

Chanting Psalm 118:1-4 in Hallel
Aaron Alexander, Elliot N. Dorff, Reuven Hammer
May, 2015

This teshuvah was approved on May 12, 2015 by a vote of twelve in favor, five against, and one abstention (12-5-1). Voting in Favor: Rabbis Aaron Alexander, Pamela Barmash, Elliot Dorff, Susan Grossman, Reuven Hammer, Joshua Heller, Jeremy Kalmanofsky, Gail Labovitz, Amy Levin, Micah Peltz, Elie Spitz, Jay Stein. Voting Against: Rabbis Baruch Frydman-Kohl, David Hoffman, Adam Kligfeld, Paul Plotkin, Avram Reisner. Abstaining: Rabbi Daniel Nevins.

Question: In chanting Psalm 118:1-4 in Hallel, should the congregation be instructed to repeat each line after the leader, or should the congregation be taught to repeat the first line after each of the first four?

Answer: As we shall demonstrate below, Jewish tradition allows both practices and provides legal reasoning for both, ultimately leaving it to local custom to determine which to use. As indicated by the prayer books published by the Conservative Movement, however, the Conservative practice has been to follow the former custom, according to which the members of the congregation repeat each of the first four lines of Psalm 118 antiphonally after the leader, and our prayer books should continue to do so by printing the psalm as it is in the Psalter without any intervening lines. However, because the other custom exists and is acceptable, it should be mentioned as a possible way of chanting these verses of Hallel in the instructions.

A. The Authority of Custom on this Matter

What is clear from the earliest Rabbinic sources is that local customs varied as to how to recite Hallel, and each community was authorized to follow its own custom. Mishnah *Sukkah* 3:11 (38a) says this:

מקום שנהגו לכפול - יכפול, לפשוט -
יפשוט, לברך - יברך, הכל כמנהג המדינה.

In a place where it was the custom to repeat each line, they should repeat it; to say each line only once, they should do that; to make a blessing at the end of Hallel, they should do that; everything is according to local custom.

This Mishnah is also cited in B. *Pesahim* 119a-119b. The *Shulhan Arukh* (O.H. 422:3) affirms this principle:

בענין הפסוקים שכופלין בו וכן בפסוקים שש"צ אומר והקהל עונים אחריו, כל מקום
כפי מנהגו.

In the matter of the verses that we repeat, and similarly the verses that the leader says and the congregation answer after him [something other than what the leader said], everything is according to local custom.

The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly provides guidance in matters of halakhah for the Conservative movement. The individual rabbi, however, is the authority for the interpretation and application of all matters of halakhah.

B. The Custom to Interpose the First Line (*Hodu...*) after Each of the First Four Lines

As medieval sources that we will cite below indicate, those in the Middle Ages who used this custom did not know of any precedents for it in Tanna'itic or Amoraic literature, even though it is recorded in the Tosefta, and so several medieval rabbis thought that it appears the first time in the Middle Ages. One principle that the Talmud does discuss and that they knew, however, is relevant to this mode of reciting Hallel – namely, that people who hear liturgy are legally equivalent to those who answer to it (*shome'a k'oneh*). This is important because in this way of reciting Hallel, the congregation never says the last three of these four lines. So only if the principle of hearing being the legal equivalent of responding applies can one justify creating a mode of reciting Hallel in which the individual congregants do not actually recite the last three of these four lines but only hear them recited by the leader. The relevant source about the principle is this talmudic passage (B. *Sukkah* 38a-b), which we will quote at length because later sources refer to different parts of it:

