

**PSALMS OF ASCENT:**  
A textual and musical study of  
Psalms 121, 122, 126, 130 and 134

**Rachel Ellen Berney**

**Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
Requirements for Cantorial Investiture**

**Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
School of Sacred Music  
New York, New York**

**Spring 2009  
Thesis Advisor: David Sperling**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Chapter

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Annotated Translations of Psalms.....	4
3. Translation of <i>Shir Hama'a lot</i> Superscription.....	13
4. Interpretation of Psalms.....	21
5. Music Analysis of Psalm settings.....	37
6. Conclusion.....	52

### Appendix

1. "I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes" by Hugo Chaim Adler
2. "Samachti B'Omrin Li" by Helen Greenberg
3. "Shir Hama'a lot" by Samuel Adler
4. "Mimaamakim" by Lazar Weiner
5. "Old Jerusalem" by Julius Chajes

### Bibliography

## Acknowledgements

This project is dedicated to my family. Their unwavering support throughout this process helped me to believe in myself. My mother, Jackie Berney, was always there for me and never stopped believing in me even when my project took so long in coming to fruition. I will always be grateful for her encouragement during my years at school and inspiring me to become a cantor in the first place.

Heartfelt thanks to Dr. David Sperling for helping me to finish this project. It meant so much to me that he was able to step in and really make it all come together in the end. I will always be so grateful for the kindness and generosity that he showed me when I needed it the most. Many thanks to Dr. Mark Kligman for overseeing the musical aspects of this thesis. He gave generously of his time, even over a vacation, in guiding me to successfully complete my work. Thanks to Rabbi Andrea Weiss for helping me to complete the necessary task of narrowing the scope of my project.

I would also like to acknowledge the support, understanding and assistance of a wonderful colleague and friend, soon to be rabbi, Joe Murray. I am deeply grateful for all of the time and effort he gave to help me move forward. Finally, I would like to thank Erik Kohlbrenner for his love and support. He was my rock through all of the ups and downs during my years at school.

## 1. Introduction

The Book of Psalms contains 150 psalms that are divided into five books: (1) Psalms 1-41; (2) Psalms 42-72; (3) Psalms 73-89; (4) Psalms 90-106 and (5) Psalms 107-150.

James Limburg writes in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* that according to the Talmud, the five books of the Psalms correspond to the five books of the Torah: “Moses gave Israel the five books, and David gave Israel the five books of the Psalms.” (*Midrash Tehillim* on Psalm 1).<sup>1</sup>

The *Shir Hama'a lot* psalms are a collection of 15 psalms (120-134) in the fifth book. Jacqueline Shuchat-Marx writes in her MSM thesis that “the subdivision in the fifth book focuses strongly on faith, Jerusalem, the cultic practices that evolved into Temple ritual, God’s expectations of humanity according the law and praise.”<sup>2</sup> The focus of the present project is on of these five psalms, Psalms 121, 122, 126, 130 and 134, which seemed to me to merit close investigation. In the following chapters attempt is made to translate and interpret the literal, contextual and contemporary meaning of these five psalms by subjecting them to textual and musical analysis.

The second and fourth chapters contextualize each of the five psalms by means of a close translation and interpretation of the text of each psalm. The second chapter provides an annotated translation of each of the five psalms. For this translation I consulted three types of sources. First, the “well known” translations, including the King James Version (KJV), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), and the old and

---

<sup>1</sup> James Limburg, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* vol. 5, David Noel Freedman, ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 526.

<sup>2</sup> Jacqueline Shuchat-Marx, “Shir ha Ma’a lot” (New York: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1997), 2.

new Jewish Publication Society (JPS/NJPS) translations in order to find a “standard” point of comparison. The second type of source consists of commentaries by Hans Joachim Kraus, Konrad Schaefer, Loren D. Crow and Robert Alter. These commentators offer suggestions about the general context of these psalms as well as specific details of interpretation. Finally, the project makes use of biblical dictionaries including *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* and *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* in order to understand the nuances of the word-choices made by the authors of these five psalms.

The fourth chapter is an interpretation of the psalms according to my own understanding of each of them. This interpretation differs from the translation; while the translation focuses on the exact meaning of each word in the poem, chapter four explores the overall context and themes. The primary resources for the section on interpretation are the modern commentaries referred to in chapter two, and the classical Jewish commentaries found in *Mikraoth Gedoloth* in the edition of Rabbi A.J. Rosenberg<sup>3</sup>.

Scholars disagree about the meaning of the superscription or rubric “Shir Hama’alot.” In chapter three, I explore the various possibilities for understanding the context and meaning of this superscription.

In the fifth chapter of this project, I analyze modern settings of each of the five psalms. The musical settings for these psalms were composed by Hugo Chaim Adler, Helen Greenberg, Samuel Adler, Lazar Weiner and Julius Chajes. Each of these five composers adds another level of understanding to the text of the psalms.

---

<sup>3</sup> Rabbi A.J. Rosenberg *Mikraoth Gedoloth: Psalms A New English Translation*, vol. 3 (New York: The Judaica Press: 2001).

These psalms were of particular interest to me because of their setting in the cultic rites of the ancient biblical temple. According to tradition<sup>4</sup>, these 15 psalms were said to have been sung by the Levites at the Temple as they stood on the 15 steps that ascended from the Israelite courtyard to the women's courtyard. While this use of the *Shir Hama'ot* psalms has not been demonstrated, the idea of singing a psalm as you ascend, physically or spiritually, indicates how text and music can truly come together to lift one's religious experience to a higher level.

---

<sup>4</sup>Amos Hakham, "Introduction to the Songs of Ascents." *The Bible Psalms with the Jerusalem Commentary: Psalms 101-150*, vol. 3. (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 2003), 287.

## 2. Annotated Translations of Psalms

### PSALM 121

שִׁיר לַמַּעֲלוֹת

אֲשִׂא עֵינַי אֶל-הַהָרִים מֵאֵין יִבֹּא עֲזָרִי

עֲזָרִי מֵעַם יְהוָה עֲשֵׂה שְׂמִים וְאָרֶץ

אֶל-יִתְּנֵן לַמְּוֹט רַגְלֶךָ אֶל-יְנוּם שְׁמֶרְךָ

הֲגֵה לֹא יְנוּם וְלֹא יִישָׁן שׁוֹמֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל

יְהוָה שְׁמֶרְךָ יְהוָה צִלְּךָ עַל-יַד יְמִינֶךָ

יִזְמַם הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא יִכְבֶּה וְיִרְחַם בְּלִילָה

יְהוָה יִשְׁמְרֶךָ מִכָּל-רָע יִשְׁמֹר אֶת-נַפְשֶׁךָ

יְהוָה יִשְׁמֹר-צַדִּיק וּבֹאֵף מַעֲבָה וְעַד-עוֹלָם

- 1 A song for ascents  
I lift up my eyes to the mountains<sup>5</sup>  
From where will my help come?
- 2 My help comes from the Lord,

---

<sup>5</sup> הָרִים In many translations, this is translated as “the hills” instead of “the mountains.” Kraus suggests two potential contexts for this word. The first is of a pilgrim is leaving; he is looking towards the path of the dangerous hill country that lies between him and his home. The second context is that of the pilgrim looking to the tops of the hills which house the shrines of other gods; this pilgrim is having a moment of doubt over whether to look for help from these other gods. (Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989], 428-9.) I do not find it plausible that this is a quest for help toward the tops of hills with shrines of other gods. More plausible is Loren D. Crow’s assessment that this psalm does not appear to be a polemic against other gods. (Loren D. Crow, *The Songs of Ascents: Their Place in Israelite History and Religion* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996], 40.) Robert Alter explains that the psalmist is simply fearful of non-specific general dangers and looks up at the mountains surrounding him and wonders who and/or what will help him. (Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* [New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007], 437.)

- Maker of heaven and earth.
- 3 He will not let your foot stumble,<sup>6</sup>  
Your guardian<sup>7</sup> will not slumber.
- 4 Behold, the guardian of Israel  
neither slumbers nor sleeps.
- 5 The Lord is your guardian,  
The Lord is your shade at your right hand.
- 6 By day the sun will not strike you,  
nor the moon by night.<sup>8</sup>
- 7 The Lord will guard you from all harm;  
He will guard your life.<sup>9</sup>
- 8 The Lord will guard your going out and your coming in,<sup>10</sup>  
now and forevermore.

---

<sup>6</sup> אֶל-יָמִינוּ לִמּוֹט רַגְלֶךָ Konrad Schaefer explains that a slipping foot is an idiom indicating general unsteadiness. (see Psalms 38:16 and 94:18) (Konrad Schaefer, *Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narratives and Poetry: Psalms*, ed. David W. Cotter [Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001], 299.) This phrase emphasizes and assures the pilgrim that God will accompany and watch over him every step of his way; he need not feel unsteady at any moment in his journey.

<sup>7</sup> שֹׁמְרֶךָ This term is only found two times in the Tanakh, both in this psalm. Many translations, including the old JPS and the NRSV, render this as “He who keeps/guards you.” However, I chose to translate this as a noun, following the JPS Tanakh (1985) version in order to complete the full thought, and to allow for the flow of the poetic language.

<sup>8</sup> יוֹמֵם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ לֹא יִכְרַח וְיָרֵחַ בַּלַּיְלָה This verse refers to protection from sunstroke which was a real danger in this climate. Being “moonstruck” was synonymous with being possessed by demons and it led to madness. (Alter, 438; Schaefer, 299). Kraus further explains that, in Babylonian times, disastrous conditions such as fever and leprosy were attributed to the moon god. (Kraus, 430).

<sup>9</sup> נַפְשֶׁךָ This word is most commonly translated as in KJV and JPS as “your soul” which is too vague. Better is the new JPS translation, “your life.” The *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* helps further to clarify how this word can be understood and translated. It is important to understand that a person does not have a vital self, but is a vital self. From this understanding, נַפְשֶׁךָ can mean “life”, but it does not denote life in general instead it is specified to mean life instantiated in individuals, animal or human. (Bonn Seebass, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 9, trans. David E. Green [Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998], 511-2.)

<sup>10</sup> צֵאתְךָ וּבֹאֶךָ This translation maintains the parallel poetic language of “your going out and your coming in,” which are found in the old JPS and King James translations. “your going and coming” in the new JPS and “your going and your return” in Crow’s translation. (Crow, 38) does not capture the poetic language.

## PSALM 122

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת לְדָוִד  
שָׂמַחְתִּי בְּאֹמְרִים לִי בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה לֵאמֹר  
עֲמָדוֹת הַיָּם רַגְלֵינוּ בְּשַׁעְרֵיךָ יְרוּשָׁלַם׃  
יְרוּשָׁלַם הַבְּנוּיָה כְּעִיר שֶׁחִבְּרָה לָהּ יַחְדָּו׃  
שָׁמַעַם עָלָיו שְׁבֵטִים שְׁבֵטֵי-יְהוָה עֲדוֹת לְיִשְׂרָאֵל לְהָדוֹת לְשֵׁם יְהוָה׃  
כִּי שָׂמָּה יֹשְׁבוּ כְּסָאוֹת לְמִשְׁפָּט כְּסָאוֹת לְבַיִת דָּוִד׃  
שָׂאוּ שְׁלוֹם יְרוּשָׁלַם יִשְׁלִי אֶהְבִּיךָ׃  
יְהִי-שְׁלוֹם בְּחִילֶךָ שְׁלוֹחַ בְּאַרְמִנוֹתֶיךָ׃  
לְמַעַן אֲחִי וְרַעִי אֲדַבְּרָה לְנֶאֱמָר שְׁלוֹם בְּךָ׃  
לְמַעַן בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֶלְהִינוּ אֶבְקֶשׁה טוֹב לָךְ׃

- 1 A song of ascents for David  
I rejoiced among those who said to me:  
“Let us go to the house of the Lord.”<sup>11</sup>
- 2 Our feet were standing in your gates, O Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup>
- 3 The built up Jerusalem is like a city that is joined fast together,<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה לֵאמֹר The psalm describes the experience of an individual who has decided to go on a pilgrimage with his relatives and friends. Kraus explains that this is a standard formula used to announce the beginning of every pilgrimage. (Kraus, 433). However, this exact phrasing is not found anywhere else in the Tanakh, but there is evidence for understanding it in this way in Isaiah 2:3, which is worded similarly, and clearly indicates the beginning of a pilgrimage.

