

Psalms

INTRODUCTION TO PSALMS

The book of Psalms is unique among the books of the Bible. Taken as a whole, the Bible depicts the relationship between God and mankind, and more particularly between God and the people of Israel. In most books of the Bible, the relationship is primarily portrayed as proceeding from the top down, from God to man. By contrast, Psalms is the only book of the Bible where the relationship flows in the opposite direction, from man to God, in other words, where an individual turns to God and communicates with Him. Psalms is traditionally divided into five books, containing a total of 150 chapters. Some suggest that these are meant to correspond to the five books of the Torah. This parallelism also serves to illustrate that the relationship between God and man runs in both directions. Thus, despite their wide variation in subject matter and tone, the individual chapters comprising Psalms are all narrated from a human perspective, with all the limitations and complexity this entails.

The Hebrew title of the book, *Tehillim*, means “praises,” and there is much in the way of praise in its chapters. Yet Psalms is much more than a compendium of ways to praise God. In fact, one can find in it almost any thought or feeling a person might wish to express to God. It includes a wide variety of poetic forms, with personal poetry alongside epic poems, as well as philosophical musings and introspection on matters pertaining to the nation of Israel and to mankind. But what pervades all of the psalms, whether clearly expressed or implicit, is the voice of the individual psalmist.

Just as the topics of the psalms vary, so does the persona of the psalmist. The psalmist is seen as alternately dejected and elated; there are psalms of defeat and surrender alongside powerful, exultant victory songs. Moreover, some of the psalms express disquiet, originating in a crisis of faith or a grievance, whereas others bespeak peace and tranquility. To use a musical metaphor, some psalms are staccato, others legato; some largo, others presto. In similar fashion, the psalmist can be compared to a harp, each of whose many strings has its own unique sound while simultaneously working in harmony.

Psalms deals with a number of recurring themes. Many of its chapters contain prayers and supplications that seem to correspond to actual events in the life of King David. But despite their various allusions to historical events, the psalms are not autobiographical. While many of them are attributed to David, neither his private nor his public persona is readily discernible. What emerges from most of the psalms is not the voice of a specific historical figure but rather that of Everyman.

As the bounds of the personal are transcended, the psalms enter the realm of the universal. For instance, while King David was surrounded for most of his life by followers, friends, and admirers, what is most striking in the psalms of supplication attributed to David is the loneliness they convey. Only rarely do we get a sense of David as part of a larger “us.” The image is that of a man who feels alone even in the midst of a crowd. This quality, somewhat paradoxically, makes Psalms not only a collection of songs that can be sung aloud in a chorus of voices, but also an expression of many people’s most private life experiences, whether joyous or distressing. As the verse says: “The heart alone knows its own bitterness, and no stranger can share in its joy” (Proverbs 14:10). People first feel their own pain and happiness, and only after that can they identify with the feelings and experiences of others.

The logic behind the psalms’ arrangement remains unclear. There are no obvious differences between the five books, or sections, of Psalms. And while here and there a group of psalms appears to have certain structural or thematic similarities, these are the exceptions to the rule. It appears likely that the disarray is intentional, reflecting the perspective of a work that above all expresses human emotions. For emotions, like existence itself, have no fixed order; there are no predetermined conditions governing a person’s feeling happy, sorrowful, introspective, or grateful. Psalms mirrors life in all its vicissitudes and inconsistencies, demonstrating that despite our most strenuous efforts, life can never be fully organized or controlled.

The chapters of Psalms differ from one another in structure and style as well as content and length. Psalms contains the shortest

chapter in the Bible (two verses) and almost immediately following it, the longest chapter (176 verses). Some of the psalms have the rhythm and tone of epic poetry. Some are simple entreaties, and others are an outpouring of feeling emanating from the depths of the soul. There are many tearful prayers in Psalms, and often no explanation is provided for the psalmist's distress other than that something is wrong. Some psalms are distinctly meditative and deal with a well-defined topic. Others are songs of a historical nature. Also quite a few psalms offer straightforward, moral instruction.

Despite all the differences between them, the psalms share one outstanding characteristic: truth. There is no smoothing of rough edges, no attempt to ignore or gloss over difficult issues in order to create a sense of harmony. Indeed, many of the psalms have a kind of built-in dissonance that results from the psalmist's refusal to relinquish a point of truth even at the expense of disrupting the overall melody. Undoubtedly, this aspect of Psalms is partially why it continues to speak to so many people in all corners of the world. While Psalms very much belongs to a specific place (the Land of Israel) and a specific period (the biblical era), it nonetheless transcends all boundaries of space and time.

Like Job and Ecclesiastes, Psalms has a special, unique set of cantillations. The cantillation signs serve to punctuate the verses as well as to indicate specific musical notes. In Psalms, the musical component of the cantillations has been entirely lost. We know that certain psalms were sung in the Temple during the era of the Second Temple and possibly even before that. But beyond this we lack any reliable tradition pertaining to the melodies that were sung.

Until the period of the Sages, Psalms consisted of 147 chapters. Most of these texts have a heading and a clear internal structure. A later, non-Jewish division of Psalms produced the current 150 chapters, a few of which appear to be incomplete or not self-contained. Most of the psalms are attributed to David, as indicated in the psalms themselves, using descriptions such as: "the prayers of David son of Yishai" (Psalms 72:20). Nevertheless, according to the Sages in *Bava Batra* 14b–15a, various psalms were authored by ten others, among them Adam and Moses.

Apart from its literary value, Psalms enjoys an exceptional status in the biblical canon. No book of the Bible has evoked more tears or more words of gratitude and joy. Over the course of Jewish history, Psalms has been utilized more than any other book, not just by poets, but by all who seek to articulate the appropriate words and phrases with which to beseech, express gratitude to, pour out the sorrows of their soul to, or simply have a conversation with God. Whether it is a lonely widow weeping over her travails, a leader grappling with a military or political crisis, or an individual inspired to sing a song of thanksgiving, Psalms provides a mouthpiece for everyone. Indeed, if King David is termed "the sweet singer of Israel" (II Samuel 23:1), it is because he sang the song of an entire people.

Psalms

PSALM 1

PSALMS 1:1–6

A psalm that offers general observations about the joy experienced by an individual who conducts his life in the proper manner, and about the contrasting lives of those who are evil and sinful.

1 **1**
BOOK ONE
Sunday
1st day
of month

- 1** **Happy** [*ashrei*]^D **is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked, has not stood in the path of sinners.** A person who shuns evil leads a fortunate, happy life. The phrase *atzat resha'im*, “counsel of the wicked,” refers to bad advice given by wicked people. The happy man described here has not accepted or followed that advice. Since in other places the word *atzat* can be defined as “company” as well as “counsel,” this verse can also be interpreted to mean that a good man does not associate with wicked people, refusing to be considered part of their society. **And has not sat in the company of scoffers.** In modern Hebrew, *letzim*, translated here as “scoffers,” are clowns or jokers. But in Psalms, as in Proverbs and other sources, the word has a darker, more pejorative meaning. Scoffers are characterized by their frivolity and their breezy attitude toward that which is good. Even if they have no evil intent and do not actually behave in an evil manner, their mode of thinking and speaking opens the door to all manner of forbidden actions. The phrase “has not sat in the company of scoffers” emphasizes that even if one is not an active participant in such a group, and merely sits among them, he is exposing himself to wrongdoing.
- 2** **But whose desire is the Torah of the Lord.**^D The good and happy person desires God’s Torah, which is a guidebook for a way of life. **He meditates on His Torah day and night.** The pronoun “His” can also be said to be referring to the person studying the Torah rather than to God. This phrase, then, emphasizes each specific individual’s understanding of Torah, what he knows of it in his mind and heart. The term *yehgeh*, translated here as “meditates,” can also mean “utters.” When one chooses to spend all his time thinking and speaking of God’s Torah, he distances himself from evil and clings to good, and for this he is rewarded as described in the following verse.
- 3** **He is like a tree planted by streams of water.** The tree described here lacks nothing, as even without rain it has sufficient water. It is a tree **which brings forth its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.** Trees that lack water often bear their fruit late, and their leaves shrivel and fall, but this tree is

eternally fresh and thriving. This image is not merely one of blessing but also a concrete promise of ongoing fruitfulness in all its manifestations. The fruit of the righteous person’s Torah, as well as that of his everyday labors, will ripen at the right time, bringing benefit both to himself and to others. He will not suffer from premature decline or withering, and **whatever he does will prosper.**



“Like a tree planted by streams of water”

- 4** By contrast, **not so the wicked, who** are not at all like well-rooted trees but instead **are like chaff that wind blows away.** Chaff is incapable of growth, and lacking a secure place of its own, is scattered by the wind in all directions. The wicked have a similar fate. They have no real place and no plan, but simply conform to shifting influences.