אמר רבא: הלכתא גיברתא איכא למשמע ממנהגא דהלילא הוא אומר הללויה והן אומרים הללויה - מכאן שמצוה לענות הללויה. הוא אומר הללו עבדי ה' והן אומרים הללויה - מכאן שאם היה גדול מקרא אותו עונה אחריו הללויה. הוא אומר הודו לה' והן אומרים הודו לה' - מכאן שמצוה לענות ראשי פרקים. הוא אומר אנא ה' הושיעה נא והן אומרים אנא ה' הושיעה נא מכאן שאם קטן מקרא אותו - עונין אחריו מה שהוא אומר. הוא אומר אנא ה' הצליחה נא והן אומרים אנא ה' הצליחה נא - מכאן שאם בא לכפול כופל. הוא אומר ברוך הבא והן אומרים בשם ה' מכאן לשומע כעונה. בעו מיניה מרבי חייה בר אבא: שמע ולא ענה מהו? אמר להו: חכימא וספריא ורישי עמא ודרשיא אמרו: שמע ולא ענה - יצא. אתמר נמי, אמר רבי שמעון בן פזי אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי משום בר קפרא: מנין לשומע כעונה - דכתיב את (הדברים) (מסורת הש"ס: [כל דברי הספר]) אשר קרא (יאשיהו) (מסורת הש"ס: [מלך יהודה]) וכי יאשיהו קראן? והלא שפן קראן, דכתיב ויקראהו שפן) את כל הדברים האלה) לפני המלך אלא מכאן לשומע כעונה. - ודילמא בתר דקראנהו שפן קרא יאשיהו? - אמר רב אחא בר יעקב: לא סלקא דעתך, דכתיב יען רך לבבך ותכנע לפני ה' בשמעך את הדברים האלה בשמעך, ולא בקראך.

Rava observed: Once can deduce important decisions from the [current] custom [of reciting] the Hallel. He says *Halleluyah* (Ps. 118:1), and they respond *Halleluyah*, indicating that it is a religious duty to answer *Halleluyah*. He [the leader] says, “Praise him, servants of the Lord,” and they [again] say, *Halleluyah*, indicating that if an adult recites [the Hallel] for someone else [who presumably does not know it], the latter responds *Halleluyah* [after each clause to fulfill his obligation to recite Hallel]. He [the leader] says, “Give thanks to the Lord” (Ps. 118:1) and they respond “Give thanks to the Lord,” indicating that it is a religious duty to make a response of the beginning of sections [that is, whereas the mere response of *Halleluyah* is sufficient for single clauses, this is not enough for the beginning of biblical chapters]. (And so it was stated: Rabbi Hanan bar Rava said: it is a religious duty to make a response to the beginning of biblical chapters.) He [the leader of services] says, “Deliver us, Lord, we implore you” (Ps. 118:25), and they respond “Deliver us, Lord, we implore you,” indicating that if a minor is calling out the psalm, we respond with what he says. He [the leader of the

congregation] says, “Prosper us, Lord, we implore you” (*Ibid.*), they say, “Prosper us, Lord, we implore you,” indicating that if one wants to repeat [a verse], one may repeat a verse. He [the leader of services] says, “Blessed is the one who comes” (Ps. 118:26), and they “in the name of the Lord” (*ibid.*),” indicating that he who hearkens is though he responded. They inquired of Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba: If one listened but did not make the responses, what is the law? He answered them: The Sages, the Scribes, the leaders of the people, and the expounders laid down that if a man listened but he did not make the responses, he has [nevertheless] fulfilled the obligation. It was similar stated: Rabbi Simeon Ben Pazzi, citing Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, who had it from Bar Kappara, stated: On the basis of what do we know that he who listens is as though he responds? From what is written, “Even all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read” (2 Kings 22:16). For was it Josiah who read them? Was it not in fact Shaphan who read them, as it is written, “And Shaphan read it before the king” (*ibid.*, 10)? Consequently it may be inferred that he who listens is as though he responds. But perhaps Josiah read it after Shaphan had read it? Rabbi Aha bar Ya’akov said: This cannot be imagined because it is written, “Because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I spoke” (*ibid.* 19) – “when you heard,” not “when you read.”