<sup>12</sup> עֲמָדוֹת הַיָּם רַגְלֵינוּ בְּשַׁעְרֵיךָ There is disagreement about whether to translate this verse in the past or present tense. I chose to keep it in the past tense for continuity with verses 1-2, where the poet is recalling the pilgrimage, his departure and eventual arrival in Jerusalem with his relatives and friends.

<sup>13</sup> יְרוּשָׁלַם הַבְּנוּיָה כְּעִיר שֶׁחִבְּרָה לָהּ יַחְדָּו Each of the several translations which I consulted rendered this verse differently, perhaps because this is the only place in the Tanakh where this wording appears.

- 4 For there the tribes went up, the tribes of the Lord,<sup>14</sup>  
 A testimony for Israel<sup>15</sup> to praise the name of the Lord.
- 5 For there they sat in thrones of judgment,<sup>16</sup>  
 The thrones of the house of David.
- 6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; May those who love you prosper!  
 7 Peace be within your walls, Prosperity in your palaces.
- 8 For the sake of my relatives and friends, let me speak, I pray, of your peace  
 9 For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, let me seek your good.<sup>17</sup>

KJV and JPS render the text similarly as “Jerusalem is built as a city compacted together” while the new JPS translates as “Jerusalem built up, a city knit together.” Kraus translates this phrase as “Jerusalem built as a city, especially firmly walled about” which he suggests that this may refer to a ritualistic walking around the city walls in order to pass on the message of the solidarity and invincibility of Jerusalem, as shown in Psalm 48:13-14. (Kraus, 433). I agree with Robert Alter’s interpretation that this is a reference to the firm protective walls that enclose the city. (Alter, 439). Therefore I combined Kraus and Alter’s translations in order to formulate my own rendering of the text.

<sup>14</sup> שָׁשִׁים עָלָי שְׁבֵטִים שְׁבֵטֵי יְהוָה This translation emphasizes the importance of Jerusalem as the center of the cult to promote national unity. (Alter, 439; Kraus, 434). I decided to translate ה' as Lord based on the understanding that the use of the *dagesh* in the *hey* is for the missing two letters in God’s name that was shortened most likely for poetic flow of the line, especially since the use of ה' as a name for God appears most frequently in the Book of Psalms. In most translations such as KJV, NRS, old and new JPS, also interpret ה' as Lord. Therefore I translated as Lord, the same way as if all four letters were present.

<sup>15</sup> עֵדוּת לְיִשְׂרָאֵל The translation “testimony for Israel” is based on the definition provided in The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, which comes from an understanding of the term עֵדוּת יִשְׂרָאֵל which means congregation of Israel. (David J.A. Clines, ed. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* vol.6 [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007], 279.) Crow also notes that עֵדוּת יִשְׂרָאֵל occurs 11 times in the Tanakh and all are translated as congregation of Israel. (Crow, 44-5). While this is not the exact term used in this psalm, it guides where the translation of testimony for Israel comes from. An important point of clarification is that Mishnaic Hebrew distinguishes between *ed* “a witness” and *edut* “the testimony of a witness.” While in Biblical Hebrew they are both understood *ed* meaning “a witness.” If a congregation of Israel, meaning a religious or legal quorum (see *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol.10, 472-474), is present then it can be a testimony for either legal or religious matters. In this case, it would be religious matters since it is dealing with pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem.

<sup>16</sup> כִּי שָׁמָּה יִשְׁבּוּ כִסֵּאוֹת לְמִשְׁפָּט Alter’s more literal translation is “For there the thrones of judgment sit,” which is supported by the idea that one sits on a throne. (Alter, 440). However, for his own work he renders יִשְׁבּוּ as “stand,” and the new JPS translation does similarly with “stood.” Rather than follow Alter or the new JPS, Crow explains that this cannot be understood as “sitting on,” since in almost every instance of “sitting on,” a preposition is used, usually *al*, which is not here; moreover, it is never found in the form used here. He reads this instead as *sham hayahvu* meaning to be set or established. (Crow, 45). The Hebrew *yashav* can mean to “sit in” with the bet preposition elided. See Ps 84:5 and cf. Gen 18:1 with Gen 19:1; therefore I translated as “they sat.”

## PSALM 126

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת

בְּשׁוּבַ יְהוָה אֶת־שִׁיבַת צִיּוֹן הָיִינוּ כְּחֹלְמִים׃

אִזּוּ יִמְלֵא שְׂחֹק פִּינוֹ וּלְשׁוֹנֵנוּ רִנָּה אִזּוּ יֹאמְרוּ בְּגוֹיִם

הַגְּדִיל יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת עִם־אֱלֹהֵי׃

הַגְּדִיל יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת עִפְנוֹ הָיִינוּ שְׂמֵחִים׃

שׁוֹבָה יְהוָה אֶת־שְׁבִיתֵנוּ בְּאִפְיקִים בְּנִגְבּוֹ׃

הַזְרְעִים בְּדַמְעָה בְּרִנָּה יִקְצְרוּ׃

הָלוֹךְ יֵלֵךְ וּבֹכֶה נִשְׂא מִשָּׁף־הַזֶּרַע בָּא־יָבֹוא בְּרִנָּה נִשְׂא אֶלְפֹתָיו׃

1 A song of ascents

When the Lord restores the fortunes of Zion,<sup>18</sup>

We will be like dreamers.<sup>19</sup>

2 Then our mouths shall be filled with laughter and our tongue with songs of joy.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> אֶבְרָה־נָא and אֶבְרָה־נָא In this translation, I am following Robert Alter by using “let me” to illustrate the parallel in the Hebrew of both verbs being *piel*, first person imperfect. (Alter, 440).

<sup>18</sup> שִׁיבַת צִיּוֹן Most commentators agree that שִׁיבַת is a mistake, as confirmed by many Hebrew manuscripts that show it should have been written either as *shevut* or *shevit* (as in verse 4). (Kraus, 449-50). This term should be understood as a previous condition or restoration, as it is used at the end of Job and in Psalm 85. (Alter, 447). The phrase “restores the fortunes of Zion” is from the new JPS translation.

<sup>19</sup> הָיִינוּ כְּחֹלְמִים Among the commentators used for this annotated translation, there is disagreement about whether to translate this verse and the ones following in the past tense or future tense. While הָיִינוּ is technically in the past tense, verb tenses are more fluid in biblical poetry. I agree with Robert Alter, in his interpretation throughout this song, that this event has yet to occur. (Alter, 447). Therefore, I chose to use the future tense.

<sup>20</sup> אִזּוּ יִמְלֵא This time the verb is written in the future tense, but again there is the uncertainty over past versus future. I continue to closely follow Robert Alter and the new JPS translation here; therefore, I again used the future tense.

Then shall they say among the nations:

“Great things has the Lord done for them!”

3 Great things the Lord will do for us, we shall rejoice.<sup>21</sup>

4 Restore, O Lord, our fortunes like wadis in the desert<sup>22</sup>

5 They who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.

6 He walks along and weeps, carrying the seed-bag.

He will surely come in with songs of joy, carrying his sheaves.

### PSALM 130

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת

מִמַּעַמְקִים קָרָאתִיךָ יְהוָה:

אֲדֹנָי שְׁמַעְנָה בְּקוֹלִי תַּחֲיִינָה אַזְנֶיךָ קִשְׁבוּת לְקוֹל תַּחֲנוּנָי:

אִם-עֲוֹנוֹת תִּשְׁמַר יְיָ אֲדֹנָי מִי יַעֲמֵד:

כִּי-עַמְּךָ הִסְלִיחָה לְמַעַן תִּגְרָא:

קִנִּיתִי יְהוָה קוֹתָה נַפְשִׁי וְלִדְבָרוֹ הוֹחֵלְתִי:

נַפְשִׁי לְאֲדֹנָי מִשְׁמַרְיִם לְבַקֵּר שְׁמַרְיִם לְבַקֵּר:

יַחַל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-יְהוָה כִּי-עַם יְהוָה הִחֲסֵד וְהִרְבָּה עִמּוֹ פְדוּתוֹ:

וְהוּא יַפְדֶּה אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכָּל עֲוֹנוֹתָיו:

---

<sup>21</sup> הַגְדִּיל יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת עִמָּנוּ As between verses 2 and 3, there is an exact repetition of the text in the Hebrew. However, I chose to translate it slightly different in order to maintain the continuity of the future vision that is created in the poem. More specifically, I translated הַגְדִּיל יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת as “Great things the Lord will do” instead of repeating “Great things the Lord has done.”

<sup>22</sup> קָאִפִּיקִים בְּגִיב The poet is comparing God’s restoration of a desolate Zion to the effect of a sudden rainfall on the dry wadis in the desert: they will suddenly be full of water. This comparison will lead into the resulting images of sowing and reaping. (Kraus, 450; Alter, 448; and Schaefer, 306).

- 1 A song of ascents  
 Out of the depths I call to you, O Lord.
- 2 Master<sup>23</sup>, listen to my voice,  
 May your ears be attentive to sound of my plea for grace.<sup>24</sup>
- 3 If you, O Lord, were to keep account of wrongs,<sup>25</sup>  
 Master, who could survive?
- 4 For forgiveness is with you,  
 So that you will be feared.<sup>26</sup>
- 5 I hoped<sup>27</sup> for the Lord, my whole being<sup>28</sup> hoped,

---

<sup>23</sup> אֲדֹנָי I translated this as “master” so as to use a different name for God, similar to how Alter translated it. (Alter, 455). I chose this over using “Lord” as the only name for God, as was used by several translations, such as the old and new JPS, NRSV and KJV. The use of אֲדֹנָי is a form of address that indicates a master-servant relationship, especially since God is addressed in this way three times in this poem, in verses 2, 3 and 6. (Kraus, 467).

<sup>24</sup> תְּחִנּוֹתֵי Among the commentators used for this annotation, there was a disagreement of how to translate this word for the context of this poem. The most common ways to translate תְּחִנּוֹתֵי were: “my supplications” as in KJV, NRSV and the old JPS; “plea” or “pleading” as in the new JPS, Alter’s and Kraus’ translations; and finally “my prayer” in Crow’s rendering of the word in his translation. I chose to translate this as “plea” in order to distinguish it from an established and structured prayer. This is a moment in which the poet is begging God to have mercy on him since he is coming from a dark place of fear and terror. (Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* vol. 4 [Leiden: Brill, 1999], 1719.) The sense of *tahanun* here is from *hanan*, “be gracious,” as in *gratis, hinnam*, for nothing, therefore I translate as “my plea for grace.”

<sup>25</sup> אַם-עֲוֹנוֹת תִּשְׁמֹר-יְהוָה In this context, the verb תִּשְׁמֹר has a sense of “keeping track of,” as indicated in Crow’s translation. Similar is “keep account of” in the new JPS translation. Alter renders as “watch for wrongs” for two reasons. First, this keeps the poetic alliteration of the double use of “w” in the English. Second, as Alter explains, this preserves the poetic word play in the Hebrew with verse 6, where the root of this word occurs twice. (Alter, 455). Alter misses the point with this translation because “watch for” means to look out for or anticipate. Instead this verse means that if God preserved our sins, we could not survive. Therefore I follow the new JPS translation, “keep account of.”

<sup>26</sup> לְמַעַן תִּירָא This verse as a whole needs further explanation. The translation of “feared” is used meaning fear of or reverence for God as a response of awe of God who is all-powerful and compassionately forgiving as opposed to a fear of God as a response to complete terror. (Alter, 455). Kraus helps to clarify it by quoting R. Kittel: “The purpose of forgiveness is the promotion of the fear of God.” Forgiveness is a free gift from God, but is only meant for those who are faithful servants of God. (Kraus, 466-7). God provides forgiveness so that he will have worshippers. It is also possible to understand *yare* to mean “worship” in this context. See Ps 115:17-18—the dead can’t praise god.

<sup>27</sup> קִוִּיתִי There is a disagreement over whether to translate this verb as “wait” or “hope.” *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* translates this verb in the piel form to mean “hope directed towards

And for His word I waited.

