד לענות אמן אחר גאל ישראל אחר ברכת עצמי.**
>
> In truth, the Kabbalists cite in the name of the Zohar not to respond "amen;" however we have not found this [rule] anywhere in the Zohar explicitly, but only by inference in several places, in which prayer [recited while] sitting and prayer [recited while] standing are compared with hand tefillen and head tefillen. And it was from this [comparison] that probably enabled them to learn [the rule]: just as in that case [of tefillen] one does not recite "amen" [if he has heard the blessing] between the two [hand and head tefillen], so too here [with regard to prayers] one does not respond "amen"... [between the Shema and its blessings, and the Amidah]. And what difference is there between [reciting] "amen" [after the blessing *ga'al yisrael*, before the Amidah] and *O Lord, open my lips* [which likewise is recited between *ga'al yisrael* and the beginning of the Amidah],

52 One should also not ignore the several Aharonim supporting our position, cited in the body of this teshuvah. For example, see also the opinion of Rabbi Barukh Halevi Epstein: צריכין לענות אמן אחר ברכה זו כדעת הגמרא וממילא צריך הש"ץ לומר ברכה זו בקול רם ככל הברכות, וממילא צריך לענות אמן כבכל הברכות, "We must respond *amen* after this *berakhah* (i.e., *ga'al yisrael*) in accordance with the opinion of the Gemara; and in any event the *shali'ah tzibbur* must recite this *berakhah* aloud like the rest of the prayers. And in any event one must respond *amen*—as with all berakhot." *Sefer Barukh She'amar: Perush 'al Tefillot Hashana* (Tel Aviv: Am Olam, 1968), 112–113. This source was cited by Rabbi Hayyim Herman Kieval in "The Case of the Lost Amen: Victim of An Erroneous Custom," *Journal of Synagogue Music* 19:1 (July, 1989), 72–76. I am grateful to Rabbi David Golinkin for alerting me to this article.

> which is considered as though it were part of a long [Amidah] prayer. [Were you to say that the recitation of] *O Lord, open my lips* is permitted since its recitation was ordained by the Rabbis, [the recitation of] "amen" was also ordained by the Rabbis… Therefore it seems that everyone should respond "amen"… And I myself practice according to the rulings of the Tur and the Rosh, may their memories be for a blessing, to respond "amen" at all the endings of blessings [i.e., major units of liturgy] after my individual blessing. And I intend to respond together with the *shali'ah tzibbur*, to respond "amen" after [the blessing] *ga'al yisrael*, following my own blessing.[53]

Thus here we have a case of a mystically-inclined commentator who cannot find the source for R. Karo's ruling, and who testifies that he himself follows the Rishonim and early Codes.

Similarly, R. Yitzhak Safrin of Komarna, an important figure in nineteenth century Hassidic Kabbalah, also rules specifically that one must say "amen" even after one's own blessing—and how much the more so, after that of the *shali'ah tzibbur*:

> **לא יפסיק בין גאולה לתפלה בשום דבר כי אם באמן, שהעיקר שחייב לענות אמן אף אחר ברכת עצמו. אם כן הוא מעיקר התפלה, ומכל שכן שיכול לענות אחר ברכות אחרים.**
>
> One should not make an interruption between ge'ulah and tefillah with any word, except for "amen," for the essential point is that one is obligated to respond "amen" even after one's own blessing. Therefore, it (the recitation of "amen") is of the essence of the prayer, and how much the more so may one respond ("amen") after the blessings of others.[54]

Thus, R. Yitzhak is an additional figure who, despite the mystical tradition espoused by R. Karo, will disregard R. Karo's pesak.

In addition, the *Shulhan Arukh Ha-Rav* of R. Shneur Zalman rules likewise that the response of "amen" does not constitute an interruption; although he records the opinion of not saying "amen," he favors the position that encourages the recitation (**וכן נוהגין**):