This, then, becomes the justification for allowing a practice that effectively makes the congregation omit saying the last three of the verses in Psalms in Ps. 118:1-4 as they respond with the first line, “*Hodu...*” instead, as the Tosafot (B. *Sukkah* 38b, s.v. *mikahn*) attest while pointing out that this was not, as far as they knew, the practice found in the Talmud:

ומה שנוהגין עכשיו ששליח צבור אומר שלשה יאמרו נא והצבור עונים על כל אחד ואחד הודו ולא מצינו מנהג זה בש"ס מ"מ נפקי מהנך קראי דשומע כעונה.

Our current custom that the leader says the three *yomru na* verses and the congregation answers after each one of them the [first] *hodu* verse we have not seen in the Talmud. Nevertheless, they fulfill their responsibility to say these verses because of the principle that one who hears something is as if he responded.

Rabbenu Nissim (on the RIF 19a, s.v. *hu omer hodu*) also attests to this practice and gives the same justification, with the added suggestion that interposing the *hodu* verse became the custom because it is an expression of gratitude:

ומה שאנו נוהגין עכשיו הש"צ אומר יאמר נא ויאמרו נא והצבור עונים על כל אחד ואחד הודו לא מצינו מנהג זה בתלמוד ואפשר שנהגו כן לרמוז שמצוה לענות ראשי פרקים ע"פ זה הפירוש האחרון שכתבתי ולפי שהוא פסוק של הודאה ושבה נהגו כן ומ"מ יוצאין בו מאותן הפסוקים שאומר ש"צ דשומע כעונה:

Our current practice that the leader says *yomar na* (Ps. 118:2) and *yomru na* (Ps. 118:3-4) and the congregation answers after each one of them *hodu* (Ps. 118:1) we have not seen in the Talmud. It is possible that they acted according to this custom to hint to the fact that it is duty to answer with the beginnings of chapters, as I interpreted this in my last comment, and they (also) acted this way because it (Ps. 118:1) is a verse of thanksgiving

and praise. In any case, they fulfill their duty to recite these verses (Ps. 118:2-4) that (only) the leader says through this custom because of the principle that one who hears (a verse) is as one who responded (with it).

Rabbenu Nissim (*ibid.*) also explains the variance of his community's current custom from the only one he knew in Rabbinic literature (namely, repeating each of the four lines) on the grounds that the Talmud makes this all a matter of custom:

ממנהגא דהלילא...ומה שאין אנו נוהגין כן הוא משום דמנהגא קרי ליה והיכא דנהוג
נהוג והיכא דלא נהוג לא נהוג :

“From the customs of [reciting] Hallel”...The fact that we do not act this way [i.e., repeating each of the first four verses] is because [the Talmud specifically] calls [the practice of its time] a custom, and where it is customary to [recite Hallel] that way, it is done that way, and where it is not done that way, it is not done that way.

This practice is also attested in the Tur (Orah Hayyim 422):

...וקורא ש"צ לבדו הודו והקהל עונין אחריו הודו וקורא פסוק יאמר נא ישראל והקהל
עונין אחריו הודו וכן יאמרו נא בית אהרן ועונין הקהל אחריו הודו וכן יאמרו נא יראי ה'
ועונין הקהל אחריו הודו

The leader reads by himself *Hodu* (Ps. 118:1), and the congregation answers after him *Hodu*. Then he reads [the verse beginning] *yomar na yisrael* (Ps. 118:2), and the congregation answers after him *Hodu*. Similarly, they [probably he] says *yomru na* [Ps. 118:3-4], and the congregation answers after him *Hodu*.

So there is ample precedent for those congregations who wish to follow this practice, based as it is on the presumption that one who hears a verse read is as if s/he recited it and that local custom on this matter is authoritative.