“Chaff that wind blows away”

- 5** **Therefore the wicked will not stand up in judgment.** When the time of judgment comes, the wicked will have no standing, **nor evildoers among the righteous.** Not only will evildoers not be acquitted, but they will not even be able to join the company of the righteous.
- 6** **For the Lord knows the way of the righteous.** Here, as elsewhere, *yode’a*, translated as “knows,” specifically implies connectedness and love. God loves the righteous, and He therefore guides and assists them on their journey through life. **But by contrast, the way of the wicked will perish.** The way of the wicked results not only in the loss of eternal existence but also in an inability to withstand the vicissitudes of this life. Their path inevitably ends in ruin.

תהלים

א אֲשֶׁר־יִהְיֶה אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר | לֹא הִלֵּךְ בְּעֵצַת רְשָׁעִים וּבַדְרֹךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד וּבְמוֹשָׁב
 ספר ראשון
 ב לְצִים לֹא יָשָׁב: כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה חָפְצוֹ וּבְתוֹרַתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וּלְיָלֵה: וְהָיָה
 יום ראשון
 א לחודש
 ד כְּעֵץ שָׁתוּל עַל־פְּלָגֵי מַיִם אֲשֶׁר פָּרְיוֹ | יִתֵּן בְּעֵתוֹ וְעֵלְהוּ לֹא־יִבּוֹל וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־
 ה יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלִיחַ: לֹא־כֵן הָרְשָׁעִים כִּי אִם־כַּפְזֵן אֲשֶׁר־תִּדְפְּנוּ רוּחַ: עַל־כֵּן | לֹא־יִקְמוּ
 ו רְשָׁעִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט וְחַטָּאִים בְּעֵדַת צְדִיקִים: כִּי־יִדַע יְהוָה דְרֹךְ צְדִיקִים וְדֶרֶךְ
 רְשָׁעִים תֵּאבֹד:
 ב לָמָּה רָגְשׁוּ גוֹיִם וְלֹא־מִים יִהְיֶה דִיק: יִתְיַצְּבוּ | מַלְכֵי־אֲרֶץ וְרוֹזְנִים נוֹסְדוֹ־יַחַד
 ג עַל־יְהוָה וְעַל־מְשִׁיחוֹ: גַּנְתְּקָה אֶת־מוֹסְרוֹתֵימוֹ וְנִשְׁלִיכָה מִמֶּנּוּ עֵבְתֵימוֹ:

PSALM 2

PSALMS 2:1–12

A psalm without a heading in honor of a king who is mentioned several times. The psalm's content and visionary language indicate that it is not describing a specific king but rather depicts a prophetic vision of the future redeemer, the Messiah.

- 2 1 **Why do nations rage** and stir up a great commotion, and **peoples meditate in vain?** Why do they deliberate and make declarations that ultimately are no more than empty threats?
- 2 **The kings of the earth have assembled, and rulers are gathered together against the Lord and against His anointed one,** the king. Those in power consult with one another, gathering together in order to plot against God and His anointed one, as described in the following verse.
- 3 **Let us snap off their chains,** a metaphor for the rule and control that Israel exerts over them, **and throw off their bonds.** The main objective of their rebellion against the king is to be



Roman slaves in chains, marble relief, 200 CE



"Let us snap off their chains"

free of God, as the king represents the nation's connection to God.

DISCUSSION

1:1 | **Ashrei:** This word, translated here as "happy," serves as the opening word of several psalms. It indicates not only the subjective traits of happiness [*osher*] and satisfaction, but also objective uprightness and correctness [*yosher*].

1:2 | **Whose desire is the Torah of the Lord:** The psalmist here presents a definition of the righteous person: He is good in thought and in action, and even his inner will is directed toward God's Torah. When he has no other tasks

to occupy him, neither sacred nor mundane, he directs his speech and thoughts to God's Torah.

- 4 **He whose seat is in heaven will laugh; the Lord will ridicule them.** All those rulers' plans will come to naught, for they are void of any true substance. What actually will come to pass is punishment from on high.
- 5 **Then He will talk to them in His anger; in His wrath He will frighten them** and say:
- 6 **Yet I have anointed My king on Zion, My holy mountain.** The continuation of the psalm is spoken by the king himself:
- 7 **I will tell of the decree.** I will set forth the basic premise of all my actions. **The Lord said to me: You are My son; today I begat you.** The king, chosen by God, can be likened to a man's beloved son. When he ascends to the throne, it is as if he is being reborn.
- 8 God has told me: **Make your request of Me, and I will make nations your inheritance; the ends of earth will be your portion.** You will reign over many nations; your sovereignty will extend to the ends of the earth.
- 9 **You will smash them with an iron rod, shatter them**



Shattered potter's vessels

PSALM 3

PSALMS 3:1–9

A psalm referring to an episode in which David is surrounded by enemies and considered by everyone to be in a hopeless situation. Nevertheless, he trusts in God to deliver him from his enemies and lead him to victory and peace.

- 3 **1 A psalm by David when he fled from Avshalom his son.** Although the heading makes reference to a specific episode, the psalm speaks generally of a situation of great distress. It is an entreaty to God, coupled with an expression of faith that He will rescue the psalmist from his dire straits.
- 2 **Lord, how numerous are my tormentors; many rise up against me.** Not only are they enemies, but they are rebels from within my own ranks.
- 3 In addition to these enemies and rebels, principally Avshalom's army, there are **many** others who **say of me: There is no salvation for him in God.** Although they were not actively involved in the insurgency, they nonetheless believed that David's reign had ended and that his predicament was hopeless. **Selah.**^D
- 4 **But You, Lord, protect me. You are my glory,** or alternatively, You are the source of my glory, and **You lift my head.** You keep me from being completely cast off and humiliated.
- 5 **I cried aloud to the Lord and He answered me from His holy mount, Selah.** It is as if I can hear the voice of God speaking to me from the holy mount in Jerusalem.
- 6 **I lay down and slept,** often dejected and with no expectation that I would live to see the following day. But **I awoke** and did not succumb to eternal sleep, **because the Lord sustains me** and gave me strength to carry on.
- 7 And because God sustains me, **I shall have no fear of the myriads that surround me and oppose me.** I am not afraid of tens of thousands of people, all of whom are poised to attack me.
- 8 **Arise, Lord.** This is a call for God to reveal Himself in a recognizable way. **Save me, my God. For You have smitten my enemies on the cheek.** You have slapped the faces of all the enemies who surround me. This notion of a painful blow to the enemy's cheek resonates with the subsequent imagery: **You have broken the teeth of the wicked.**
- 9 In summation, David declares: **Salvation belongs to the Lord.** Even if salvation from God does not appear to be imminent, eventually it becomes apparent that **Your blessing is on Your people, Selah.**

like a potter's vessel. You will destroy all your enemies as easily as one shatters a clay vessel.

- 10 **So now, kings, be wise; accept admonishment, judges of the earth.** Understand that God has placed the privilege of sovereignty in my hands, and consequently you are powerless against me. For this reason, one should follow the advice given in the next verse:
- 11 **Serve the Lord with reverence,** aware of the consequences that await you if you do not serve Him, **and rejoice with trembling.** Although you will be able to rejoice under the rule of the king, this joy must be tempered with a trembling awe, as a hidden threat will always be present: If you do not serve God, you will be punished in various ways.
- 12 **Kiss the son.** Most commentators define *bar* here as "son," which is the meaning of this word in Aramaic, referring to the king, as God said: "You are My son" (verse 7). The kiss is an expression of homage and affection. **Lest He be angry and you lose your way, even if His anger burns only slightly.** You cannot withstand God's fury; you cannot weather even His slightest anger. By contrast, **happy are all who rely on Him.** Those who put their faith in God will find the world beautiful and full of goodness.

יוֹשֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׁחַק אֲדֹנָי יִלְעַג לָמוֹ: אִזְ יִדְבֵר אֱלִימוּ בְּאָפוֹ וּבַחֲרוֹנוֹ יִבְהַלְמוּ:
 וְאֲנִי נִסְכַּתִּי מִלְּפִי עַל-צִיּוֹן הַר-קֹדֶשׁ: אִסְפְּרָה אֶל חֵק יְהוָה אֲמַר אֵלַי בְּנֵי-
 אֶתְרָה אֲנִי הַיּוֹם יְלֻדְתִּיךָ: שָׁאֵל מִמֶּנִּי וְאַתְנֶנָּה גּוֹיִם נַחֲלַתְךָ וְאַחֲזַתְךָ אֶפְסֵי-אָרֶץ:
 תִּרְעַם בְּשִׁבְטֵי בְרִזָּל כְּכֹלִי יוֹצֵר תִּנְפַּעֲס: וְעַתָּה מְלָכִים הִשְׁכִּילוּ הוֹסְרוּ שְׁפָטֵי
 אָרֶץ: עֲבָדוּ אֶת-יְהוָה בִּירְאָה וְגִילוּ בְדַעְדָּה: נִשְׁקוּ-בַר פֶּן-יֵאָנָף וְתִאָבְדוּ דָרֶךְ
 כִּי-יִבְעַר כַּמַּעַט אִפּוֹ אֲשֶׁר־י כָּל-חֹסֵי בּוֹ:
 מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד בְּבְרָחוֹ מִפְּנֵי וְ אֲבִשְׁלוֹם בָּנוּ: יְהוָה מִהֲרִבּוֹ צָרִי רַבִּים קָמִים עָלַי:
 רַבִּים אֲמָרִים לְנַפְשִׁי אִין יִשׁוּעָתָה לֹו בְּאֱלֹהִים סִלָּה: וְאַתָּה יְהוָה מִגֵּן בַּעֲדֵי
 כְּבוֹדִי וּמְרִים רֵאשִׁי: קוֹלִי אֶל-יְהוָה אֶקְרָא וַיַּעֲנֵנִי מִהַר קֹדֶשׁוֹ סִלָּה: אֲנִי שָׁנַבְתִּי
 וְאִישְׁנָה הִקְיַצְתִּי כִי יְהוָה יִסְמַכֵּנִי: לֹא-אִירָא מִרְבָּבוֹת עִם אֲשֶׁר סָבִיב שְׁתוֹ
 עָלַי: קוֹמָה יְהוָה וְ הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי אֱלֹהֵי כִי-הַבֵּית אֶת-כָּל-אֵיבֵי לַחֵי שְׁנֵי רְשָׁעִים
 שִׁבְרָתָ: לִיְהוָה הִישׁוּעָה עַל-עַמְךָ בְּרַכְתָּךְ סִלָּה:
 לְמַנְצֵחַ בְּנִגִּינוֹת מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד: בִּקְרָאֵי עֲנֵנִי וְ אֱלֹהֵי צַדִּיקֵי בַּצָּר הִרְחַבְתָּ לִּי חֲנֻנִי

PSALM 4

PSALMS 4:1–9

A psalm of entreaty on the part of one who is being vilified and pursued groundlessly. The psalmist calls upon God, as He both saves the blameless and foils the schemes of the wicked.

4 1 For the chief musician, on stringed instruments,^d a psalm by David. Like the preceding psalm, this is essentially a prayer, though it does not speak of a specific struggle or imminent

danger but rather conveys a more generalized state of distress. It also includes expressions of encouragement for others.

2 When I call, answer me, God of my righteousness. In my

DISCUSSION

3:3 | **Selah:** The meaning of this word, found almost exclusively in the book of Psalms, where it occurs frequently, is not entirely clear. According to an ancient tradition it means “forever” or “for all time.” Often this sense is compatible with the context of the word, but sometimes this meaning can be applied only with difficulty. Some commentators are of the opinion that Selah indicates reinforcement for the preceding statement, meaning approximately “And so it is” or “Indeed

it is so.” Others believe that it is a musical term, indicating that the voice was to be raised at this point. Still others maintain that it is an instruction to lengthen the preceding word in order to conform to the meter of the song. Lastly, there are those who state that it indicates the end of a section of a song.

4:1 | **For the chief musician, on stringed instruments [neginot]:** This heading indicates that the psalm is addressed to the person who

conducts its musical recital, known as the *menatze’ah* or “chief musician.” This is one of a number of instructive openings to individual psalms. Some mention the type of musical instruments to be used, whereas others refer to a specific ancient melody. Some say that the plural word *neginot* indicates that this psalm has several tunes or involves several instruments. Apparently even the word *mizmor*, translated here as “psalm,” serves to identify a particular type of melody.

distress, I feel as though I am confined. The word *batzar*, translated here as “distress,” literally means “in a narrow place.” This implies a feeling of paralysis, as though to say: My very existence, whether physical or spiritual, is so pressured that I am unable even to move. **You have relieved me.** The word *hirhava*, “you have relieved,” or literally, “you have widened,” describes one’s feeling when redemption follows profound distress; it is as if all the sources of pressure have receded into the background and one can again breathe and move freely. Now, God, **be gracious to me and hear my prayer.**

- 3 Sons of man.** The psalmist now turns to *benei ish*, “sons of man,” namely, the leaders among his adversaries. Throughout the Bible, the word *ish* usually indicates a person of seniority and status. **How long will you put my honor to shame?** To what extent will you continue to denigrate and embarrass me? How long will you **love emptiness?** David’s humiliation and his enemies’ fight against him are not a consequence of his own deficiencies or mistakes. They constitute an unfounded war brought about by people who are propagating empty distortions and disseminating lies. How long will you **seek deception?** They go out of their way to seek out lies and deceptions concerning me. **Selah.**
- 4** Rather than pursuing me for baseless, deceptive reasons, **know**, be aware, **that the Lord has set apart the devoted for Himself; the Lord hears when I call to Him.** God has a special relationship with those who are faithful to Him. David’s devotion to God and desire to be close to Him were acknowledged by all, even during his lifetime. He repeatedly refers to the special way in which God sets apart those who seek Him.
- 5 Tremble and do not sin.** In this psalm, the word *rigzu*, defined here as “tremble,” connotes agitation, though elsewhere the word refers to anger. The psalmist bids his antagonists to shake off their evil ways. **Say in your heart, upon your bed.** He calls

on people to bestir themselves, to change their mind-set, and to transform their outlook on life so that they will not be drawn toward habitual sin. It is as if the psalmist is saying: Consider these matters in private, at a time before bed, rather than in the company of other people. Whereas public discussion can lead to distorted thought and convoluted expression, private contemplation facilitates a clearer understanding of the truth. **And be still, Selah.** The psalmist further enjoins individuals to be still and remain silent. One should not offer opinions or be drawn into discussion about matters unrelated to himself or outside the realm of his understanding. In the specific case at hand, rather than focusing on David and his deficiencies, people would be better off examining their own behavior and turning toward God.

- 6 Offer sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the Lord.**
- 7 Many are saying** in their prayers: **Who will show us any good?** They seek out a source of blessing and goodness. **Bring forth the light of Your countenance upon us, Lord.** They ask God to bring forth His light and shine His countenance upon them. Alternatively, the word *nesa*, can mean “reveal Yourself.” The psalmist goes on to say: I myself do not sit and contemplate the wrongs of others. I truly attempt to cleave to God.
- 8 You put gladness in my heart, more than when their grain and new wine abounded.** You, God, have brought joy to my heart, a joy greater than that felt by others in possession of abundant grain and wine. I am not jealous of them; my inner joy suffices, and even increases in the face of the great success of others.
- 9 I lie down and sleep, at peace together.** Apparently this means that when everything all together is peaceful, I will be able to sleep undisturbed. **For even if You are alone, Lord,** in seeking peace for me while all others are against me, this is sufficient for me, for You will **allow me to dwell in safety.**

PSALM 5

PSALMS 5:1–13

A psalm of prayer directed against those wicked individuals who are unworthy of God’s kindness. The psalmist prays for his own righteousness to become apparent and for him to be granted salvation, as well as those found worthy.