- 6 My whole being [is eager] for the Master,  
More than the dawn-watchers watch for the dawn<sup>29</sup>.
- 7 O Israel, wait for the Lord, for with the Lord there is grace<sup>30</sup>,  
And great redemption is with Him.
- 8 And He will redeem<sup>31</sup> Israel from all its wrongs.

---

a target” or “alternatively hope inserted within a sequence of expectation and fulfillment.” (Koehler and Baumgartner, Vol. 3, 1082). Based on this, I chose to translate it as “hope.”

<sup>28</sup> קִוְיָהּ נַפְשִׁי A more accurate meaning of נַפְשִׁי is provided by *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. It states, “Just as *nefesh* does not simply mean life, but rather the individuation of life, as which it effectively appears, so too *nefesh* does not denote the soul as one nuance among others—it refers to psychic power, abounding personality, energy that exorcises all gloominess. This basic sense of *nefesh* is reflected perfectly in the fact that hoping and waiting for God have *nefesh* as their subject.” (Seebass, 510). Therefore the usual translation of “soul” does not suffice in this context, so translating as “my whole being” was attempting to capture a more true sense of נַפְשִׁי

<sup>29</sup> מִשְׁמָרִים לְבֹקֵר שְׁמָרִים לְבֹקֵר The repetition of this phrase is worth noting. This image of watchmen on the lookout, waiting for the morning to come, is described in Isaiah 21:11. Kraus explains further that the early morning is the time for an individual who is awaiting the helpful intervention of God. (Kraus, 467). Most translations, including the NRSV, the new JPS and old JPS, render this phrase as “more than watchmen for the morning, watchmen for the morning.” The repetition of שְׁמָרִים לְבֹקֵר is meant to emphasize the poet’s longing for God’s divine presence. However, I chose to translate this phrase as Alter did: “more than the dawn-watchers watch for the dawn.” I did so based on his explanation. He states that שְׁמָרִים can be rendered either as a noun (watchmen) or a verb (watch); this version provides a more poetic flow of the line and allows the image to become more alive with the dawn-watchers waiting and hoping with attentiveness for the arrival of the dawn. (Alter, 456).

<sup>30</sup> עִם יְהוָה הַחֶסֶד כי-עם יהוה החסד Since there is a shift from individual to the community of Israel in this verse, they are, as a whole community, recipients of God’s kindness which implies a covenantal nature to understanding how to translate חֶסֶד in this context. How Israel understood these demonstrations of God’s kindness is shown by the nouns used in parallel. God’s kindness is expressed as an act of “redemption” that is in verse 7. חֶסֶד in this context is used to express the permanence and constancy of God’s kindness, its inviolability and trustworthiness. (Zobel, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 5, trans. David E. Green [Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998], 44-63). I chose to translate as “for with the Lord there is grace” in order to capture this sense of God forgiving Israel of their wrongs even when they do not deserve it because God has a covenant with Israel and therefore will show ultimate loving-kindness towards the community of Israel.

<sup>31</sup> פָּדוּת and יִפְדֶּה come from the root פָּדָה which means “be rescued” or “liberated.” While all of the commentators and translations I have used for this annotation are consistent in their rendering of this verb as “redeem,” it has a slightly different connotation than the other root for redeem גָּאֵל (Koehler and Baumgartner, vol. 3, 912-3).

## PSALM 134

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת

הִנֵּה בָּרְכוּ אֶת יְהוָה כָּל עַבְדֵי יְהוָה

הַעֲמִידִים בְּבַיִת יְהוָה בַּלַּיְלוֹת;

שָׂאוּ יְדֵיכֶם קֹדֶשׁ וּבְרַכּוּ אֶת יְהוָה;

יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה מִצִּיּוֹן עֹשֶׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ;

- 1 A song of ascents  
Behold<sup>32</sup>, bless the Lord all servants of the Lord,  
Who stand in the house of the Lord during the nights.
- 2 Lift up your hands toward the sanctuary<sup>33</sup> and bless the Lord.
- 3 May the Lord bless you from Zion,  
The one who makes heaven and earth

---

<sup>32</sup> הִנֵּה Because הִנֵּה before an imperative verb is not found anywhere else in the Tanakh, many commentators find this word problematic. Crow offers a possible explanation from Gunkel; specifically that “it has been transposed from the previous Psalm 133.” But I agree with Crow when he discards this idea due to the wide range of meanings of this particle. To Crow it is plausible that הִנֵּה is meant to emphasize the imperativeness of the verb and so he translates it as “O,” in order to capture the “attention-getting” function. (Crow, 121). I have chosen to maintain the traditional rendering of “behold” as found in the KJV, old JPS and NSRV. “Behold” better depicts the image of the priests calling everyone’s attention, in order to be able to bestow a blessing on behalf of the Lord to the community before its descent.

<sup>33</sup> קֹדֶשׁ The literal meaning of this word is “holiness,” but in this context it most likely means “holy place” and more specifically “the sanctuary.” In each translation I consulted, an assumed preposition is written in the English. Kraus explains that “קֹדֶשׁ is an accusative of place to which the addition of the preposition *al* is not obligatory.” (Kraus, 487). Therefore I rendered this “toward the sanctuary.”

### 3. The Translation of the Superscription *Shir Hama'a lot*

Psalms 120-134 each begin with the superscription *Shir Hama'a lot*. These 15 consecutive psalms are unique in that no other psalms have a similar heading. While most translators and commentators have settled on "A Song of Ascents," both the context and development of the term deserve further research.

There are four different categories of explanations of this title: (1) literary-poetical interpretations; (2) musical interpretations; (3) historical interpretations; and (4) cultic interpretations. While no one of these views is fully sufficient by itself, each one of these categories can guide our understanding of this superscription.

Hans-Joachim Kraus provides two possible literary-poetical interpretations. The first possible interpretation sees the title as only a term for a connected progression of psalms. According to this explanation, the superscription would have the meaning of "Songs in a Sequence," or "Songs in a Series." However, this interpretation is much too formal and does not adequately interpret the term *ma'a lot*.<sup>34</sup> Another interpretation that Kraus offers within this category, considers the poetic form of the group of psalms. Specifically, it focuses on the observation that the closing word of a verse or section is repeated at the beginning of the verse or section immediately following. While this is true of the *Shir Hama'a lot* psalms, this poetical device is not unique to this collection.<sup>35</sup> This interpretation simply ignores the fact that these psalms are so distinctive that no

---

<sup>34</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*. Hilton C. Oswald, trans. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 23-4.

<sup>35</sup> See Psalms 93; 96; 103 and 118

psalm outside this collection has this heading. In addition, the term *ma'a lot* in this context is not adequately justified.<sup>36</sup>

The last explanation within this first category is suggested by Amos Hakham; it is a creative approach to understanding the meaning of this title. He proposes:

“A Song of Ascents” refers to a particular poetic form that is exemplified in this series of psalms, because certain words and expressions are repeated in them. These words and expressions may have been called ‘ascents,’ because they can be regarded as steps leading from verse to verse.<sup>37</sup>

This explanation attempts to understand the term *ma'a lot* more precisely within this category of literary-poetical interpretations.

The second category of explanations is musically-based. Alter suggests that “A Song of Ascents” could be a musical term, possibly referring to an ascent in pitch or a crescendo in the song; or it could refer to the pattern of repetition that is common to many of these psalms.<sup>38</sup>

To help understand the context of “A Song of Ascents,” Hakham offers further possibilities in this category of musical conceptions. These possibilities are already raised in the teachings of the sages and commentators. For example, Sa'adyah Gaon states that it is “a song sung to a high melody.” Meiri offers another possibility: “This is a song that one begins to sing with a soft voice, raising the voice gradually until it is a

---

<sup>36</sup> Kraus, 23-4.

<sup>37</sup> Amos Hakham, “Introduction to the Songs of Ascents.” *The Bible Psalms with the Jerusalem Commentary: Psalms 101-150*, vol. 3. (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 2003), 287.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), 435.

very loud voice.”<sup>39</sup> Avigdor Herzog offers the additional possibility that *Shir Hama'a lot* is a reference to some peculiar gradational style of musical implementation.<sup>40</sup> There are some translations that render *shir hama'a lot* as “A Song of Degrees,” but Herzog observes that what was understood by that is not clear. However, Hakham points to *Midrash Tehillim* which states that “[w]hen the Jews rise...they rise up many degrees.”<sup>41</sup> This quotation as opposed to musical explanations seems the most likely source of the tradition of rendering the term as “A Song of Degrees.” These musical interpretations seem like plausible possibilities, but the use of “degrees” to the exclusion of “ascents” does not fully reflect the meaning of the Hebrew of *ma'a lot*.

The third type of explanation is historical in nature. According to this explanation *Shir Hama'a lot* indicates songs sung in the context of Jews “going back up” after the Exile; this would make these psalms “traveling songs” of the people returning home. In this explanation, *ma'a lot* is related to *ma'alah* as used in Ezra 7:9 or to a similar term in Ezra 2:1.<sup>42</sup> Hakham notes that many of the commentators have interpreted “A Song of Ascents” as a song sung by those who ascended to the Land of Israel from the Babylonian exile. The evidence in support of this interpretation is adduced from Psalm 126:1<sup>43</sup> which many commentators have as “when the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,” in the past tense: i.e. in the context of the Israelites return from Babylonian exile. Herzog agrees that the rendering of “ascents” may be connected to the return from

---

<sup>39</sup> Hakham, 286.

<sup>40</sup> Avigdor Herzog, “Book of Psalms.” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd Ed. Vol. 16.(Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 2007), 673.

<sup>41</sup> Hakham, 286.

<sup>42</sup> Kraus, 23.

<sup>43</sup> Hakham, 286.

Babylon; but raises the objection that this accounts only for the context of Psalm 126. After all, in Psalms 122 and 134, the Temple is still standing.<sup>44</sup> Kraus also finds this historical interpretation questionable; to him, this explanation does not maintain the integrity of the characteristics of the songs that are brought together in Psalms 120-134.<sup>45</sup>

The final category of explanations is cultic. One theory interprets *ma'alah* as a word used for the step of a throne or an altar. According to this explanation, *ma'a lot* would be the "steps," and the title of these psalms would be translated as "songs of the steps."<sup>46</sup> In Tractate Middot (Mishnah 2:5), regarding the women's section, it states: "And fifteen steps lead up from it to the Israelite section, corresponding to the fifteen Ascents in Psalms, upon which the Levites perform songs."<sup>47</sup> We learn from this Mishnah that the Levites performed their songs on the 15 steps at the Nicanor Gate. Accordingly, *ma'a lot* would denote the location, but this interpretation confines these psalms to a very limited usage.<sup>48</sup>

Another interpretation finds a connection with the fifteen steps joining the court of the Israelites to the court of the women in the Second Temple. On Sukkot, this is where the levitical musicians used to stand during the ceremony of the "drawing of water."<sup>49</sup> The evidence for this comes from Tractate Sukkah (Mishnah 5:4), regarding the feast of water-drawing, which reads:

---

<sup>44</sup> Herzog, 673.

<sup>45</sup> Kraus, 23.

<sup>46</sup> Kraus, 24.

<sup>47</sup> Hakham, 286.

<sup>48</sup> Kraus, 24.

<sup>49</sup> Herzog, 673.

And the Levites, with viols and lyres and cymbals and trumpets and innumerable musical instruments, are on the fifteen steps that descend from the Israelite section to women's section, corresponding to the fifteen Songs of Ascents in Psalms, and the Levites stand on them with musical instruments and perform songs.<sup>50</sup>

In the aggadic stories in the Babylonian Talmud<sup>51</sup> and the Jerusalem Talmud,<sup>52</sup> there is even more evidence of another possible understanding of the context of "A Song of Ascents;" namely, that it is a song that is recited on the steps of the abyss.<sup>53</sup>

The last cultic interpretation is the one that many commentators have decided is the most reasonable. This takes *ma'a lot* back to the verb *ayin lamed hey*. This literally means "going up," most likely referring to the "going up" to Jerusalem for festivals.<sup>54</sup> This verb is the technical term for pilgrimage; it denotes the final act of the pilgrimage: the procession to the Temple. *Shir Ham'a lot* in this context could be understood to mean "pilgrimage song" or "processional song." However, it must be noted that, in this collection of psalms, only Psalm 122 may be applied to pilgrimage<sup>55</sup> and only Psalm 132 may be applied to a procession.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, one would need to assume that *Shir Hama'a lot* denotes a collection of psalms that should bear the title "songbook for pilgrimages," in

---

<sup>50</sup> Hakham, 286.