C. The Custom of the Congregation Repeating Each of the Verses of Ps. 118:1-4 after the Leader

The long-standing custom in most Conservative/Masorti congregations, however, is for the congregation to chant each of the first four lines of Ps. 118 antiphonally after the leader. This is reflected in all of the Conservative Movement's printed prayer books, which print the psalm as it is in the Psalter without interposing the first line, *Hodu...*, after each of the first four lines of the psalm. This has been the pattern ever since the Conservative Movement printed its first prayer book that included Hallel in 1945, the *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book*, edited by Rabbi Morris Silverman and published by the United Synagogue and the Rabbinical Assembly (p.113). (The first prayer book published by the Conservative Movement was *The High Holiday Prayer Book*, edited by Rabbi Morris Silverman and published by the United Synagogue of America in 1939, but that liturgy, of course, does not include Hallel.) The custom of not including an intervening *Hodu* line but rather printing the psalm as it appears in the Psalter is also what appears in *The Weekday Prayer Book*, edited by Rabbi Gershon Hadas and published

by the Rabbinical Assembly in 1974 (p. 178); and *Sim Shalom*, edited by Rabbi Jules Harlow in 1985 (p. 386). It is also true of *The Prayer Book: Weekday, Sabbath, and Festival*, edited by Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser and published by the Hebrew Publishing Company in 1957 [p. 152].¹ In addition, this was the practice that Professor Saul Lieberman followed when serving as the halakhic authority for the synagogue of the Jewish Theological Seminary, thus setting the practice for over a generation of rabbis trained there.²

This practice dates back to the Mishnah's discussion of how to recite *Shirat HaYam* and its parallel in Hallel. As for the former, basically it was a question of how you interpret the verse: **אָז יִשִּׁיר מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַיהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֵאמֹר אֲשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי גָאָה גָאָה סוּס וַרְכָבוֹ רָמָה בַּיָּם:** Rabbi Akiva, as usual when there is a word that seems to be extra, in this case the word **לֵאמֹר**, believes that it is there to add something, namely, that they did not all recite it together with Moses. Rather he said something, and the people then said something. What, though, did each one say? Here the sources and the Sages differ.

Mishnah Sotah 5:4 has:

(ד) בּוֹ בַיּוֹם דָּרַשׁ רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא (שְׁמוֹת טו), אָז יִשִּׁיר מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לֵה' וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֵאמֹר, שְׁאֵין תִּלְמוּד לֹמֵר לֵאמֹר, וּמָה תִּלְמוּד לֹמֵר לֵאמֹר, מְלַמֵּד שְׁתֵּיו יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹנִין אַתְּרֵיו שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה עַל כֵּל דְּבַר וְדְבַר, כְּקוֹרִין אֶת הַהֲלֵל, לְכֹךְ גָּאָמַר לֵאמֹר. רַבִּי נִתְמַיָּה אֹמֵר, כְּקוֹרִין אֶת שְׁמַע וְלֹא כְּקוֹרִין אֶת הַהֲלֵל:

On that day, Rabbi Akiba interpreted (Exodus 15:1), “Then Moses and the Children of Israel sang this song to Adonai, and they said, saying,” where the Torah did not have to add the word “saying” (*laimor*), so why does the Torah say “saying”? To teach us that the Israelites were answering after it [the verse that Moses recited] each and

¹ The only exception to this is a late one – namely, *Siddur Va'ani Tefilati*, published by the Rabbinical Assembly Israel Region and the Masorti Movement in Israel in 1998 (p. 503), which does insert the *Hodu* line after each of the first four of the psalm.