- 5 1 For the chief musician, for nehilot accompaniment, a psalm by David.** Although we do not know the exact meaning of *nehilot*, it is reasonable to assume that it was a musical instrument used to accompany this psalm. Some commentators say that it made a buzzing sound like that of a swarm [*nehil*] of bees. Others believe it refers to an ancient melody known as *El HaNehilot* to which the words of this psalm were sung. Like the preceding psalms, this takes the form of a prayer, though it does not specify the psalmist’s troubles. Instead, the psalmist presents the various ways in which people go astray, reiterating for himself and for others the importance of desiring closeness with God and choosing the right path.
- 2 Give ear to my words, Lord; consider my meditation.** Please listen, God, to prayers of the heart as well as to those uttered by one’s lips.
- 3 Listen to the voice of my cry, my King and my God, for to You I pray.** The emphasis is on “to You”; I pray only to You, not to others.
- 4 In the morning,** each morning, day after day, **Lord, You hear my voice. In the morning,** each morning, **I direct my prayer to You and await Your response.** These are the words of someone who is wholeheartedly set on choosing the right path to follow, someone who knows that the choice of any other path would defy the will of God.

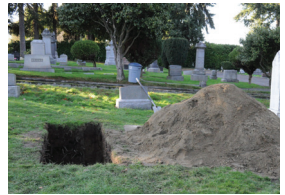
וּשְׁמַע תְּפִלָּתִי: בְּנִי-אִישׁ עַד-מָה כְּבוֹדִי לְכַלְמָה תִּאְהָבוּן רִיק תִּבְקָשׁוּ כְּזָב
 סֵלָה: וּדְעוּ כִּי-הַפְּלֵה יְהוָה חֶסֶד לֹא יִהְיֶה יִשְׁמַע בְּקִרְאֵי אֱלֹוִ: רְגִזוּ וְאֶל-תִּחַטְּטְאוּ
 אַמְרוּ בְּלִבְבְּכֶם עַל-מִשְׁפַּבְּכֶם וּדְמוּ סֵלָה: זָבְחוּ זִבְחֵי-צַדִּיק וּבִטְחוּ אֶל-יְהוָה:
 רַבִּים אִמְרִים מִי-יִרְאֲנוּ טוֹב נִסָּה-עָלֵינוּ אֹד פְּנִיךָ יְהוָה: נְתַתָּה שְׂמֵחָה בְּלִבִּי
 מֵעַת דָּגַגְס וּתִירוּשָׁם רַבּוּ: בְּשָׁלוֹם יַחֲדוּ אֲשַׁכְּבָה וְאִישָׁן כִּי-אַתָּה יְהוָה לְבַדָּד
 לְבַטַח תּוֹשִׁיבֵנִי:

לְמַנְצָה אֶל-הַנְּחִילוֹת מִזְמוֹר לְדוֹד: אִמְרֵי הָאֲזִינָה | יְהוָה בִּינָה הַגִּיגִי: הַקְּשִׁיבָה |
 לְקוֹל שׁוֹעֵי מַלְכֵי וְאֱלֹהֵי כִּי-אֲלִיךָ אֶתְפַּלֵּל: יְהוָה בְּקָר תִּשְׁמַע קוֹלִי בְּקָר אֶעֱרֹךְ-
 לְךָ וְאֶעֱפָה: כִּי | לֹא אֶל-חֶפְזֵי רָשָׁע | אֶתָּה לֹא יִגְרַךְ רַע: לֹא-יִתְיַצְבוּ הוֹלְלִים
 לְנֶגֶד עֵינֶיךָ שְׁנֵאתָ כָּל-פְּעֻלֵי אוֹן: תִּאֲבֹד דְּבָרֵי כָּזָב אִישְׁ-דְּמִים וּמִרְמָה יִתְעַב |
 יְהוָה: וְאֲנִי בְּרַב חֶסֶדְךָ אֲבֹא בֵיתְךָ אֲשַׁתְּחֹוה אֶל-הַיְכָל-קֹדֶשְׁךָ בִּירְאֶתְךָ: יְהוָה |
 נַחֲמֵי בְּצַדִּיקְתְּךָ לְמַעַן שׁוֹרְרֵי הוֹשֵׁר לְפָנֶי דְרָכְךָ: כִּי אֵין בְּפִיָּהוּ נְכוֹנָה קִרְבָּם הַוּוֹת
 קָבַר-פְּתוּחַ גְּרָגְס לְשׁוֹנִם יַחֲלִיקוּן: הָאֲשִׁימִם | אֱלֹהִים יִפְּלוּ מִמַּעַצוֹתֵיהֶם בְּרַב

הַיִּשָּׁר

- 5 **For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness.** God's will is opposed to evil. **No evil dwells with You.**
- 6 **The foolish,** those who act impulsively, lack direction, and go astray, **will not stand before Your eyes.** You do not want them near You, for **You hate all evildoers.**
- 7 **You destroy those who speak falsehood; the Lord abhors a man of bloodshed and deceit.**
- 8 **But as for me, through Your abundant kindness, I will enter Your House.** The psalmist knows fully that he is not perfect. What matters is that he is trying to choose the right path. The fact that he is allowed to enter God's House is an expression of God's kindness toward him. **I will bow to Your Holy Temple in reverence to You.**
- 9 **Lead me, Lord, in Your righteousness.** Place me on the right path, guide me in Your righteous ways, so that I will be able to choose the appropriate way to stand **against my foes.** When surrounded by enemies, a person does not always have the ability to know how to act. It is precisely then that he needs guidance in how to remain on the proper path. **Straighten**

- Your path before me** so that I will be able to walk easily in the path of righteousness.
- 10 **There is no truth in what they say.** In contrast with the divine path mentioned in the previous verse, the path of the enemies is marked by deceit. **Their inner being is misfortune.** All that is found within them is the disaster and trouble that they plot for others. **Their throat is an open grave.** Their mouths are likened to open tombs: They exude an inner decay; moreover, they entice and seduce others to fall within. **They deceive with their tongue,** frequently making use of deceptive accusations rather than honest argumentation.
- 11 **Condemn them, God.** Judge them as they deserve to be judged, and find them guilty. **Let them fall by their own devices.** Alternatively, let them fall away from their schemes and



"Open grave"

conspiracies. **Cast them out for their many transgressions, for they have rebelled against You** and are consequently deserving of punishment. *Pesha*, translated here as “transgression,” indicates a sin committed deliberately.

- 12 The psalmist concludes on a more positive note: **But let all who put their trust in You rejoice; let them sing for joy forever, and You will shelter them. Those who love Your name will exult in You.**
- 13 **For it is You who blesses the righteous man, Lord, surrounding him with favor,^d like a large shield [tzina]** that covers the entire body like a suit of armor. This is how God loves and is close to the righteous.

PSALM 6

PSALMS 6:1–11

A psalm of entreaty by a man who is both ill and persecuted by his enemies, crying out to God in his suffering and asking that God have mercy on him and heed his supplications.

- 6 1 **For the chief musician on stringed instruments, on the eight-stringed harp,^b a psalm by David.**

- 2 **Lord, rebuke me not in Your anger^d nor chasten me in Your displeasure.** The word *tokhilheni* refers to both rebuke and physical punishment. The psalmist entreats God: Do not rebuke me by means of physical punishment; pain can sometimes be unbearable.



African lyre with eight strings

- 3 **Be gracious to me, Lord, for I am miserable; heal me, Lord, for my bones are frightened.** The psalmist bases his request not on his own good deeds but rather on his inability to bear the intensity of the pain. The phrase “my bones are frightened” is almost certainly a poetic expression depicting fear and pain that have penetrated to the core.
- 4 **For I am in great terror.** More than just experiencing pain, the psalmist also fears that he will never recover from his illness, that he will die. He asks of God: **And You, Lord, how long will You leave me in this dire and hopeless situation? When will I be healed?**
- 5 **Return, Lord.** Pain and suffering can be understood as signs that one has been abandoned by God. This is the reason the psalmist beseeches God to return to him. **Rescue my soul.** Rescue me from this state of oppression. **Save me for the sake of Your kindness.** The rationale behind this request, “for the sake of Your kindness,” appears frequently in the book of Psalms.
- 6 **For in death, there is no memory of You; in the grave, who**



Relief depicting Assyrian archers behind a shield, Central Palace, Nimrud, 728 BCE

can give You thanks? The psalmist argues that it is not in God’s interest to kill him, as he is capable of acknowledging and thanking God only while he is alive.