<sup>51</sup> The commentary on Mishnah Sukkah 53a-b includes a story to which David recited that Song of Ascents in order to raise up the waters of the abyss that had been displaced and had sunk down when the foundation stone had been laid to receive libations that were poured on the altar. (Hakham, 286).

<sup>52</sup> Tractate Sanhedrin (chapter Helek) on the Mishnah which states that Ahithophel has no part in the world-to-come, as story is told similar to the one in Tractate Sukkah of the Babylonian Talmud, and it states, "A Song of Ascents—each song one hundred ascents." (Hakham, 286).

<sup>53</sup> Hakham, 286.

<sup>54</sup> James Limburg, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* vol. 5, David Noel Freedman, ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 528.

<sup>55</sup> The first verse of Psalm 122, "Let us go to the house of the Lord," can be understood as individuals deciding to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in order to make a sacrifice at the Temple on the festivals.

<sup>56</sup> In verse 7-8 of Psalm 132, there is a call for entrance of the ark at the "dwelling place" meaning the Temple. The processional event reaches its peak with prostration before God. (Kraus, 480).

which other prayers and songs have also been collected.<sup>57</sup> This interpretation has a problem similar to that of the historical explanations where Psalm 126 is the only evidence; here, only Psalm 122 or 132 could appropriately be given the title “pilgrim psalm.”<sup>58</sup>

Kraus suggests a combination of two different cultic conceptions in the attempt to find a more suitable context for the translation of *Shir Hama'a lot* as “A Song of Ascents.” He offers the possibility that *ma'a lot* also indicated “the steps” that led up to the City of David (see Neh 3:15; 12:37). According to this view, the translation would be “Song of Steps” and it would have been intoned during the act of procession up to the City of David. However, this explanation may be too restrictive, as the entire proceedings of the pilgrimage would have to be considered.<sup>59</sup>

Konrad Schaefer emphasizes that all these varying interpretations of the title *Shir Hama'a lot* are hypotheses. Commentators theorize about their use as Jerusalem pilgrimage psalms, arranged in a stair-like pattern, from the beginning of the pilgrimage to the moving towards Jerusalem, and finally to the entrance into the city and the Temple. Another hypothesis is that they were sung on the fifteen steps in the ascent to the Temple. There is no obvious model to indicate their order. Their meaningful arrangement or religious purpose, even their use as a pilgrimage combination, continues to be only hypothetical.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Kraus, 24.

<sup>58</sup> Herzog, 673.

<sup>59</sup> Kraus, 24.

<sup>60</sup> Schaefer, 297.

Loren D. Crow takes this idea of a hypothetical interpretation a step further. He emphasizes that the interpretation of the Songs of Ascents as “pilgrim psalms” does not have any basis in actual fact; instead, it is largely due to the preconception imposed upon these psalms by its title. It is not only plausible, but also necessary to delay judgment about the meaning of the superscription until one has fully looked at the collection as a whole without alternatives to it. Crow claims:

[H]istorically scholarship has been, with a few exceptions, unduly influenced by the interpretation of the superscription, many proposals having been made for its meaning that either totally disregard the songs themselves or bend the evidence to fit one’s own solution. All of the various readings of the superscription, to varying degrees, have ignored the content of the songs in favor of the supposed meaning of the superscription.<sup>61</sup>

Schaefer believes that this unifying title indicates that it is possible that this collection was a hymnal before it was incorporated into the Book of Psalms. His reasoning behind this idea is not simply the same title of *Shir Hama'a lot*; it is more due to the fact that there are recurring features that bring together this group of psalms. Shaefer identifies these main features: (1) These poems, with the exception of Psalm 132, are brief. (2) The names Jerusalem and Zion occur with an unusual frequency, 12 times in eight psalms and “house of the Lord” in two psalms. “Israel” appears with a regularity atypical elsewhere in the book of Psalms, nine times for the collection. (3) Liturgical components are relatively frequent—benedictions and peace, summons to confess and hope, and confessional terms. (4) There is a profound vocabulary of blessing and “peace” that is used often in these psalms. (5) The theme of dependence on God

---

<sup>61</sup> Crow, 2-3.



## 4. Interpretation of the Psalms

### Psalm 121:

#### *Lifting Our Eyes Towards Promises of Protection*

Psalm 121 takes us on a journey in which our uncertainty is met with promises of protection. The psalm is neatly divided; the first two verses ask a question, and the remainder of the psalm, beginning with verse three, is the response to that question.<sup>63</sup>

The unifying theme of the question and answer is that God is our protector.<sup>64</sup> This theme is maintained by the repetitive use of the root *shin mem resh*, which is used six times within the psalm's eight short verses.<sup>65</sup> The unmistakable concern of the entire psalm is that we see God as our protector.<sup>66</sup>

This protection is communicated to us in the form of promises. The psalm begins with the speaker lifting up eyes to the mountains, seeking help and affirming immediately that help comes from God creator of heaven and earth. Loren D. Crowe sees the rest of the psalm as a reaffirmation that God's presence should not be seen as limited to a specific location; rather God is present with us along our entire journey, as long as we remember to have faith.<sup>67</sup> In other words, God will make a difference to those

---

<sup>63</sup> Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), 437.

<sup>64</sup> Konrad Schaefer, *Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narratives and Poetry: Psalms*, ed. David W. Cotter (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 299.

<sup>65</sup> Alter, 438.

<sup>66</sup> Loren D. Crow, *The Songs of Ascents: Their Place in Israelite History and Religion* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 40.

<sup>67</sup> Crow, 40.

individuals who are faithful in the present.<sup>68</sup> If we have faith, God promises to watch over us every step of our way.

These promises are notable both in their decisiveness and in their form. Kraus identifies three clear decisive promises in the latter part of the psalm. They are: (1) God, as the creator, has been and will be effective in His work: verse 2; (2) God is the “guardian of Israel” and will not ease up on His work even for a moment: verse 4; and (3) God is the guardian of the individual who might have difficulties along the way, but God will be present to help against any kind of harm: verses 5 and 7.<sup>69</sup>

From the standpoint of form, the promises may be seen as the expression of four negations: (1) God will not let your foot slip: verse 3; (2) God will not slumber: verse 3; (3) God will neither slumber nor sleep: verse 4; and (4) and the sun will not strike you by day nor the moon by night: verse 6.<sup>70</sup> God’s way of protecting those who are faithful is to promise not to fail in any of these promises. This psalm emphasizes that God will protect every going out and coming in because every footstep of His human beings is of unending importance.<sup>71</sup>

Psalm 121 begins in an unsure tone, moves to promises,<sup>72</sup> and concludes with the assurance of God’s eternal protection. A God who is introduced as the maker of heaven

---

<sup>68</sup> Crow 41.

<sup>69</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 430.

<sup>70</sup> Schaefer, 300.

<sup>71</sup> Kraus, 430.

<sup>72</sup> Kraus, 430. Kraus asserts that the beginning of the psalm has a confessional character. The individual confesses to having a brief moment being unsure, but once the individual gazes up to the mountains, he remembers and is reassured to trust in God. After the statements of trust in verses 1-2, the psalm turns into a promise to the individual in verses 3-8.

and earth at the beginning of the psalm is then, through promises of protection, described as a God whose actions will overcome the worshipper's initial uncertainty.<sup>73</sup>

### **Psalm 122:**

#### ***The Pilgrimage to Jerusalem***

The date, form and content of Psalm 122 help us understand the importance of Jerusalem in the eyes of the Psalmist.

Robert Alter concludes that Psalm 122 was most likely composed sometime around 621 BCE, during the time of King Josiah. He argues that this psalm connects the centralization of the Temple cult in Jerusalem with the centralization of judicial authority, including political authority, which corresponds with King Josiah's reform program.<sup>74</sup>

Schaefer explains that this psalm is structured according to its recurring themes. The first two verses begin the first theme of the psalmist and companions and "the house of the Lord." Verses 3-4 introduce the next recurring theme of Jerusalem. Verse 5 contains the theme of "the thrones of judgment" and "the house of David."<sup>75</sup> Verses 6-7 return to the Jerusalem theme. The last two verses conclude this psalm with the return to

---

<sup>73</sup>Alter, 438.

<sup>74</sup>Alter, 439-40.

<sup>75</sup>The parallel between the "thrones of judgment" and the "thrones of the house of David" that is made in verse 5 indicates that in the "house of the Lord," right worship implies right conduct. Schaefer, 301.

the first theme of the psalmist and companions and “the house of the Lord.”<sup>76</sup> As such, the psalm exhibits the chiasmic form ABCB’A’.<sup>77</sup>

The dating and form point to the significance of Jerusalem. This psalm highlights the centrality of Jerusalem by beginning and ending within the city itself.<sup>78</sup> Jerusalem is God’s chosen city, because it houses the Temple, where the psalmist believes he will experience the presence of God. As Rashi said, “When Solomon builds the Temple within Jerusalem; it will be built with Shechinah, the Temple, the Ark and the Altar.”<sup>79</sup> This is the place where an individual’s prayers and petitions will be directed because it is the true center of Jerusalem.<sup>80</sup> The hymn-like section in Psalm 122 exalts Jerusalem for its sturdiness, its position as the meeting place for the people of God, and its distinction as the center of the legitimate Davidic kingship.<sup>81</sup>

But this is more than a psalm about Jerusalem as a place to be; rather it is a psalm about Jerusalem as the destination for a pilgrimage. Alter observes that “there is a clear indication that this is a psalm of Zion founded in the pilgrimage experience.”<sup>82</sup> The pilgrimage itself can be seen as a testimony that when the 12 tribes went to Jerusalem, the city contained them because God had chosen them; now they should go up to the Temple and give thanks to God.<sup>83</sup> Along with his relatives and friends, the psalmist has made this

---

<sup>76</sup> Schaefer, 300.

<sup>77</sup> Kraus notes that this psalm is similar to psalm 84 in its form and setting. Kraus, 432.

<sup>78</sup> Crow, 47.

<sup>79</sup> Rabbi A.J. Rosenberg, *Mikraoth Gedoloth: Psalms A New English Translation*, vol. 3 (New York: The Judaica Press: 2001), 483.

<sup>80</sup> Kraus, 435.

<sup>81</sup> Crow, 46.

<sup>82</sup> Alter, 439.

<sup>83</sup> Rosenberg, 483-4.

pilgrimage to Jerusalem in order to be in the presence of God; in other words, to be in “the house of the Lord.”

The last two verses complete the pilgrimage and reveal how the psalmist acts at the end of his journey. The last two verses return to the psalmist and his companions by pledging himself to peace and well being in both human and divine relations.<sup>84</sup> The synthesis of all blessing, between his companion and God, is expressed here through repetition of the root *shalom*.<sup>85</sup> There is no better place to offer these blessings of peace and well-being than in the “house of the Lord.” Psalm 122 is “a song of an individual singer who has entered the area of the sanctuary. He has made the pilgrimage with his brothers and friends to Jerusalem. Now he lifts his voice to praise the holy city and pronounce blessing on it.”<sup>86</sup>

### **Psalm 126:**

#### ***Ambiguities***

The theological ambiguities in Psalm 126 can be seen by comparing the translations found in the New International Version (NIV) and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) on the one hand, and the new JPS translation on the other hand. The NIV and the NRSV translate verses one to three in the past tense and verses four to six in the future tense. In contrast, the new JPS (and others) set the entire psalm in the future.

---

<sup>84</sup> Schaefer, 301.

<sup>85</sup> Schaefer, 301.

<sup>86</sup> Kraus, 432.