² When an earlier version of this responsum was discussed during the November, 2014 meeting of the CJLS, Rabbi Miriam Berkowitz asked me [Elliot Dorff] what led me to address this topic in the first place, later with the aid of Rabbis Alexander and Hammer. I answered that the services at the synagogue in which I had grown up, the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), and the Conservative synagogue I joined in Los Angeles when my wife and I moved there in 1971 all had the congregation repeat each of the first four lines of Psalm 118 after the leader chanted them, and it remained that way in the synagogue to which I belong when the first rabbi retired and a new one took his place, serving there for 25 years. It was not until a new rabbi became the rabbi of the synagogue to which I belong that the alternative was introduced as the correct way to do this, and that, I said at that meeting, led me to do the research for this responsum. Upon further reflection, however, I realized that the issue had been on my agenda long before then because Rabbi David Lieber, z”l, President of the University of Judaism, asked me to set the halakhic practice of the rabbinical program at the University of Judaism (now the American Jewish University) ever since I began directing that program in 1971, and I taught the students what I had been taught, namely, that the congregation repeats each line after the leader. When the Artscroll *siddur* was published in 1984, however, one of my students pointed out to me that it instructed people to repeat the *Hodu* line after each of the first four lines and then say the next line. This custom interposes the *Hodu* line after each of the first four lines of the psalm, thus changing the psalm, and it is unprecedented in classical Rabbinic sources, but it does have the advantage of ensuring that everyone recites or sings all of the verses. I then did some initial research on this topic with the intention of doing more later on. So my new rabbi's practice motivated me finally to carry out this plan, but my interest in this topic began with the publication of the Artscroll *Siddur* in 1984, which was at odds with what I had been taught at my home town synagogue (led, incidentally, by a man ordained by the Skokie yeshivah) and at JTS and also, as we shall see in the Tosefta below, at odds with any of the classical Rabbinic ways of reciting these verses of Hallel..

every verse, as we read Hallel. Therefore it says “saying.” Rabbi Nehmiah says, “As we read Shema and not as we read Hallel.”

So Rabbi Akiva would have us repeat each line after the leader in both *Shirat HaYam* and Hallel, and Rabbi Nehemiah disagrees, saying that we should read the Song of the Sea as we read Shema and not as we read Hallel. (As we will see from the Tosefta below, according to Rabbi Nehemiah, the leader should read the beginning of each verse of the Song, and the congregation should respond by saying the end of each verse, as the Shema was recited, rather than the congregation repeating each line of the Song after the leader, as Hallel was recited.)

As the Tosefta (T. *Sotah* 6:2, quoted also in B. *Sotah* 30b) below indicates, however, even during Tana’itic times, there were different customs. The Tosefta records three of them – namely, that the congregation repeats the first line after the leader reads each successive line; that the congregation repeats each line after the leader recites it; and that the leader begins each line and the congregation finishes it:

(ב) דרש ר' עקיבא בשעה שעלו ישראל מן הים בקשו לומר שירה שרת עליהן רוח הקדש ואמרו שירה כיצד אמרו שירה כקטן שקורא את ההלל בבית הסופר ועונין אחריו על כל עניין ועניין משה אמ' אשירה לה' וישראל אמרו אשירה לה' משה אמ' עזי וזמרת יה וישראל אמרו עזי וזמרת יה ר' לעזר בנו של ר' יוסי הגלילי אומ' כגדול שמקרא את ההלל בבית הכנסת ועונין אחריו עניין ראשון משה אמ' אשירה לה' וישראל אמרו אשירה לה' משה אמ' עזי וזמרת יה וישראל אמרו אשירה לה' משה אמ' ה' איש מלחמה וגו' וישראל אמרו אשירה ר' נחמיה או' כבני אדם שקורין שמע בבית הכנסת שנ' ויאמרו לאמר מלמד שהיה משה פותח בדבר תחילה וישראל עונין אחריו וגומרין עמו משה אמ' אז ישיר וישראל אמרו אשירה לה' וגו' משה אמ' עזי וזמרת יה וישראל אמרו זה אלי ואנוהו משה אמ' ה' איש מלחמה וישראל אמרו ה' שמו

Rabbi Akiva taught: In the hour that the People Israel went up from the sea, they asked to sing a song. The Holy Spirit came over them, and they said [sang] the song. How so? They said [sang] the song as a minor who reads the Hallel in school and they answer after him one by one. Moses said, “I will sing to Adonai...,” and Israel said, “I will sing to Adonai...” Moses said, “Adonai is my strength and my might...,” and Israel said, “Adonai is my strength and my might...”

Rabbi Eliezer the son of Rabbi Yosi Haglili said: as an adult who reads Hallel in the synagogue and they [the congregation] answer after him in response to each topic. Moses said (Exodus 15:1), “I will sing to Adonai...,” and Israel answered, “I will sing to Adonai...” Moses said, “Adonai is my strength and my might...” (Exodus 15:2), and Israel said “I will sing to Adonai...” Moses said, “Adonai is a Warrior...” (Exodus 15:3), and Israel said, “I will sing...”