> **צריך לסמוך גאולה לתפלה... ולכן יש אומרים שאין עונין אמן אחר גאל ישראל, לא אחר ברכת עצמו... ולא אחר הש"ץ. ויש אומרים שעניית אמן אינה חשובה הפסק, כיון שהוא צורך הברכה וסיומה. וכן נוהגין במדינות אלו, לענות אמן בין גאולה לתפלה אחר שמסיים הש"ץ ברכה זו, אבל לא אחר ברכת עצמו... ומי שרוצה לצאת לדעת הכל יוכל לכוין לסיים עם הש"ץ, ואז אינו מחוייב לענות אמן אחר הש"ץ לפי מנהגינו, שאין עונין אמן אחר ברכת עצמו... ויש מדקדקים להמתין בצור ישראל כדי לענות אמן אחר הש"ץ....**
>
> One must juxtapose [the blessing] *ga'al yisrael* with [the beginning of] the Amidah… Therefore, there are those who say that one may not respond "amen" after [the blessing] *ga'al yisrael*, neither after one's own blessing… nor after that of the *shali'ah tzibbur*. And there are those who say that the response of "amen" is not considered an interruption, since it is said for the purpose of the blessing and its conclusion. And so do we conduct ourselves in these lands, to respond "amen" between [the blessing] *ga'al yisrael* and [the beginning of] the Amidah, after the *shali'ah tzibbur* concludes this blessing, but [we do not do so] after one's own blessing. One who wishes to fulfill

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53 Mordecai Moshe Ha-Kohen Karfman, *Shulhan Arukh of Rabbenu Yizhak Luria* (Jerusalem, 1984), 55.

54 R. Yitzhak Eizek Yehudah Yehiel Safrin, *Siddur Heikhal Haberakhah* (Jerusalem, 1990), 207. I am most grateful to R. Jeremy Kalmanofsky for directing me to this source.

> both opinions may intend to conclude together with the *shali'ah tzibbur*, and then he is not obligated to respond "amen" according to our custom, since one does not respond "amen" after one's own blessing… And there are those who practice exactly to pause at *O Rock of Israel* specifically to respond "amen" after [the blessing of] the *shali'ah tzibbur*.[55]

Thus, this important Hassidic Halakhic work seems at one with the important Rishonim and Codes that form the basis for the decision rendered by this teshuvah.

Conclusion

This responsum affirms that one should not decide questions of *halakha* on the basis of the Zohar or mystical traditions when these contradict the Talmudic tradition.[56] Even as we continue to be informed and enriched by the literary treasures of classic Jewish mysticism, especially in homiletical and theologically educative contexts, the general approach exemplified by this teshuvah should characterize the *halakhic* inclinations of our decisors and decision-making institutions.

Nevertheless, in considering the question of whether or not a worshipper should respond "amen" following the blessing *ga'al yisrael*, this teshuvah concedes that it is permissible to maintain one of several minhagim:

1. One may decide to continue to support the decision of R. Yosef Karo, maintaining the mystically-based custom of falling silent at the transition from the Shema and Its Blessings to the Amidah.

2. One may adopt the position of the Magen Avraham, and choose to complete one's blessing together with the *shali'ah tzibbur* without saying "amen," and thereby avoid any conflict.

3. One may adopt the practice of the **מדקדקים**, and make a special effort—even to the extent of delaying the completion of one's own blessing—to respond "amen" to the blessing of the *shali'ah tzibbur*.

4. However, whether or not one accepts the stringency of the **מדקדקים**, this teshuvah maintains that the *shali'ah tzibbur* ought to recite the blessing *ga'al yisrael* outloud and that worshippers should respond by reciting "amen."

55 Shneur Zalman, *Shulhan Arukh, Orah Haim* 66:9 (Brooklyn: Otzar Ha-hasidim, 1978), 59.

56 The question of the relationship between Kabbalah and Halakha is of course a very old and a very complex one, and I do not wish to make light of the subject. It may well be that Committee on Jewish Law and Standards will wish to explore this topic in some formal venue in the future. For now, interested readers may consult Jacob Katz, Halakha and Kabbalah: Studies in the History of Jewish Religion, its Various Faces and Social Relevance [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, the Hebrew University, 1984); and see also Katz's "Halakha and Kabbalah as Competing Disciplines of Study" in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Sixteenth-Century Revival to the Present*, ed. Arthur Green, vol. 14 of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 34–63. The comprehensive book by Moshe Hallamish, *Kabbalah in Liturgy, Halakha and Customs* [Hebrew], cited above, would also be a resource in this endeavor. Hallamish devotes an entire chapter (pp. 161–179) to the influence of Jewish mysticism on the halakha of R. Karo, and treats our specific question on pp. 164ff.