- 7 **I am depleted by my groaning.** Excessive groaning from pain can further sap the strength of a sick person. Alternatively, his pain is so great that it is difficult even to groan. **Every night I cause my bed to swim.** Because of all his weeping at night, his bed has practically become a pool of water. **I melt my couch with my tears.** I weep so profusely that my tears seem to dissolve my bed.
- 8 The psalmist’s illness is not just his own private matter; it also arouses and encourages his enemies. He suffers both from the pain of the illness and from the awareness that his enemies are rejoicing in his misery, hoping daily for his demise. **My eye is weakened by anger, pulled out because of all my foes.** When I think of my adversaries celebrating my misfortune, I feel as if my eyes are falling out of their sockets. My vision has been weakened and clouded by grief. The foes in this psalm are not necessarily mortal flesh and blood; such imagery is rather an expression of the emotional state of a person who is desperately ill. He may feel that many different forces of evil are gathering against him, rejoicing in his misfortune. But when he recovers, all these dark feelings disappear. The concluding verses indicate the psalmist’s abrupt shift in mood:
- 9 **Leave me, all you evildoers, for the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping** and has healed me.
- 10 **The Lord has heard my plea; the Lord will accept my prayer.** Once He accepts my prayer, I am able to recover.
- 11 **My enemies will be greatly ashamed and frightened; they will retreat, immediately be put to shame.** And once I recover, my enemies will disappear; they will even feel ashamed that they had been lying in wait for me.

פִּשְׁעֵיהֶם הִדְיָחוּ בִּי מֵרֹדֶף בְּךָ: וַיִּשְׁמְחוּ כָּל־חֹסֵי בְּךָ לְעוֹלָם יִרְגְּנוּ וְתָסַךְ עָלֵינוּ
 וַיַּעֲלֵצוּ בְּךָ אֱהָבֵי שְׁמֶךָ: כִּי־אֲתָהּ תִּבְרַךְ צְדִיק יְהוָה כִּצְנֹה רְצוֹן תַּעֲטֹרְנוּ:
 לְמַנְצֵחַ בְּנִגִּינוֹת עַל־הַשְּׁמִינִית מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד: יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי בָּאֶפְרַיִם תִּזְכְּרֵנִי וְאֶל־
 בְּחַמְתְּךָ תִּיִסְרֵנִי: חַנּוּנֵי יְהוָה כִּי אֲמַלֵּל אֲנִי רַפְּאֵי יְהוָה כִּי נִבְהָלוּ עַצְמֵי: וּנְפֹשֵׁי
 נִבְהָלָה מְאֹד וְאֲתָּה יְהוָה עַד־מָתַי: שׁוּבָה יְהוָה חֲלִצֵה נַפְשִׁי הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי לְמַעַן
 חֲסֹדְךָ: כִּי אֵין בַּמּוֹת זְכָרְךָ בְּשֵׂאוֹל מִי יוֹדֵה־לְךָ: יַגִּיעֵתִי וּבְאַנְחֹתַי אֲשַׁחֶה בְּכָל־
 לַיְלָה מִטָּתִי בְּדַמְעֹתַי עֲרֹשִׁי אֲמַסֶּה: עֲשֵׂשָׁה מִכַּעַס עֵינַי עֲתָקָה בְּכָל־צוּרָי:
 סוּרוּ מִמֶּנִּי כָּל־פְּעֻלֵי אֹן כִּי־שָׁמַע יְהוָה קוֹל בְּכֵי: שָׁמַע יְהוָה תַּחֲנֻנֹתַי יְהוָה
 תִּפְלֹתַי יִקַּח: יִבְשׁוּ וַיִּבְהָלוּ מְאֹד כָּל־אֵיבֵי יֹשְׁבוּ יִבְשׁוּ רַגַע:
 שִׁגְיוֹן לְדָוִד אֲשֶׁר־שָׂר לַיהוָה עַל־דְּבַר־כּוֹשׁ בֶּן־יְמִינֵי: יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי בְּךָ חֲסִיתִי

PSALM 7

PSALMS 7:1–18

A psalm that offers the prayer of an individual beset by enemies and falsely accused of wrongdoing, who asks God to acknowledge his righteousness and requite his foes.

7 1 A meditation^D by David. A song that he sang to the Lord concerning the words of Kush the Benjamite. There is no definitive identification for Kush the Benjamite. Some of the Sages suggest that it was another name for King Saul, who was from the tribe of Benjamin. A simpler explanation is that Kush

was an ordinary Benjamite who spoke ill of David, possibly accusing him of being responsible for a military setback or of not fighting valiantly enough as a soldier in Saul’s army.

2 Lord, I put my faith in You. Deliver me from all my pursuers and rescue me,

BACKGROUND

6:1 | **The eight-stringed harp [sheminit]:** The psalms were accompanied by various stringed instruments that differed according to their number of strings. Ancient drawings and reliefs display instruments varying from three to fourteen strings. *Sheminit*, from *shemoneh*, meaning “eight,” alludes to eight strings, or perhaps to the stringed instrument called *sammu* in Akkadian (see also 92:4). Other commentators claim that the phrase *al hasheminit*, literally, “on the eighth,” is an instruction for this particular psalm to be sung to the last of the eight melodies typically played on the instrument.

DISCUSSION

5:13 | **Surrounding him with favor [ratzon]:** The noun *ratzon* can mean “desire,” or “wish,” but it also indicates the fulfillment of the desire, the granting of goodness and satisfaction. The righteous are engulfed in God’s love and in His willingness to hear and gratify their desires.

6:2 | **Rebuke me not in Your anger:** This psalm expresses the prayer of a man who is ill with a serious malady and does not know if he will ever recover from it. It ends with words of thanks, apparently because the prayer has been answered and he has been healed. The psalm makes mention of foes and evildoers, but this is not necessarily to be understood as referring to

physical enemies. Rather, it is an expression of a sick person’s feeling that various evil powers have aligned against him and are glad to see him suffer. When he recovers, these dark shadows disappear.

7:1 | **Meditation [shigayon]:** The simple explanation of this word appears to be that it is the name of a type of song or the name of a particular melody (see Rashi and Ibn Ezra; Habakkuk 3:1). However, some relate it to the word “mistake” [*shegi’a*] or “inadvertent act” [*shegaga*], meaning that this is a psalm of remorse for a mistake that David had made. The root of the word, *shin-gimmel-heh*, is sometimes used in the sense of “to think” or “to contemplate.”

- 3 lest he, my enemy, tear me like a lion, rending me in pieces, while there is no one to be my savior.** The psalmist now addresses the complaint that had been directed against him:
- 4 Lord, my God, if I have done this,** if I have committed the misdeeds of which my enemies accuse me, **if my hands have done any wrong,**
- 5 if I have repaid my friend with evil,** referring to someone who had once paid him a kind act, as *sholmi*, “my friend,” is linguistically similar to *shalem*, “to pay,” **or despoiled my enemy without cause,**
- 6 then let the enemy pursue me and overtake me; let my life be trampled on the ground and my soul to the dust, Selah.** The word *kavod*, which usually means “honor,” can also connote “being” or “soul.” Hence the translation here and elsewhere of *kevodi* as “my life,” “my being,” or “my soul.” Nevertheless, despite the psalmist’s statement about being overtaken by the enemy and trampled to the ground, he continues:
- 7 Arise, Lord, in Your anger.** It is fitting for You as well to be angered by the evil being done to me. **Lift Yourself up** and display Your power **against the wrath of my enemies. Awaken for me the judgment You commanded** concerning me.
- 8 A congregation of nations will surround You, and with it return on high.** This is an image of God surrounded by an honor guard or entourage of the nations, all of whom have come to thank Him and escort Him to heaven, His holy abode on high.
- 9 The Lord will be the Judge of the peoples.** When this time arrives, when God reveals Himself in judgment, I can request of Him as well to **judge me, Lord, as befits my righteousness and as befits my innocence.**
- 10** At that time **let the evil of the wicked come to an end, but give strength to the righteous one.** God has no need to examine external testimony in order to execute justice, **for men’s hearts and minds are probed by the God of righteousness.** *Kelayot*, translated here as “minds,” literally means “kidneys,” which are considered the seat of a person’s thoughts.
- 11 God, the Savior of the upright of heart, is my shield.**
- 12 God is a righteous Judge.** Because God is just, He exonerates the righteous. **And** at the same time, **the Almighty also shows His wrath** against the evildoers **every day**
- 13 if he,** the evildoer, **does not repent** of his threats and evil plans against the righteous, **if he persists and sharpens his sword and pulls back his bow in readiness.**
- 14 But** his plans will fail anyway, and the final result will be his own destruction; in the end, **he prepares deadly weapons against himself.** The very weapons the wicked aim at the righteous will instead target and destroy the wicked themselves. **His arrows are used against those who pursue.** The arrows directed against the righteous will instead be used against their pursuers.
- 15 Behold how he conceives evil, is pregnant with iniquity, and gives birth to deceit.**^d Whatever the wicked person creates and produces, the plans are undertaken in *aven*, translated here as “evil” but also meaning “nothingness,” and in *amal*, translated as “iniquity” but also connoting toiling in vain. The final result is nothing but an empty lie.
- 16 He,** the evildoer, **has dug a hole deep in the earth and has fallen into the pit he made.** Ultimately, the evil person falls into the hole that he dug for others.
- 17 His wrongdoing will return to punish him; his violent behavior will come down on his head.** His own sins and evil deeds bring him trouble, suffering, and punitive consequences. He suffers even without the external infliction of punishment; he is essentially punished by his own wrongful deeds.
- 18** In conclusion: **I praise the Lord for His righteousness; I sing to the name of the Lord Most High.**