Rabbi Nehemiah said: It was like people who read the Shema in the synagogue, as it says, “Then Moses sang...”, [which did not need to be said, so why was it said?] To teach us that Moses opened a matter first and Israel answered after him and finished with him. Moses said, “Then Moses sang...” (Exodus 15:1), and Israel said, “I will sing to Adonai ...” [the continuation of Exodus 15:1]. Moses said, “Adonai is my strength...” (Exodus 15:2), and Israel said, “This is my God, and I will glorify Him...” [the continuation of

Exodus 15:2]. Moses said, “Adonai is a Warrior...” (Exodus 15:3), and Israel said, “Adonai is His name” [the continuation of Exodus 15:3].

So where does this leave us? There clearly is traditional precedent for the congregation to repeat each line of Psalm 118:1-4 after the leader, as Mishnah *Sotah* indicates and as Rabbi Eliezer’s opinion in Tosefta *Sotah* indicates as well. Moreover, that has been the custom of much of the Conservative/Masorti movement for at least seven decades, and probably for more than that, given that the editors of the Silverman prayer book did not indicate that they were starting a new practice in just printing these four lines, one after the other. There are, in addition, some very good reasons why our current custom, which has everyone repeating each of the first four lines of the psalm after the leader chants it, is preferable to the alternative one in which the congregation sings the *Hodu* verse after each of the first four verses:

- 1) The psalm is not written with the *Hodu* line following each of the first four lines, so inserting the line is effectively changing the psalm. The psalmist certainly knew how to indicate when he wanted people to repeat a line or a phrase, as Psalm 136 amply illustrates, and as the last three words of each of the first four lines of the psalm we are discussing in this responsum, Psalm 118, also indicate, so if he wanted us to insert that full line between each of the first four lines of this psalm, he would have written it that way. It is one thing to repeat a line, which prayer leaders often do in singing a line in a particular way and which sometimes common custom has the congregation do as well, as in the case of the four sentences that we repeat before the last paragraph of Hallel; it is quite another thing to change the text by inserting other lines. There are several places in our liturgy where the Rabbis strung biblical verses from disparate places together (e.g., the *Hodu* paragraph before Ashrei in P’sukai D’zimra and *U’va L’Tziyon* toward the end of the service), so yes, the Rabbis permitted themselves to use biblical verses randomly. They even permitted themselves to cut off verses in the middle, as in the recitation of God’s Thirteen Attributes (Exodus 33: 6-7) on the High Holy Days and on Festivals, thus changing the theology in those verses drastically. They even occasionally permitted themselves to rewrite verses, as in their change of Isaiah 45:7 in the opening blessing of the Shaḥarit service (changing Isaiah’s description of God as “fashioning light and creating darkness, making peace and creating evil” to “fashioning light and creating darkness, making peace and creating everything”). Furthermore, as we have seen in the section of Talmud *Sukkah* reproduced above, they had the custom of responding *Halleluyah* after verses in the Psalms, oddly parallel to the practice in some Evangelical churches today. Except for the custom of inserting *Hodu* between each verse of Ps. 118:1-4 above, however, they never inserted full verses into a set biblical text. So the practice of inserting *Hodu* after each of the first four lines rewrites the psalm and is thus *sui generis*.
- 2) If the congregation says the *Hodu* line after each of the first four lines, the congregation never recites the second, third, and fourth lines. The Talmud seems to prefer that people who cannot recite the verses say *Halleluyah* after each one, even though it also announces the principle that one who hears a verse is counted as one who responded to it. The *Mishnah Berurah* (422:3, subpar. 20), says that we should say the *Hodu* line after