If the first three are rendered in the past tense, this psalm is post-exilic: the psalmist, while having experienced the joy of the return to Zion, still has a need to pray for a full and complete restoration. This is the view of Kraus. He explains that the return to Zion was only the beginning, “because there is no worldwide appearance of the glory of God, encounter with the nations and transformation of the world even though certain groups have returned from exile.”<sup>87</sup> Crow also explains that while the community has rejoiced at Zion’s prosperity, it has not yet seen the benefits of this prosperity. In this context, verses 4-6 become a request that Zion’s prosperity be fully extended so that it may reach and influence the Jewish community that are outside of Israel.<sup>88</sup> According to this view, this psalm asks God to intervene again and give us good fortune just as beforehand, but this time, fulfill the true salvation.<sup>89</sup>

The other possibility is that both verses 1-2 and verses 4-6 are in the future. This put the psalm before the return to Zion and makes it, in total, a prayer for a restoration which has yet to begin. Alter supports this view in his interpretation of verse 4.<sup>90</sup> Crow points out that Psalm 126 has very strong ties with the book of Joel in its language and themes.<sup>91</sup> The use of prophetic perfect language as well as several prophetic thematic elements including (1) prophetic dream in verse 1, (2) motif of the nations’ glorification of God in verses 2 and 3 and (3) prediction of future prosperity in verses 4-6 all further support this interpretation.<sup>92</sup> While there are reasonable arguments for both ways of

---

<sup>87</sup> Kraus, 449.

<sup>88</sup> Crow, 65.

<sup>89</sup> Kraus, 451.

<sup>90</sup> Alter, 447.

<sup>91</sup> Crow, 63.

<sup>92</sup> Crow, 64.

understanding the theme of restoration in this psalm, Alter's understanding that the restoration of Zion's fortunes has yet to occur seems more plausible.

The second half of the psalm is notable for more than its future tense, as it focuses on imagery of replenishing the fertility of the land. The first image in verse 4 is of the wadis in the desert that previously dried up, but is now suddenly renewed with live-giving waters. This image serves as a metaphor in a prayer that God will miraculously one day restore Zion's fortunes and change the fate of the community.<sup>93</sup>

The second image in verses 5 and 6 is the sowing in tears and reaping in joy. Ibn Ezra offers an explanation of this imagery:

Seed is valuable in an arid land, and the poor man carrying it to the field to sow it goes along weeping for fear that it may be lost and not grow because of the dryness of the soil. God sees his tears, has compassion on him and brings rain. At harvest time, he comes singing instead of weeping, and he will carry home the sheaves of harvest in joy. So too Israel in exile. They bear the yoke of the exile and carry the burden of the taxes in order to keep the Torah and the commandments, the seed of allegory. At the time of the redemption, the harvest time of the allegory, they will come home to the land of Israel in song, carrying the good sheaves that God will grant them, leaving the exile laden with silver and gold.<sup>94</sup>

When God restores Zion's fortunes, our weeping in exile will be transformed into great joy. Crow's assessment that Psalm 126's central concern is the fertility of the land and the resulting rejoicing of the people, rather than God's ultimate glory and salvation

---

<sup>93</sup> Kraus, 450.

<sup>94</sup> Rosenberg, 490.



of *rinnah* or sounds of joy that ties the psalm together.<sup>101</sup> Schaefer explains that Psalm 126 emphasizes that joy is God's work, first in the restoration of Zion and second in the renewal of the worshippers.<sup>102</sup> When God returns the Jewish community to Zion, it will be like a dream; wish fulfilled because no one has ever witnessed such wonders except in a dream.<sup>103</sup> This psalm is bursting with the anticipated gladness that will follow the restoration of Zion's fortunes.

### **Psalm 130:**

#### ***Content over Form***

Without emphasizing form over content, it is necessary to first examine the form of Psalm 130. The psalm may be divided into four distinct stanzas, with two verses in each stanza; and each stanza focuses on a different aspect of the message of the whole psalm.<sup>104</sup> The first stanza, verses 1-2, is an opening petition to God to listen closely to the supplicant's prayer. The second stanza, verses 3-4, is a statement of trust that God will be merciful and hear the prayer. In the third stanza, verses 5-6, the psalmist waits anxiously for the "word" of God; and the last stanza, verses 7-8 moves the psalm from the individual voice outwards to the whole community of Israel.

This move from the individual to the community that occurs between verses 1-6 and verses 7-8 is as monumental as it is sudden. Many commentators have trouble with

---

<sup>101</sup> Alter, 448.

<sup>102</sup> Schaefer, 305.

<sup>103</sup> Rosenberg, 488-9 and Alter, 447.

<sup>104</sup> Crow, 88-9.

this quick transition in the psalm. Crow's explanation is that verses 1-6 are of a text taken by the psalmist from an older prayer, while verses 7-8 is a reapplication of that text.<sup>105</sup> Schaefer simply explains that the individual and the believing community merge into one as the psalmist speaks with, for and to the community.<sup>106</sup> Crow's evidence is that the specifics are not distinguished. He points out that in that in verse 1 the psalmist alluded to troubling circumstances, but does not speak about those circumstances. While in verse 2 the psalmist asks God to listen carefully to his prayer, but does not offer a specific prayer and finally, hopefully waits for the manifestation of God's word in verse 5, but does not clarify what that word should exactly concern.<sup>107</sup> Instead this psalm is more universal because it is not only a prayer of the individual, but it speaks to for and about the community as well.

The richness of the content of the psalm is confirmed by its movement from a confusion caused by distance from God to a bridge of hope. In the first stanza the psalmist finds himself far from God and cries out to God from great anguish and the depths of a consciousness of guilt.<sup>108</sup> This reference to "out of the depths" in the first verse expresses a vast distance between God and sinful humanity, that if God actually kept account of all of our sins, no one would be able to live.<sup>109</sup> Verse 3 asks this rhetorical question of who could stand because of course no one would be able to stand in the God's presence and survive if the Lord kept account of all humanity's sins.<sup>110</sup> With the use of *mimaamakim*, the psalmist conveys a sense of drowning in confusion and sin

---

<sup>105</sup> Crow, 90.

<sup>106</sup> Schaefer, 311.

<sup>107</sup> Crow, 90.

<sup>108</sup> Kraus, 465.

<sup>109</sup> Schaefer, 311.

<sup>110</sup> Kraus, 466.

and being overwhelmed by turbulent waters.<sup>111</sup> This is fitting imagery to describe acute distress.

This distance between God and the psalmist is no small gap. This gap, as expressed in the beginning of the psalm, is eventually bridged by hope. This theme of hope is founded on the belief that God will show *chesed* and redeem not only the individual, but the community of Israel from their sins.<sup>112</sup> God shows mercy, fortunately, by not judging according to the stringent demands of retributive justice.<sup>113</sup> In this psalm, the petitioner does not even attempt to justify a right to hearing, but instead acknowledges the opportunity to pray and to be heard by God. This profound statement is based entirely on God's grace and mercy.<sup>114</sup> In the last stanza, the psalmist encourages the assembly to adopt this attitude of being confident and certain that God will show *chesed* towards the community of Israel.<sup>115</sup>

According to one interpretation, the last stanza in this psalm speaks to the whole community of Israel instead of the individual petitioner. The promise of salvation proclaimed to the assembly in verses 7-8 is a model that exemplifies a pious individual taking his place in prayer in the reality of the community surrounding him.<sup>116</sup> This message transforms the prayer into an example for all Israel, which is common in psalms and particularly frequent in the Songs of Ascents.<sup>117</sup> This last stanza can be seen as

---

<sup>111</sup> The evidence for associating *mimaamakim* with water comes from translating as "the depths" meaning the watery deep as in Isaiah 51:10 and Ezekiel 27:34 and the sense of being overtaken by tumultuous waters comes from images in psalms 69:1-2; 124:3-5 and Jonah 2:2-3, 5. Schaefer, 311.

<sup>112</sup> Schaefer, 311.

<sup>113</sup> Crow, 88.

<sup>114</sup> Crow, 88.

<sup>115</sup> Schaefer, 311.

<sup>116</sup> Kraus, 466.

<sup>117</sup> Crow, 89.



be a word of reassurance that the supplicant will be forgiven in order to move closer towards redemption.

God shows *chesed* towards the people of Israel which brings the psalmist back to the bridge of hope. Is it enough? I submit that part and parcel of this psalm's description of hope is the psalmist's quality of trust. There is a definite sense of hope that is expressed in by the psalmist. Rashi writes, "Hope for the Lord, be strong and He will give your heart courage and hope."<sup>121</sup> This message plays a significant role in this psalm. This sense of hope is displayed in the vow of trust of the petitioner that takes the form of waiting for God and the divine word.<sup>122</sup> Kraus explains that in verse 4 the psalmist says that "to fear God means to wait for his word of forgiveness, in straining attentiveness to look forward to the moment in which God grants *s'lichah*."<sup>123</sup> Until this moment comes, the supplicant will continue to hope and to wait. In a word, this is trust.

The repetitive use of the words *shomrim laboker* needs further study. The psalmist uses a repetition of the words *shomrim laboker* in order to communicate the intense anticipation of hoping and waiting for God's word. The visual image of watchmen, sitting through the several nights, watching and waiting anxiously for when the dawn will come, is not even enough to convey the intensity of the psalmist looking forward to God's redeeming word to come to him in the dark night of the soul.<sup>124</sup> Ibn Ezra comments that the petitioner's "soul hopes for the Lord more than the watchmen of the walls hope for morning, for they look forward to morning when they will be able to

---

<sup>121</sup> Rosenberg, 495.

<sup>122</sup> Schaefer, 310.

<sup>123</sup> Kraus, 468.

<sup>124</sup> Alter, 456.

sleep,”<sup>125</sup> while the supplicant is looking forward to God’s redeeming word which falls short in its comparison.

The connection between verses 3-4 also must be examined. The psalmist is arguing that keeping the worshipper alive is in the best of interest of the divine. In verse 4, the Hebrew used is *tivarey* which is the niphal of the root *yod resh alef* which not only means “be feared” or “held in awe,” but “worshipped.” The sense is that if the Lord did not forgive us, we would all be dead and then no one would be able to serve the Lord.<sup>126</sup>

### **Psalm 134:**

#### ***Concluding with Imagery and Lessons***

Psalm 134 brings us to the end of the *Shir HaMa’a’lot* cycle of psalms. Alter believes that this psalm is an appropriate conclusion because of its liturgical content and its summarization of the major concerns of the collection of psalms as a whole.<sup>127</sup>

Schaefer explains further that this short three-verse psalm effectively sums up the main purpose of the pilgrimage, praises God and receives blessings (also in psalms 128:5 and 133:3) which are channeled through Zion and through the “servants of the Lord.”<sup>128</sup>

The lifting up of hands is a prominent image in this psalm. This might refer to the priests being asked by the psalmist to raise hands towards the holy place of the sanctuary

---

<sup>125</sup> Rosenberg, 496.

<sup>126</sup> See Psalm 115:17-18 for another example of this sentiment.

<sup>127</sup> Alter, 464.

<sup>128</sup> Schaefer, 317.

so that the community may be blessed.<sup>129</sup> Kraus sees here the more subtle hand imagery: “The power of blessing that supports life comes from the hand of the creator.”<sup>130</sup> This links the priests’ lifting up of their hands in order to bless the people in verse 2 to the physical image of God as the maker of heaven and earth in verse 3.

The psalm contains an important lesson regarding blessings. Psalm 134 clearly emphasizes that prayer is two directional, as shown by the repetition of *b’rachah*.<sup>131</sup> Rosenberg quotes Redak as saying, “When God commands the blessing to you, you too should bless Him with your praise, each one according to his intellect.”<sup>132</sup> Specifically, this psalm advises the people in the community to bless God, who will in turn bless them as a community. This psalm does not beseech God; rather it simply urges the people who are being addressed to bless and praise God.<sup>133</sup>

Not surprisingly, given its role as a concluding psalm, Psalm 134 expresses theologically the significance of Jerusalem. As Crow notes, the psalmist “implies a well-developed Zion theology that sees the Jerusalem temple as the center from which God’s blessing flows.”<sup>134</sup> This Zion-centered theology is also present in Psalms 122 and 126 of *Shir Hama’a’lot*. The priests’ ability to facilitate blessings to and from God can occur only in Jerusalem and specifically at the Temple, which is the heart of the Jewish community. This is an appropriate conclusion to this cycle of psalms because it summarizes the reasoning behind the pilgrimage up the Temple in Jerusalem. Why?