PSALM 8

A psalm that begins as a hymn of praise to God but is also an introspective poem that muses about man’s place in the world.

PSALMS 8:1–10

- 8 1 For the chief musician on the gittit,**^b probably a musical instrument named after Gat, the city in which it may have been invented or where it was commonly played; **a psalm by David.** The psalm begins and ends with a proclamation of praise:
- 2 Lord, our Master, how mighty is Your name throughout the world! You set Your glory in the heavens.** This verse can be understood to be an observation that God’s name is glorified in heaven. Others explain it to mean: It would be befitting for You to bestow Your glory exclusively on the heavens.
- 3 Out of the mouths of small children and suckling babes You founded strength.**^d Their unique prayers are directed **against Your foes, in order to stop the enemy and the avenger.** Sung with childish sincerity, these songs are a positive force in the war

against God’s enemies. They represent a fundamental, basic strength that cannot be extinguished by adversaries, and they are a buffer against the waves of hatred that recur in every generation.

- 4 When I see Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars You have made.** I am thrilled by the enormity of Your all-encompassing greatness. But



“Out of the mouths of small children and suckling babes You founded strength.” Children and their teacher, Samarkand, 1909

הוֹשִׁיעַנִי מִכָּל־דָּדַי וְהַצִּילֵנִי: פֶּן־יִטְרֹף בְּאֲרִיֶּה נַפְשִׁי פְּדוּק וְאִין מִצִּיל: יְהוָה
 אֱלֹהֵי אִם־עֲשִׂיתִי זֹאת אִם־יִשְׁעוּל בְּכַפֵּי: אִם־גַּמְלֹתַי שׁוֹלְמֵי רַע וְאֶחְלָצָה
 צוֹרְרֵי רִיקָם: יִרְדֹּף אוֹיֵב וְנַפְשִׁי וַיִּשָּׂג וַיִּרְמֹס לָאָרֶץ חַיִּי וּכְבוֹדִי וְלַעֲפָר יִשְׁכַּן
 סֵלָה: קוֹמָה יְהוָה וְבִאֲפֹךְ הַנְּשָׂא בְּעִבְרוֹת צוֹרְרֵי וְעוֹדָה אֵלַי מִשֹּׁפֵט צוֹיֹת: וְעֵדֶת
 לְאֻמִּים תִּסּוּבְבֶךְ וְעָלֶיךָ לְמָרוֹם שׁוּבָה: יְהוָה יִדִּין עַמִּים שֹׁפְטֵנִי יְהוָה כְּצַדִּיקִי
 וּבְתַמֵּי עָלָי: יִגְמֹרְנָא רַע וְרִשְׁעִים וְתִכְוֹנֶן צַדִּיק וּבַחֲן לְבוֹת וְכִלְיוֹת אֱלֹהִים
 צַדִּיק: מִגְּנֵי עַל־אֱלֹהִים מוֹשִׁיעַ יִשְׂרָאֵל: אֱלֹהִים שׁוֹפֵט צַדִּיק וְאֵל זֶעַם בְּכָל־
 יוֹם: אִם־לֹא יִשׁוּב חֲרָבוֹ יִלְטוּשׁ קִשְׁתּוֹ דָּרֹךְ וַיִּכּוֹנְנָה: וְלוֹ הִכִּין כְּלֵי־מוֹת חֲצִצּוֹ
 לְדִלְקִים יַפְעֹל: הִנֵּה יַחְבֵּל־אוֹן וְהָרָה עֵמָל וַיִּלְדֵּ שָׂקָר: בּוֹר כְּרָה וַיַּחֲפְרֵהוּ וַיִּפֹּל
 בְּשַׁחַת יַפְעֹל: יִשׁוּב עֵמָלוֹ בְּרֵאשׁוֹ וְעַל קִדְקָדּוֹ חֲמָסוֹ יִרַד: אוֹדָה יְהוָה כְּצַדִּיקוֹ
 וְאַזְמְרָה שֵׁם־יְהוָה עֲלִיוֹן:

לְמַנְצַח עַל־הַגְּתִית מְזֻמּוֹר לְדוֹד: יְהוָה אֲדִנְנוּ מִה־אֲדִיר שִׁמְךָ בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ
 אֲשֶׁר־תִּנְהַ הוֹדֶךְ עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם: מִפִּי עוֹלָלִים וְיִנְקִים יִסְדֹּת עֵז לְמַעַן צוֹרְרֶיךָ
 לְהַשְׁבִּית אוֹיֵב וּמִתְנַקֵּם: כִּי־אֲרָאָה שִׁמְךָ מַעֲשֵׂה אֶצְבְּעֹתֶיךָ יָרַח וְכּוֹכָבִים אֲשֶׁר

BACKGROUND

8:1 | **Gittit:** A *gittit* is probably similar to a lyre [*nevel*]. The ancient lyre was arched in shape; its lower part was thick, and the strings were stretched from there to the upper, thinner section. Thus it was similar in appearance to a wine flask, which also had a thick base and a long neck, and which is also called *nevel* in the Bible (I Samuel 10:3, Jeremiah 13:12 and elsewhere). A *gat* is a winepress, and the derivative term *gittit* may have been used, by extension, as a name for the flask from which wine was drunk, and by further extension, to the musical instrument that resembled it in shape or that was played as an accompaniment to the drinking of wine or the trampling of grapes at the winepress.

DISCUSSION

7:15 | **He conceives evil, is pregnant with iniquity, and gives birth to deceit:** The schemes of the wicked that ultimately turn into actions are compared to stages in the development of a person: conception, pregnancy, and birth. The evil person sows words of evil, which develop into frustration and end with falsehood and failure (see also notes on Isaiah 59:4; Rambam, *Guide of the Perplexed* 1:7).

8:3 | **Out of the mouths of small children and suckling babes, You founded**

strength: Praises and prayers offered to God are uttered not only by the lips of select wise men or elders; there is a special kind of divine praise that issues from the mouths of small children. Their words of praise, uttered in complete innocence, constitute the greatest praise of God, because they are devoid of guile or pretense. Their prayers do not suffer from the artificiality that is often a hallmark of “professional” religious poetry.

the sight of Your miraculous creations also raises doubts and uncertainty in my mind:

5 What is a mortal that You remember him, a man that You take him into account?

After seeing the sun, moon, and stars, after contemplating enormous and distant worlds, one might conclude

that man is an inconsequential and pitiful creation, fundamentally unworthy of attention from God above. Yet somehow, despite man's insignificance, You, God, have chosen to bestow on him manifold gifts.

