

WHICH SITUATIONS CALL FOR RECITATION OF HAGOMEL?

1) CROSSING A DESERT

Nowadays, a trip on a paved road through a desert is no more dangerous than a trip on an interstate highway; thus ha-gomel is not recited. Still, were it to happen that one lost his way in a desert and survived, ha-gomel would be recited.

2) DANGEROUS IMPRISONMENT

The poskim debate if this refers only to imprisonment in which one's life was endangered or threatened, such as being a prisoner of war, or even jail imprisonment for criminal activity, where one's life is not in danger. In practice, the individual case should be presented to a rov for a ruling.

3) SERIOUS ILLNESS

This includes recovery from any illness which is or could be life-threatening, or any surgery which requires general anesthesia. Many poskim maintain that if a patient is so weak that he remains bedridden for three consecutive days, ha-gomel is recited even if according to the doctors the patient's life was not in danger.

Diagnosed mental illness which required that the patient be restrained or hospitalized is considered life-threatening; ha-gomel is recited upon recovery.

Ha-gomel should be recited upon complete recovery from the illness or condition, even if the patient needs to continue taking medication for his condition. If, according to the doctors, the patient will never completely regain his former strength, then ha-gomel is recited as soon as he is well enough to walk on his feet.

4) SEA VOYAGE/AIRPLANE TRIP

This refers only to voyages far into the ocean that last several days. It also includes shorter trips where harsh weather conditions threatened the safety of the passengers.

Whether or not to recite ha-gomel after an airplane trip is a subject of much debate. There are three opinions:

- 1) It is doubtful whether ha-gomel may be recited, unless a potentially dangerous situation developed during the flight.
- 2) Ha-gomel is recited only when the airplane crossed over an ocean or a desert.
- 3) Ha-gomel is recited after every airplane trip.

While there is no clear ruling on this issue, the custom today follows the poskim who require the recitation of ha-gomel only when an ocean [or a desert] is crossed. [Once the destination has been reached, ha-gomel is recited; the return leg of the trip necessitates its own ha-gomel. Is ha-gomel recited in cases other than the four categories mentioned?

In addition to the categories of people mentioned above, our custom is to recite ha-gomel whenever one finds himself in a life-threatening situation and was saved through the grace of Hashem. As long as one came face to face with actual danger and survived, whether he was saved miraculously or by what appears to be "natural" means, ha-gomel is recited. For example, a survivor of - an attack by wild animals who normally kill their prey, a car accident which according to bystanders should have been fatal, of a bus which was blown up by a suicide bomber, a shooting, an armed robbery, a collapsed building, a soldier who saw combat in war.

In the above cases, the person found himself in actual danger and was nevertheless saved. Sometimes, however, a person is merely close to the danger, but was not actually involved in the danger itself. In those cases, ha-gomel is not recited. For instance, a survivor of - a sighting of a wild animal, but the animal did not attack, a killer aiming a weapon in one's general direction, but was overpowered, a car that gets out of control but came to last minute stop, a low impact head-on crash between cars, a bomb which explodes seconds before people entered that area, a gun that discharges by accident and missed the person by inches.

GENERAL NOTE:

If one remains in doubt as to whether or not he is obligated to recite ha-gomel (e.g., it is difficult to determine if he was in "actual" danger; an unresolved dispute among the poskim; a minyan is not available; a father for a minor, a woman who is embarrassed to recite the blessing in front of men, etc.), he has two options whereby which he can fulfill his obligation: He can recite the blessing without reciting Hashem's name. The text is: Baruch ata ha-gomel . . . He can have specific intent to fulfill this mitzvah when reciting the morning blessing of ha-gomel chasadim tovim l'amo Yisrael. Preferably, he should do so out loud in front of ten men, including two Torah scholars. If he wishes, he can add at the end of the text the words "shegemalani (kol) tov." (*Rabbi Daniel Neustadt, torah.org*)

For final rulings, consult your Rav.)