each of these four verses, and it, as it were, answers this objection by saying that either the congregation should fulfill its obligation to say these verses of Hallel through the leader's recitation of those lines, based on the Talmudic principle discussed above, or the congregation should say the lines quietly to themselves after they say *hodu* out loud. This latter suggestion seems to indicate that author of the *Mishnah Berurah*, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (Poland, 1838-1933), is himself not comfortable with the fact that people inserting *Hodu* after each verse will never say Ps. 118:2-4. Artscroll instructs this: "After each verse, the congregation responds *hodu la'shem ki tov, ki l'olam hasdo*, and then recites the succeeding verse,"³ without specifying whether the congregation recites the next line quietly or out loud. This suggestion, however, is problematic, for if the congregation is singing *Hodu* after each line -- and if the rabbi and/or the Siddur is instructing them to do so -- they will never say the other three lines by themselves because the prayer leader will immediately respond with the next line, especially if the entire congregation is singing out the line they are taught to sing (*Hodu* or the line the leader just sang) in a loud and enthusiastic voice, as is the norm in this part of the service.

Thus even though one can fulfill one's obligation by just listening to the prayer leader, it is always halakhically preferable for Jews to recite as much of the service as they can on their own, thus indicating their active assent and confirmation of what they are reciting. Moreover, educationally it is better to have a practice that teaches Jews pieces of the liturgy they might otherwise not know, and having them repeat each of the first four lines does that, while saying *Hodu*... after the second, third, and fourth line does not.⁴

P'sak:

- 1) There is ample legal precedent for each of the two customs described in this responsum -- that is, having the leader sing, and the congregation repeat, each of the first four verses, verse by verse, or the alternative custom of having the congregation respond to each of the first four verses of Ps. 118 with the *Hodu* verse (Ps. 118:1), followed in some congregations with each congregant saying, either out loud or quietly, the following of the first four verses in this psalm before the leader chants it. Local custom is authoritative in this matter.
- 2) That said, there are good reasons to prefer the custom that has the congregation repeat each of the first four lines after the leader chants it. Specifically, (a) it is the more

³ Rabbi Noson Scherman, *The Complete Artscroll Siddur: Weekday/Sabbath/Festival* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1984), p. 638.

⁴ Some colleagues on the CJLS have asked whether the practice on Sukkot should differ from that used when Hallel is recited during the rest of the year so that on Sukkot one would recite *Hodu* after each of the first four lines of Psalm 118 even though one does not do that during the rest of the year. As quoted above, however, a central source of this whole discussion is B. *Sukkah* 38a-38b, where *Hodu* is repeated only after the first verse of Psalm 118, and so there does not seem to be any halakhic reason to make Sukkot an exception. On a practical level, I can attest, having done this for decades, that one can waive the *lulav* singing each of the first two lines of Psalm 118 after the leader with no musical problem. On the contrary, if the congregation sings *Hodu* after each of the first four lines of the psalm, that makes it seem that all four lines should be treated the same and so the congregation should waive the *lulav* after each of the first four lines, while our custom is to do so only after the first two, which is easier to explain and remember if each of the first four lines is treated as a separate verse.

common custom in Conservative/Masorti congregations, as attested by our liturgical publications since 1945; and (b) because it has all Jews recite all four verses out loud and usually in enthusiastic song, which is both halakhically and educationally preferable to fulfilling one's legal obligation to say these verses by passively listening to the leader recite them or by depending on individuals, after singing *Hodu*, to say each verse quickly before the leader chants it. Rabbinical Assembly prayer books should therefore continue to reflect the earlier and preferable practice by printing the psalm as it is in the Tanakh without any other lines inserted in between each of the first four lines of the psalm.

If instructions are included, they should indicate that the preferable custom is that we repeat these verses, one by one, after the leader. It would be appropriate however, to mention in the instructions that because we depend on local custom on this matter, some may follow the alternative custom of repeating the first verse after the leader chants each of the first four. So if the prayer book is to include instructions, they should read something like this:

Each of the following four verses is chanted first by the leader and then repeated by the congregation, verse by verse. Some follow the practice of the congregation repeating the first line (Hodu) after each verse recited by the leader.