6 For You have made him a little less than divine.^D You have created him "in the image of God."¹ Consequently, God's spirit resides within man. An alternative interpretation of "divine" in this verse is that it refers to God's angels. You have bestowed upon man unique powers, making him only slightly inferior to the divine angels and **crowning him with honor and glory.**

7 In addition to creating man to be essentially superior to other beings, as is written in the book of Genesis, You have made him ruler over the works of Your hands, giving him permission and power to rule over Your handiwork. You placed all things at his feet. You charged him with reigning over all that exists,



"Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars You have made"

8 all sheep and cattle. Domestic animals have been given over to man, and he also has dominion over **all the wild animals of the field,**

9 and over the birds of the air and the fish of the sea, whatever crosses the sea's deep waters. Man should thank God for giving him power over all the creatures of the land, sea, and sky. This vast power should be humbling. One might wonder: Is man truly worthy of it? This question can be instructive, helping one to realize that although man is in charge, his power stems from God, who, in His kindness, relegated it to him. When man considers his own insignificance vis-à-vis the immensity of the power placed in his hands, he should acknowledge that it is all a God-given gift. Therefore, he should say again, as in the opening verse of the psalm:



"Birds of the air"



"Fish of the sea, whatever crosses the sea's deep waters"

10 Lord, our Master, how mighty is Your name throughout the world!

PSALM 9

PSALMS 9:1–21

A psalm of thanksgiving by one who has been rescued from his enemies and led to victory. The psalmist prays that God will continue to be at his side against others who wage war against him.

9 1 For the chief musician, on the death of Laben,^D a psalm by David. Written mostly in first-person singular, this psalm is intended to be studied and taught. To facilitate memorization, this Hebrew text, like many others, is arranged in an alphabetical acrostic. The alphabet is not complete, however, and there

are non-alphabetical verses inserted between consecutive letters.

2 I will thank You, Lord, with all my heart. I will tell of all Your wonders.

DISCUSSION

8:5–6 | **What is a mortal that You remember him ...For You have made him a little less than divine:** The psalmist moderates his statement of man's immense capabilities, by a sense of humility. He asks whether man is in fact deserving of all the power that has been granted to him. There is a lesson here for everyone: One must be aware of his great potential, but at the same time

be grateful to God for having supplied him with dominion over nature.

9:1 | **On the death of Laben:** Since this psalm is generally one of thanksgiving to God and does not appear to be a lament about the loss of a son, certainly not one of David's own children, most commentators agree that the word *laben*, literally translated as "for the son," does not have that meaning here. Some commentators argue that

Laben could be the name of an enemy king or commander unknown to us from other sources. Others speculate that *al mut Laben*, translated here as "on the death of Laben," actually has nothing to do with death, but rather was the name of a well-known song, and that this psalm was meant to be sung to its melody (see Rashi; Ibn Ezra; Malbim).

פִּוֹנְנָתָהּ: מִה־אֲנֹשׁ כִּי־תִזְכְּרֵנוּ וּבֶן־אָדָם כִּי תִפְקֹדֵנוּ: וּתְחַסְרָהוּ מֵעַט מֵאֱלֹהִים
 וְכְבוֹד וְהַדָּר תִּעֲטֹרָהוּ: תִּמְשִׁילֶהוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂי יַדְיךָ כֹּל שֶׁתָּה תַחַת־דְּגָלָיו: צִנְה
 וְאַל־פִּים כָּל־סוֹרְרִים וְגַם בְּהַמּוֹת שָׂדֵי: צַפּוֹר שָׁמַיִם וְדַגֵּי הַיָּם עֲבֹר אַרְחוֹת יַמִּים: יִהְיֶה
 אֲדֹנֵינוּ מִה־אֲדִיר שִׁמְךָ בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ:
 לְמַנְצֵחַ עַל־מוֹת לַיָּם מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד: אֹדָה יְהוָה בְּכָל־לֵבִי אֲסַפְּדָה כָּל־נַפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ:
 אֲשַׁמְחָה וְאֶעֱלֶצֶה בְּךָ אֲזַמְרָה שִׁמְךָ עַל־יוֹן: בְּשׁוּב־אֹיְבֵי אַחֲוֹר יִבְשְׁלוּ וְיִאֲבֹדוּ
 מִפְּנֶיךָ: כִּי־עֲשִׂיתָ מִשְׁפָּטִי וְדִינִי יִשְׁבֹּת לְכִפָּא שׁוֹפֵט צַדִּיק: גְּעַרְתָּ גּוֹיִם אֲבֹדָתָ
 רָשָׁע שָׁמַם מְחִיתָ לְעוֹלָם וְעַד: הָאֹיֵב וְתָמוּ חֲרָבוֹת לְנֶצַח וְעָרִים נִתְּשָׁת אֲבָד
 זְכָרֵם הֵמָּה: וְיִהְיֶה לְעוֹלָם יֹשֵׁב בּוֹנֵן לְמִשְׁפַּט כְּסֵאוֹ: וְהוּא יִשְׁפֹּט־תֵּבֵל בְּצַדִּיק
 יִדִּין לְאֻמִּים בְּמִישְׁדִּים: וְיִהְיֶה מִשְׁגֵּב לְדָךְ מִשְׁגֵּב לְעֵתוֹת בְּצָרָה: וּיְבַטְחוּ
 בְּךָ יוֹדְעֵי שִׁמְךָ כִּי לֹא־עֲזַבְתָּ דֹרְשֶׁיךָ יְהוָה: זָמְרוּ לִיהוָה יֹשֵׁב צִיּוֹן הִגִּידוּ בְּעַמִּים
 עֲלִילוֹתָיו: כִּי־דָדַשׁ דַּמִּים אֹתָם זָכַר לֹא־שָׁכַח צַעֲקַת עַנְיִים: חֲנַנְנִי יְהוָה רַאֵה עַנְיִים

- 3 I will be glad and delight in You. I will sing for Your name, Most High.
- 4 When my enemies are turned back, they stumble and perish before You.
- 5 This will occur, for You have performed my judgment and my verdict. When the time came for me to be judged by You, I knew that You would find my enemies guilty. You sat on Your throne of justice, Judge of righteousness.
- 6 You rebuked the nations, and since God's rebuke manifests itself in the physical world of man, the outcome is that these evil nations are struck down. You obliterated the wicked to such an extent that You blotted out their name forever and ever.
- 7 The enemy is no more, and all that is left of their territory lies in eternal ruin. You have destroyed their cities. The word *natashta* is translated here as "You have destroyed," similar to the word *natatzta*, "You have shattered." The memory of them is lost. Not only have the cities fallen in conquest, but their memory has been obliterated as well.
- 8 But in contrast to the aforementioned enemies whose end is described here, the Lord will endure forever. He has prepared His throne for judgment,

- 9 and He will judge the world in righteousness. He will administer fair judgment to the nations.
- 10 The Lord is a fortress for the oppressed, a fortress in times of trouble.
- 11 And those who know Your name, who believe in You and recognize You, and are thus close to You, place their trust in You, for You, Lord, do not forsake those who seek You.
- 12 Sing to the Lord a song of thanksgiving, dweller in Zion; make His deeds known among the peoples. Tell all the nations how He saved you from danger and from the attacks of your enemies.
- 13 For He avenges blood. The word *doresh*, translated here as "avenges," literally means "searches." God investigates, as it were, incidents of bloodshed, and He remembers them, the righteous who have been unjustly slain. He does not forget the cries of the humble, those who have conducted themselves with righteousness and humility.
- 14 Be gracious to me, Lord; see my deprivation, inflicted by my enemies. You lift me up from the gates of death,

- 15 **so I might speak Your praise** when I experience Your salvation, **at the gates of the daughter of Zion.** The gates of a city were the public spaces, akin to a central plaza. **I rejoice in Your salvation** and tell others about it.
- 16 In contrast to my joy, **the nations have sunk into the pit they made, their feet trapped in the nets they hid.** The evil nations will fall into the very pits they dug; their feet will be caught in the traps they set for others.
- 17 **The Lord is known through the judgments He executes** throughout the world. **The evildoer is snared in the work of his own hands. Reflect upon this, Selah.** The word *higgayon*, translated here as “reflect upon this,” can mean: This topic deserves consideration; think about it and discuss it with others.
- 18 **The wicked will return to,** or go in the direction of, **the netherworld.** Alternatively, one might say that in a certain sense, evildoers are creatures emanating from the netherworld who are forced to return to their origin. The same may be said of **all nations who have no memory of God.**

PSALM 10 A psalm of prayer that rails against the rule of the wicked.