---

<sup>129</sup> Rosenberg, 502.

<sup>130</sup> Kraus, 489.

<sup>131</sup> Schaefer, 316.

<sup>132</sup> Rosenberg, 502.

<sup>133</sup> Crow, 125.

<sup>134</sup> Crow 126.

Because it is only in Zion that an individual can offer complete blessings to God, and in return that individual within the community can truly be blessed by God.

The setting of the Psalm at nighttime should not be ignored. The two liturgical sections of this psalm are directed at “a community that knows it is sheltered in an area of *b'rachah* and praises God, conscious of dependence.”<sup>135</sup> Alter further explains the setting of worship at night. According to him the reference in verse 1 could either be to those who tend the fires and temple lamps for the duration of the night or to those remained at the Temple in order to pray or participate in the sacrificial feast throughout the night.<sup>136</sup> Crow expresses his uncertainty with whether this psalm is the conclusion or the beginning of a period of worship, but either way the cultic setting of this psalm is the priest encouraging the community to come together in Zion in order to praise God.<sup>137</sup>

---

<sup>135</sup> Kraus, 489.

<sup>136</sup> Alter, 464.

<sup>137</sup> Crow, 127.

## 5. Music Analysis

### **Psalm 121: *I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes* by Hugo Chaim Adler**

This setting of Psalm 121 captures the sense of dialogue in the text with the use of alternating solo and choir making this piece antiphonal. There is a modal feeling throughout this setting primarily due to Adler's use of open harmonies such as parallel fifths. This piece is reminiscent of Gregorian chant in some of the solo lines due to the simply melodic line that mostly moves stepwise. It is also for majority of the time uncomplicated in its harmonic structure and consonant throughout which provides the listener with a feeling of comfort and security. This is especially fitting of Psalm 121 because this poem is about being assured of God's protection.

The first phrase, section A, is measures 1-5 which includes the first verse of the psalm, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the mountains, from whence shall my help come?" This A section is in B minor and in six four time. This phrase is written for solo voice with a bare, yet contrapuntal organ accompaniment. The choral progression is from a minor one chord to a minor five chord. Ending this phrase with a half cadence lends itself to the text as the poet is asking a question where he wants an answer, just as the listener would like to feel the phrase resolve.

The next phrase, measures pick up to 6-9, is section A' due it similarities to the first phrase. The phrase includes the answer to the poet's question in the first phrase, "My help cometh from the Lord who made heaven and earth." The choral progression is the same minor one chord to the minor five chord, but in this phrase it written in common

time and also for choir with organ accompaniment that is doubling the choir. The choir is basically restating the solo phrase previously with additional harmony reassures the listener with an answer to the poet's question.

The third phrase, measures 10-16, includes the text, "He will not suffer thy foot to be moved, He that keepeth thee will not slumber." This is the start of a new section; section B, because of the change in the melodic line and there is no real choral progression, it stays within the minor one chord throughout this phrase. Section B returns to using six four time, but transitions into three four time. This section includes a solo line with contrapuntal organ accompaniment. This melodic line is almost entirely stepwise also using a small range of notes that give a sense of continuous movement. This section gives the feeling of security just as the people of Israel should feel comfort in knowing that God is our keeper.

The pick up to measure 17 begins section C which continues until measure 26. Section C is written for choir with the organ doubling the choir until measure 23 where it is solo vocal line. This section changes time signature twice from three four to five four and then back to three four in order to accommodate for the text of the poem, "Behold, He that keepeth Israel doth neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper." This section is more contrasting to the other two sections due its transition from B minor into B major with the added D sharp beginning in measure 23 until the end of the section and with the change of tempo. However, it is similar to section B in its lack of chord progression because it continues to remain at the tonic chord of the key. This first part of the phrase, "Behold, He that keepeth Israel doth neither slumber nor sleep," textually further develops the previous phrase, "He that keepeth thee will not slumber." Musically,

Adler mirrors this with continuing to stay in the minor one chord for this part of the phrase, but with the addition of the harmony of the choir. The word “sleep” is highlighted with the additional D sharp making it a major one chord which leads to the second part of this section in B major. This part of the phrase is more declamatory with the use of slightly bigger intervals, its contrast of color being in B major and it being written as an a cappella solo vocal line.

The next phrase, “The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand,” in measures 26-30, is another musical restatement of section A. This is due to the return to B minor and the similar chord progression of the minor one chord moving towards the minor five chord. The return to a familiar musical section provides a sense of stability and reassurance that is present in the text of the poem.

The bottom of page two at the pick up to measure 31 begins the next phrase, “The sun shall not smite thee by day and the moon by night.” This is a musical restatement of section B since it also remains with the tonic chord of B minor, returns to a time signature of six four and has quite a similar melodic line. These two phrases are both promises of God’s protection, so it seems fitting that they are written with such a similar melodic line.

The top of page three with the text, “The Lord shall keep thee from all evil, He shall keep thy soul,” is the next phrase in measures 34-38. This phrase is a variation of the first part of section C. Even though, the chord progression is different, (moving from minor five chord to the minor one chord and then ending on the major five chord), the musical function is similar. In the previous phrase, the word “sleep” was highlighted with the use of an added D sharp and which shifted the rest of the phrase into B major,

making it a point of emphasis. Here, the word “soul” is emphasized with the added A sharp making it a major five chord which gives it a stronger pull into the next phrase, “The Lord shall guard thy going out and thy coming in,” making it a key moment in the whole piece.

“The Lord shall guard thy going out and thy coming in” is the D section which is the peak moment in the piece. In this section there is only a solo vocal line and no organ or choral accompaniment which demonstrates vulnerability in the soloist that is only present in this moment of the piece. This is a key verse in the text because it summarizes the essence of the entire poem, which is to reassure us that God will be our guardian and protector.

The final phrase, “From this time forth and forever,” in measures 42-44 is continuation of section D. This phrase is a musical restatement of the climax solo moment of the previous phrase, but with harmony in the choir and organ. There is a coda at the bottom of the last page which emphasizes the words “and forever.” This coda is built up from the last section, but uses fuller harmony in the choir. The coda cadences on a major one chord and is the only time in the whole piece where a rich harmony is used. The change in the final chord to a major one chord gives the listener a sense of brightness and hope knowing that God will remain our protector always. Hugo Chaim Adler effectively through the restating musical phrases and the use of simplistic, yet beautiful harmonies creates a mood that comforts and reassures that if we have faith in God, God will continue to watch over us no matter what lies in our pathway.

## **Psalm 122: *Sha-alu Shalom Yerushalayim* by Helen Greenberg**

Helen Greenberg wrote this setting of Psalm 122 in Toronto 1995, however she composed this piece in a late 19<sup>th</sup> century romantic model of key changes similar to composers such as Schubert and Brahms in a Germanic based system. This piece hovers around G sharp minor, but the keys shift often using the third relationship as a way to transition into the key of the fifth and then back to the original key. Another point of interest is the frequent use of seventh chords which gives a fuller harmony in some parts as well as subtle dissonances in other sections.

The piece begins in G sharp minor with the text, "I rejoiced among those who said to me: Let us go to the house of the Lord." She uses text painting in this phrase on the words, *neileich* meaning "Let us go" by ending this phrase on a half cadence which an added seventh giving the listener a feeling of just beginning a journey into this piece and into the text.

This section in G sharp minor continues until the word, *Yerushalayim* that is emphasized with its quick shift into E sharp major that only remains for one measure. Jerusalem is highlighted because it is the focal point of the whole poem. Being in Jerusalem and going up to the Temple is at the core of the text.

The next section begins with verse six of the psalm, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; May those who love you prosper!" This verse is written in C sharp major, the fifth of the original key of G sharp minor. There is a change of tempo where this section is slightly more rhythmic and flows more like a melody as opposed to the previous

section. It is fitting that these words are set to a flowing melody as this verse of the psalm are words of blessing.

In measure 16, the flowing melody continues, as do the words of blessing in the text, "Peace be within your walls, Prosperity in your palace." However, this section transitions into the key of B sharp major which is also the third from the original key of G sharp minor. The change of key shows the change in the text from being general blessing of Jerusalem to a more specified blessing that is more particular to the Temple in Jerusalem. Greenberg emphasizes the word *b'arm'notayich* meaning "in your palace," with the use of a melisma that is a sweeping melody that evokes feeling of being regal in a palace. She ends this phrase with a change of key into G sharp major.

The following section, beginning in measure 24 through measure 32, is a lengthy solo piano section that is built on the musical phrases of the prior section. This solo piano section is written in the key of G sharp major and is a sweet and consonant melody that is absent of conflict and gives the listener a sense of what peace might sound like. This end of this section eases the listener into the next section where the text returns and it is in the key of B major.

The section in B major includes the text, "For the sake of my relatives and friends, let me speak, I pray, of your peace." Greenberg clearly highlights the word *shalom* by repeating it exactly the same way musically twice which adds an effect of anticipation and but when it is repeated for the third time, it changes significantly with an added melisma and the end of the word is sustained on an unresolved chord. She is able

to express an eagerness for peace to happen, but it has not occurred yet as demonstrated by the subtle dissonant chord at the end of this verse.

The following section includes the last verse of the psalm, “For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, let me seek your good.” This section is quite dramatic from its quick change of key at the beginning to D sharp minor to reaching the highest vocal note in a grand melodic line making it the climax moment in the piece. The word *avak'sha* meaning “let me seek” is highlighted by it being repeated three times, each time is more declamatory than the previous until the last time where a sense of tenderness is added with the drawn out descending vocal line leading into the last words of the phrase, “your good.”

While, the previous section is the end of the psalm text, Greenberg continues the piece by returning to the text of verses six through eight in the psalm. She also goes back to the same flowing melodic line for the all of the words of blessing in both verses six and seven, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; May those who love you prosper! Peace be within your walls, Prosperity in your palace,” but instead remaining in the key of B minor throughout this section. The solo piano section also returns starting in measure 63 through measure 71. This section is an exact repeat of the previous solo piano section including its return to G sharp major. This return to the blessings for Jerusalem and solo piano section emphasizes the true desire for peace and wholeness to happen for Jerusalem.

The last section of the piece is a return to the text of verse eight in the psalm, “For the sake of my relatives and friends, let me speak, I pray, of your peace.” It begins

exactly the same way as the previous time with being the key of B major and the same vocal line, until the last repeated *shalom*. Instead of the final repetition being unresolved with a subtle dissonant chord as in the first time, this time the vocal line is repeated exactly the same way with no harmony underneath it for that particular moment. This adds to the effect of even more anticipation and hope that peace will occur then the first time through. The piano continues after the vocal line ends, moving from B major back into the original key of G sharp minor to finally resolve on a G sharp ninth chord. The chord progression at the end moves higher and higher until it resolves with extensions leaving the listener with a feeling of hope that peace will eventually come.

### **Psalm 126: *Shir Hama'alot* by Samuel Adler**

Samuel Adler truly captures the sense of *rinah*, songs of joy, in this setting of Psalm 126 through its accelerated and animated tempo. The musical texture plays a key role in this piece. Adler composes this psalm in a style that blends “ancient” and modern sounds. The arpeggiated cluster chords or harp like texture in the piano accompaniment is a way to incorporate the sounds of ancient instruments as well as add a dream like quality to the piece. It is also reminiscent of minimalist music with the constant repetition of the cluster chord patterns. The three treble voices interchange singing in unison and in harmony throughout the piece. The unison singing has an “ancient” women’s voices quality to it especially with most of the piece written modally.

The introduction of the piece sets up the harp like texture and the upbeat tempo. This quick harp like accompaniment continues as the treble voices begin on measure four with the repetition of the text, *Shir Hama'a lot*, a song of ascents, all in unison. This setting begins in the key of E mixolydian which sets the tone for having an "ancient" and chant-like character to the piece.

The whole texture changes at the text, *B'shuv Adonai et shivat tsiyon hayinu k'cholmim* meaning "When the Lord restores the fortunes of Zion, We will be like dreamers." The treble voices have split into three part harmony here and the accompaniment is primarily doubling the voices, but with a contrapuntal bass line. There is a return to unison singing and the arpeggated cluster chords briefly at *k'cholmim* which highlights the dream that God will sometime soon return to Zion.

At measure 11 begins the next section with the text, *Az y'male s'chok pinu ul'shoneinu rinah* meaning "Then our mouths shall be filled with laughter and our tongue with songs of joy." The accompaniment here is functioning as if it is representing the *rinah*, shouts of joy with the staccato octaves at the starts of phrases only. It gives this section a playfulness that echoes the meaning of the text here. There is a syncopated rhythm in the voices at the word *rinah* again adding a playfulness which paints the text.

In the next section, beginning at measure 14, the accompaniment changes again by switching into using the bass clef adding a lower range that was not present in the music until this point. There is a striking key change into F sharp minor at this point as well which demonstrates the change in character of the text, "Then shall they say among the nations: Great things has the Lord done for them!" The lower notes and wider range

in the accompaniment creates a depth that adds to the sense of “greatness” that is being expressed in the text.

There is a return of the arpeggated cluster chords in measure 19 through the end of this phrase in measure 27 which sets the listener back into a “dream like” state. The alto voice begins this phrase in one key and then the second soprano voice joins the alto moving into a different key which is leading to when the first soprano joins in a completely different tonal center, but all singing the same text of “Great things the Lord will do for us.” This builds up to when all the voices are singing in harmony together and completing the phrase with, “we shall rejoice.”

The treble voice come together and sing in unison again at the pick up to measure 28 through the top of page eight at measure 30 with the repetition of the text, *shuvah Adonai*, restore, O God. This simple message of the text is emphasized and made clearer by having all the voice sing in unison. The piano accompaniment changes here from the cluster chord figures to a fuller harmonic support throughout this phrase. Beginning in measure 30, the voices split into three part harmony to finish the rest of the phrase which is a metaphor for restoration.

There is a quick change in the accompaniment back to the arpeggated cluster chords at the pick up to measure 33 through the end of this phrase at measure 37. At the same time, the voices return back to singing in unison for the first half of the text of “They who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy,” until the top of page nine where there is a split into harmony. The phrase ends with the two soprano voices in unison in harmony with the alto voice, which is building up to the last phrase of the psalm.

In measure 37 begins the gradual rise to the peak of the piece with the forward motion of the rhythm and the fuller harmony of both voices and piano. The text that repeats here is "He walks along and weeps, carrying the seed-bag." The piano accompaniment once again returns back to the arpeggated cluster chords at measure 44 with start of the second half of the last verse, "He will surely come in with songs of joy, carrying his sheaves." This section is has unison singing present, but with counterpoint that each voice is either a beat or half a beat off of the other voice. This adds a dramatic effect that is the final build up to the climax moment when all of the voices are singing together, but in pure harmony without the piano at measure 48. There is no piano suddenly for a drawn out measure and then returns with the final use of the arpeggated cluster chords underneath the final held chord in the women's voices.

Adler combines an "ancient" music quality with modern harmonies in the setting of this psalm. The modern components are the quick change of keys that occur throughout the piece as well as the harmonies used in the treble voices. The use of mixolydian mode and the unison singing gives a chant like character that is a throw back to an "ancient" musical sound. In addition, there are repetitive arpeggated clusters chords throughout the piece in the accompaniment. It serves two functions; it puts the listener in a dream-like state which is consistent with the text particular in verse one and it imitates what we think a harp or lyre during Temple times might have sounded like. He invokes the sounds of musical instruments of the Temple along with the setting of this psalm because this collection of psalms were said by several commentators to have been sung by the Levites ascending the steps of the Temple while playing instruments such as the lyre. I feel that Adler creates a unique psalm setting that is authentic because it hints at

the historical context with the use of “ancient” sounds, but at the same time allows this text to feel relevant today with the use of modern harmonies.

### **Psalm 130: *Mimaamakim* by Lazar Weiner**

This setting of Psalm 130 has a dark quality due to constant dissonance with the use of augmented and diminished chords with sustained extensions. The feeling of being “out of the depths” is made apparent from the very beginning of this setting. This piece is anchored in E flat minor through the majority of the piece, but there are never any clear cadences in this key at almost any point. Weiner also is playing with the Dorian mode due to the interchange of C flat and C natural. The slow triplet pattern in the accompaniment at the beginning of the piece sets up this feeling of sinking into the depths that is suddenly broken with vocal line calling out to the listener because it begins the text in dissonance and continues throughout.

There are also many instances where not only harmonies are dissonant, but the rhythmic patterns of the voice are in contrast with the accompaniment as in measures 6-9 with the text, “Lord hearken unto my voice; let thine ears be attentive to voice of my supplications.” It demonstrates how distance the psalmist feels from God because they are not “in tune” with each other. The sense of calling out is present through the first page of the piece all the way until halfway through the second page culminating in “O Lord, who could stand?” with the large interval in the voice and the dramatic accompaniment underneath.

The tone of the piece changes at the third system of the second page with the text, "For with Thee there is forgiveness, that Thou mayest be feared," because the psalmist is no longer calling out to God or dwelling his wrongdoings, but now remembering that God will forgive. The key of this section changes to F major. While a subtle dissonance remains, there is a hint of resolution with the B augmented seventh chord at "is forgiveness," moving into B flat major seventh chord at "Thou mayest" into B augmented eleventh chord at "be feared," which finally resolves with F major chord at the end of the phrase at the bottom system of page two. However, this resolution is fleeting because it is only for one beat.

The next section on the bottom system of the second page with the text, "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait," gives a feeling of waiting with minimal accompaniment that has a descending bass line. The second half of this verse, "and in His word do I hope," is a build up to the peak moment of the piece, "My soul waited for the Lord." Weiner highlights "word" with a short melisma that adds a feeling of anticipation as well as changing the next measure to two four to finally arrive at "my soul waited for the Lord." This climax moment sustains a G flat major seventh chord underneath the powerful vocal line.

The repetition of "more than watchmen for the morning" in the second system on page three is treated musically with a sense of cautious hope with the use of G flat major eleventh and F major flat ninth chords sustains in the accompaniment. It is here that there is almost a moment of consonance, but at the same time is in the low range of voice, so it is feels less resolved.

At tempo I in the third system of page three there is a return of the slow triplet pattern, but with an additional bass line. This time when the voice enters, there is no “calling out” musically; instead there is true sound of pleading until the end of the piece. There is a focus on the word, “hope” with a melisma using a similar triplet pattern. Even though the vocal line is hoping and pleading, Weiner leaves this psalm with a feeling of being unresolved with the use of the sustained F note that will not resolve to the tonic of E flat. Instead, the final chord resolves to a C flat chord with extensions. In the end the voice is still calling out to God, but is unresolved in the desire for redemption.

### **Psalm 134: *Old Jerusalem* by Julius Chajes**

In this setting of Psalm 134, Julius Chajes combines a slow, yet grand melody with a dance like Hassidic niggun in order to evoke a feeling of ancient Jerusalem. This piece is written in B minor with the Hassidic niggun in F sharp *Ahavah Rabbah* mode. There is a clear ABA form with an interlude of the Hassidic niggun in between. Chajes creates musical phrases that coincide beautifully with the text.

The first section is the first verse of the psalm, “Behold, bless the Lord all servants of the Lord, who stand in the house of the Lord during the nights.” Here is where the slow and grand melody occurs which paints the image of the Temple priest making a declaration to the people of Israel. In the second verse, “Lift up your hands toward the sanctuary,” he paints the text of *S'u*, “lift up” with the octave leap up and then back

down. It is in this phrase that he introduces the A sharp hinting at F sharp *Ahavah Rabbah* mode at the word, *Kodesh*.

The third verse of the psalm is emphasized with the change of meter to six four, the melismas used, as well as the distinctive interplay of the voice with the accompaniment. Because it is at this point in the text of the psalm, that the priest is offering a blessing to the community, "May the Lord bless you from Zion, the one who makes heaven and earth." This section is building up musically with the forward motion in the accompaniment to the climax of the introduction of the Hassidic niggun.

It is at the top of the third page where the piece is fully in F sharp *Ahavah Rabbah* mode with start of the interlude of the niggun that is from measures 34-65, the majority of the piece. This niggun is dance like and is expressive with a "spiritual" quality to it. This psalm is a succinct psalm with only three verses, but it sums up all the major concerns of the whole collection of 15 psalms. The purpose of the niggun in this setting is to linger with this psalm just a little longer and heighten the spiritual level as the psalmist is about to depart from Zion after having been on this pilgrimage. It has been a journey on this pilgrimage and while the text of the psalm is short, it should not end so quickly. This infectious niggun comes to a grand halt at the top of the last page and returns to the first section back in B minor. At the last word, *baleilot*, it quickly shifts back into F sharp *Ahavah Rabbah* mode with hints of the Hassidic niggun in the accompaniment to end the piece with a grand octave leap in vocal line and a full cadence. The listener should remember the joy of this journey with return to the niggun at the end of the piece.

## 6. Conclusion

Psalms 121, 122, 126, 130 and 134 are only five of the 150 psalms in the Book of Psalms, and yet they capture a variety of emotions. Each psalm has a literal translation, contextual translation and an interpretative understanding that makes it relevant to us today. This project explored the literal, contextual and modern interpretation through music.

Psalm 121 can be interpreted as a dialogue that guides an individual when he or she is insecure. Hugo Chaim Adler effectively creates the sense of dialogue with the use of antiphonal singing. This modern musical setting of the text guides and reassures the listener in way that truly captures the intention of the psalm, which is to promise God's protection and to encourage us to have faith that God will be present in times of uncertainty.

Psalm 122 describes the joy of coming together in Jerusalem. Helen Greenberg composed a complex setting for this psalm; but within its complexity, she creates a mood of peace and tranquility. She does so with the flowing, sweet melody of the piano solo section. The listener cannot help but recognize that this psalm is a prayer for peace among the community of Israel.

Psalm 126 looks towards the future with hope and joy. The theme of *rinah*, shouts of joy, is clearly woven throughout Samuel Adler's setting of this text with the accelerated tempo and joy of three women's voices singing together. This psalm

reassures us that even though times may be difficult now, the seasons will change and one day we will be filled with shouts of joy.

In Psalm 130, the psalmist calls out to God from the depths of despair. Lazar Weiner expresses the feeling of confusion and despair with constant dissonance throughout the piece. His interpretation that the psalm speaks of that which is yet to be resolved, with Israel and still calling out to God with no hope of redemption is not consistent with my study of the text of this psalm. Within the text of Psalm 130, there is a presence of hope that God will be gracious and grant forgiveness.

Psalm 134 rejoices and blesses the community within the sanctuary of the Temple. Julius Chajes captivates a feeling of nostalgic joy with use of the dance like Hassidic niggun and the grandeur of the priest bestowing blessings upon the community of Israel at the Temple.

These five psalm settings are just some examples of how composers can reinterpret the psalms through music. There is a wide range of musical expression of psalms and these five settings capture a few of the possible ways to interpret psalm texts musically. The settings used in this project explore how psalms can be interpreted in the styles of Chassidic melody, art song and choral music. Other approaches include *Chazzanut* and Sephardic melody which are in more of a chanted style. Those styles are primarily built on understanding a psalm through the context of how it is woven throughout the liturgy. While there are a wide variety of Jewish musical approaches to interpret psalm texts, each musical style interprets the text of the psalm in different and distinctive way.



# I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes for Cantor, Mixed Choir (SATB) and Organ

Psalm 121

H.C. Adler

Andante cantabile

SOLO (SOPRANO or TENOR)  $\text{♩} = 52$

*mf*

I will lift up mine eyes un-to the moun-tains, from whence shall my help come?

ORGAN (ad lib.) *mp*

CHOIR  $\text{♩} = 69$

S *p*

A *p*

T *p*

B *p*

*p*

Poco mosso  $\text{♩} = 112$

SOLO

*mf*

He will not suf-fer thyfoot to be mov-ed, He that keep-eth thee will not slum - ber.

*mf*

*rit. -----*

*rit. - - -*

CHOIR Tempo I  $\text{♩} = 76$  *poco rit.* - - -

S doth neither slum-ber nor sleep.