PSALMS 10:1–18

- 10** **1 Why do You stand far off, Lord,** as if You were not here among us? **Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?**
- 2nd day of month* **2 The wicked in their pride fervently pursue the afflicted, who are caught in the schemes they plot.**
- 3 For the wicked one sings praises about his heart’s desire.** If an evil person decides for some reason to praise God, it is only about the attainment of his own desires. **And the evil man [botze’a] blesses and reviles the Lord.** When that evil person blesses God, his blessing is so insincere that it is actually an affront to Him. An alternative translation of *botze’a* is “one who breaks bread.” The meaning of this phrase, then, would be that an immoral person who steals bread from another and now sits down to eat it is committing a sacrilege by uttering a blessing over the bread.
- 4 The wicked one, with his proud countenance,** or, alternatively, in his great wrath, **does not seek God.** The greater his pride or wrath, the less likely he is to seek and find God. **God is not in his thoughts.** A wicked person does not take God into consideration when he plots to do evil.
- 5 His ways always prosper; Your judgments are on high, out of his sight.** It seems, especially to the evil people themselves, that Your judgments “on high” cannot affect them, for they seem to remain successful no matter what they do. **As for his foes, he blows at them.** With great ease, as if with a puff of air, the evil people blow away their rivals.
- 6 He said in his heart: I will not stumble.** In his heart, the evil person believes himself to be secure, noting: I persist, I am

- 19 For the needy will not always be forgotten and the hopes of the poor forever lost.** Even if the needy appear to be abandoned, hope is not lost; God ultimately turns toward them.
- 20 Arise, Lord.** Stir Yourself to action and reveal Yourself through justice. **Let man not be arrogant.** The wicked will not prevail once God’s presence is revealed in the world; no one then will dare to be insolent. **Let the nations be judged in Your sight.**
- 21 Place fear in them, Lord.** While this spelling of *mora*, with a *heh*, means “edict,” some interpret the word in the sense of *mora* with an *alef*, meaning “fear.” Thus, the verse can either mean issue an edict against them or instill fear in them. Either way, this is **so that nations know they are but mortal men, Selah.** The nations must acknowledge that they are far from invincible; being human, they are *enosh*, “mortal,” and both their power and their very lives will inevitably come to an end. The use of the word is significant in this context, as it evokes the similarly spelled word *anush*, someone who is critically ill.

stable; nothing can topple me. **Throughout generations I will never be in adversity.** He believes he can continue to live and do as he pleases, without anything untoward ever happening to him.

- 7 His mouth is full of curses and deceit and intrigue; beneath his tongue are mischief and wickedness.**
- 8 The following is the wicked person’s mode of action: He lies in wait in courtyards; in hidden places he kills the innocent. He fixes his eyes on the downtrodden.** He lies in ambush in unguarded places, on the prowl for his victims.
- 9 He lurks in a hiding place like a lion in its lair.** He lies in wait like a lion in the brambles, stalking its prey. **He lurks to catch the poor man; he catches the poor man and draws him into his net.** He is deceptive, entrapping the vulnerable person and setting obstacles in his path.
- 10 He crushes him, forces him to a crouch, and the downtrodden are toppled by his might.** He uses his might to crush and oppress the unfortunate, bringing them down.
- 11 He says to himself: The Almighty has forgotten** about our existence. **He has hidden His face; He will never see.** Since God remains mostly unrevealed in His world, the wicked think



“He lurks in a hiding place like a lion in its lair; he lurks to catch”

עֲנִי מִשְׁנָאֵי מְרוֹמְמֵי מִשְׁעֲרֵי־מוֹת: לְמַעַן אֶסְפְּרָה כָּל־תְּהַלְלֶיךָ בְּשִׁעְרֵי בַת־
 צִיּוֹן אֲגִילָה בִישׁוּעֶתְךָ: טָבְעוּ גוֹיִם בְּשַׁחַת עֲשׂוּ בְּרַשְׁתָּ־זוֹ טָמְנוּ נִלְכְּדָה רַגְלָם:
 נוֹדַע | יְהוָה מִשְׁפֹּט עֲשָׂה בַפֶּעַל כַּפּוֹ נוֹקֵשׁ רַשָּׁע הַגִּיזוֹן סָלָה: יִשׁוּבוּ רְשָׁעִים
 לְשִׂאוֹלָה כָּל־גּוֹיִם שְׂכַחֵי אֱלֹהִים: כִּי לֹא לִנְצַח יִשְׁכַּח אַבְיֹן תִּקְוַת עֲנוּיִם תֵּאבֹד
 לְעַד: קוֹמָה יְהוָה אֶל־יַעֲזוּ אֲנוּשׁ יִשְׁפֹּטוּ גּוֹיִם עַל־פְּנֵיךָ: שִׁיתָה יְהוָה | מוֹדָה לָהֶם
 יִדְעוּ גוֹיִם אֲנוּשׁ הֵמָּה סָלָה:
 לְמָה יְהוָה תַעֲמֹד בְּרַחֵק תִּעְלִים לְעֵתוֹת בַּעֲרָה: בְּגֹאוֹת רַשָּׁע יִדְלַק עָנִי וַתִּפְשְׁוּ |
 בְּמִזְמוֹת זֹו חֲשָׁבוּ: כִּי־הִלֵּל רַשָּׁע עַל־תְּאוֹת נַפְשׁוֹ וּבִצֵּעַ בִּירֵךְ נֶאֱמָן | יְהוָה: רַשָּׁע
 כְּגִבָּה אָפוּ בְלִי־יָדָשׁ אֵין אֱלֹהִים כָּל־מִזְמוֹתָיו: יִחִילוּ דַרְכּוֹ | בְּכָל־עֵת מְרוֹם
 מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ מִנְּגִדוֹ כָּל־צוֹרְדָיו יִפִּיחַ בָּהֶם: אָמַר בְּלִבּוֹ כָּל־אֲמוּט לְדָר וְדָר אֲשֶׁר
 לֹא־בָרַע: אֱלֹהֵי | פִּיהוּ מִלֵּא וּמִרְמוֹת וַתֵּךְ תַּחַת לְשׁוֹנוֹ עֲמַל וְאוֹן: יֵשֵׁב | בְּמֵאֲרֵב
 חֲצִרִים בְּמִסְתָּרִים יִהְרֹג נְקִי עֵינָיו לְחִלְכָה יַצְפְּנוּ: יֵאֲרֵב בְּמִסְתָּר | כְּאֲרִיָּה בַסֶּלֶה
 יֵאֲרֵב לַחֲטוֹף עָנִי יַחֲטֹף עָנִי בְּמִשְׁכּוֹ בְּרַשְׁתּוֹ: וּדְכָה יִשָּׁח וְנִפְלַ בְּעֲצוּמָיו חֲלֻכָאִים:
 אָמַר בְּלִבּוֹ שְׂכַח אֵל הַסֹּתִיר פָּנָיו בְּלִדְרָאָה לִנְצַח: קוֹמָה יְהוָה אֵל נִשְׂא יַדְךָ
 אֶל־תִּשְׁפַח עֲנוּיִם: עַל־מָה | נֶאֱמָן רַשָּׁע | אֱלֹהִים אָמַר בְּלִבּוֹ לֹא תִדְרָשׁ: רֵאֲתָה
 כִּי־אֲתָה | עֲמַל וְכַעַס | תִּבְיֹט לַתַּת בְּיַדְךָ עֲלֶיךָ יַעֲזֹב חֲלֻכָה יָתוֹם אֲתָה | הֵיִיתָ
 עוֹזֵר: שִׁבֵר זְרוּעַ רַשָּׁע וְזַע רַשָּׁע וְזַע תִּדְרוֹשׁ־דְּשָׁעוּ בְּלִתְמַצָּא: יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ עוֹלָם וְעַד

ב לחודש

ידבה
חל כאים

עננים

- they can do as they please. They are convinced that God does not see them.
- 12 Here begins the psalmist's prayer: **Arise, Lord God, raise Your hand, reveal Your strength. Do not forget the humble.**
 - 13 **Why has the wicked man mocked God, saying to himself of God: You will not seek?** The wicked man believes that God is oblivious, that He has no interest in mankind.
 - 14 But the truth is that **You have seen it; You have beheld mischief and anger.** You do look and You do see all the sins and the fury of the world, **and You gave it the power to be.** You

- Yourself are the one who makes it possible for evil to flourish in the world. **The poor rely on You; You have always helped the orphan.** Yet now the world appears to be completely abandoned by You. Because of this, the psalmist beseeches God:
- 15 **Break the arm of the wicked one and evildoer; purge his wickedness until You can find none.** Eradicate evil to such an extent that if You look for it, You will not find it.
 - 16 **The Lord is King forever and ever; nations have perished from His land.** God has banished the wicked and immoral nations from His land.