A Be - hold, He that keep-eth Is-ra-el doth nei - ther slum-ber nor sleep

T Be - hold, He that keep-eth Is-ra-el doth nei - ther slum-ber nor sleep

B Be - hold, He that keep-eth Is-ra-el doth nor sleep.

SOLO *a tempo*

S The Lord is thy keep -

A The Lord is thy shade up - on thy right hand.

T The Lord is thy shade up - on thy right hand.

B The Lord is thy shade up - on thy right hand.

SOLO  $\text{♩} = 112$  *rit.*

S The sun shall not smite thee by day and the moon by night.

CHOIR  $\text{♩} = 80$   
*p* *meno* *pp*

The Lord shall keep thee from all e - vil, He shall keep thy  
The Lord shall keep thee from all e - vil, He shall keep thy  
The Lord shall keep thee from e - vil, He shall keep thy

SOLO *f*

The Lord shall guard thy go - ing out and thy com - ing in.  
From  
From  
From  
From

S  
A  
T  
B

this time forth and for - ev - er and for - ev - er

this time forth and for - ev - er and for - ev - er

this time forth and for - ev - er and for - ev - er

S  
A  
T  
B

*ff* and for - ev - er. *rit.*

*ff* and for - ev - er.

*ff* and for - ev - er.

# Sha-alu Shalom Yerushalayim

Psalm 122 Verse 1 - 2, 6 - 9

Music by Helen Greenberg

Duration: ca 4 1/4 min.

With Inner Joy And Awe  $\text{♩} = 48 \text{ca}$

*mf* < > *mp* *mf*

Sa - mach-ti b'-om - rim il beit A - do - nai nei -

*mp*

*p* *p*

leich: Om - dot ha-yu rag - lei - nu bish - a -

*mp* *cresc.* *poco rit.*  $\text{♩} = 80 \text{ca}$  *mf*

ra-yich Y'-ru-sha - la-yim: Sha - a - lu sha - lom Y'-ru-sha -

*cresc.* *poco rit.* *mp*

*con pedale*

Sha-alu Shalom Yerushalayim

*mp*  
la - yim yish - - a - lu o - ha - va - yich:

11

*mp cresc.*  
Y' - hi sha - lom b' - chei - leich shal -

16

*mf*  
va b' - ar - - - m' - no - - - ta - yich:

20

*rit.* ♩ = 90 ca

24

Sha-alu Shalom Yerushalayim

28 *mf* *cresc.*

32 *rall.* *Rubato, Legato* *p* *f* *p* *Rubato, Legato* *es ca*  
L' - ma - an a - chai v' - rei -

35 *mp* *p* *cresc.*  
ai a - da - bra na sha - lom, sha - lom sha -

*mf* *(poco)* *sub pp* *cresc.*  
lom bach L' - - - ma - an - beit l' - ma - an - beit A - do -

39 *mf* *(poco)* *sub pp* *p*

Sha-alu Shalom Yerushalayim

*mp* *mf* *f* *rall. ... dim.*

nai E-lo - hei-nu a-va-k' - sha a-va-k' - sha a-va-k' -

42

*poco* *p* *ca*

sha tov lach: Sha-a - lu sha - lom Y' - ru-sha -

46

*mp*

la - yim yish - - a - lu o-ha - va - yich:

50

*mf*

Y' - hi sha - lom b' - chei - leich shal -

55

Sha-alu Shalom Yerushalayim

*mp* *cresc.* *mf* *poco rit.*

va - b' - ar - - - m' - no - - - ta - yich:

*p* *cresc.* *mp*

*♩ = 80 ca*

*mf* *dim.* *rall. ...*

*rall. ...*

*Rubato, Legato* *♩ = esca* *pp* *p* *mp dim.*

*♩ = esca* L' - ma - an a - chai v' - rei - ai a - da - bra na sha - lom, shi

*pp sempre legato* *mp* *p*

Sha-alu Shalom Yerushalayim

*pp*

lom — sha - lom.

*pp* *pp* *mp* *pp*

77

The image shows a musical score for the piece 'Sha-alu Shalom Yerushalayim'. It consists of three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a time signature of 4/4. The lyrics 'lom — sha - lom.' are written below the notes. The middle and bottom staves are for piano accompaniment, with the middle staff in treble clef and the bottom staff in bass clef. The piano part features dynamic markings: *pp* (pianissimo) at the beginning, *pp* and *mp* (mezzo-piano) in the middle section, and *pp* at the end. The piano accompaniment includes chords and melodic lines in both hands. The number '77' is printed at the bottom left of the piano part.

# Shir Hama'alot

## Psalm 126

For Three-Part Treble Choir and Piano

Gates of Prayer, p. 608

Samuel Adler

With great verve and enthusiasm

$\text{♩} = 120$

Piano

Sop. 1

Sop. 2

Alto

Shir ha - ma - a - lot, — shir ha - ma - a - lot, shir ha - ma - a - lot, —

Shir ha - ma - a - lot, — shir ha - ma - a - lot, shir ha - ma - a - lot, —

Shir ha - ma - a - lot, — shir ha - ma - a - lot, shir ha - ma - a - lot, —

\* Sustain the pedal throughout the measure

Copyright © 1994 by Transcontinental Music Publications, 838 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10021  
All Rights Reserved including the Right of Public Performance for Profit  
International Copyright Secured Printed in U.S.A.

Note: It is a violation of U.S. Copyright Law to reproduce copies of this composition in whole or in part by any means whatsoever.

991349-9

7

Sop. 1  
shir ha - ma - a - lot b' - shuv A - do - nai et shi - vat tsi - yon ha - yi - nu -

Sop. 2  
shir ha - ma - a - lot b' - shuv A - do - nai et shi - vat tsi - yon ha - yi - nu -

Alto  
shir ha - ma - a - lot b' - shuv A - do - nai et shi - vat tsi - yon ha - yi - nu -

8<sup>va</sup>

10

Sop. 1  
— k' - chol - mim. Az y' - ma - le s' - chok — pi - nu ul' - sho - nei - nu ri -

Sop. 2  
— k' - chol - mim. Az y' - ma - le s' - chok — pi - nu ul' - sho - nei - nu ri -

Alto  
— k' - chol - mim. Az y' - ma - le s' - chok — pi - nu ul' - sho - nei - nu ri -

(8<sup>va</sup>)

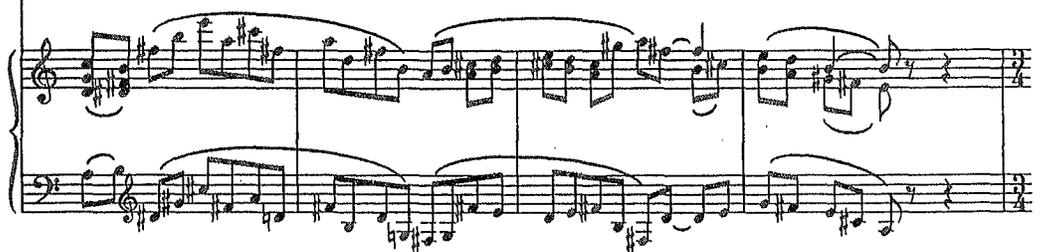
*ff* *f*

14 *ff*

Sop. 1 nah— Az yom - ru ba - go - yim hig - dil A - do - nai — la'a - sot —

Sop. 2 *ff* nah— Az yom - ru ba - go - yim hig - dil — A - do - nai — la'a - sot —

Alto *ff* nah— Az yom - ru ba - go - yim hig - dil — A - do - nai — la'a - sot —



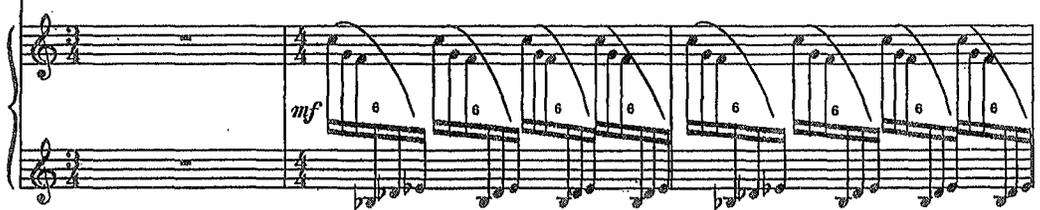
Piano accompaniment for measures 14-17, featuring arpeggiated chords in the right hand and a steady bass line in the left hand.

18

Sop. 1 — im ei - leh.

Sop. 2 — im ei - leh.

Alto *mf* — im ei - leh. Hig - dil A - do - nai la'a -



Piano accompaniment for measures 18-21, featuring a melodic line in the right hand with sixteenth-note patterns and a bass line in the left hand.

21

Sop. 1

Sop. 2

Alto

*f*

Hig - dil A - do - nai la'a -

sot i - ma - nu, hig - dil A - do - nai la'a -

23

Sop. 1

Sop. 2

Alto

*f*

Hig - dil A - do - nai la'a -

sot i - ma - nu, hig - dil A - do -

sot i - ma - nu,

25

Sop. 1  
sot i - ma - nu, ha - yi - nu, ha - yi - nu s' - mei -

Sop. 2  
nai ——— laa - sot i - ma - nu ——— ha - yi - nu s' - mei -

Alto  
*f*  
hig - dil A - do - nai ——— ha - yi - nu, ha - yi - nu s' - mei -

27

Sop. 1  
*mp* chim. Shu - vah, ——— *mf* shu - vah A - do - nai, shu - vah, ———

Sop. 2  
*mp* chim. Shu - vah, ——— *mf* shu - vah A - do - nai, shu - vah, ———

Alto  
*mp* chim. Shu - vah, ——— *mf* shu - vah A - do - nai, shu - vah, ———

*sm*

30 *f*

Sop. 1  
shu-vah A-do - nal et sh' - vi - tel - nu ka - a - fi - kim ba - ne - gev.

Sop. 2  
shu-vah A-do - nal et sh' - vi - tel - nu ka - a - fi - kim ba - ne - gev.

Alto  
shu-vah A-do - nal et sh' - vi - tel - nu ka - a - fi - kim ba - ne - gev.

33 *mf* *f*

Sop. 1  
Ha - zor - im b' - dim - ah, ha - zor - im b' -

Sop. 2  
Ha - zor - im b' - dim - ah, ha - zor - im b' -

Alto  
Ha - zor - im b' - dim - ah, ha - zor - im b' -

*f* *mf*

35

p. 1  
dim - ah, ha - zor - im b' - dim - ah b' - ri - nah yik -

p. 2  
dim - ah, ha - zor - im b' - dim - ah b' - ri - nah yik -

o  
dim - ah, ha - zor - im b' - dim - ah b' - ri - nah yik -

37

op. 1  
tso - ru. Ha - loch yei - lech u - va - choh, ha - loch

op. 2  
tso - ru. Ha - loch yei - lech u - va - choh, ha - loch

lto  
tso - ru. Ha - loch yei - lech u - va - choh, ha - loch

*ff*

40

Sop. 1  
yei - lech u - va - choh — no - sei — me - shech ha -

Sop. 2  
yei - lech u - va - choh — no - sei — me - shech ha -

Alto  
yei - lech u - va - choh — no - sei — me - shech ha -

43

Sop. 1  
zo - ra Bo ya - vo v' - ri -

Sop. 2  
zo - ra Bo ya - vo v' -

Alto  
zo - ra Bo ya -

45 *ff* *poco rit.* -----

1op. 1  
nah, bo ya - vo v' - ri - nah no - sei, no - sei a -

1op. 2  
ri - nah, bo ya - vo v' - ri - nah no - sei, no - sei a -

lto  
vo v' - ri - nah, bo ya - vo v' - ri - nah no - sei, no - sei a -

48 ----- *Tempo I*

1op. 1  
lu - mo - tav.

1op. 2  
lu - mo - tav.

lto  
lu - mo - tav.

*Tempo I*

Commissioned by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
in honor of its Centennial 1973 - 5733

To Sarah - Naomi

# Mimaamakim

Psalm 130

(OUT OF THE DEPTHS)  
Voice and Piano (Organ)

LAZAR WEINER

Very slow ♩ = 54

Mi ma - a - ma - kim k' - ro -

El - chA - do - noy. Lord, heark - en un - to my

voice; Let Thine ears be at - ten - tive To the voice of

TV - 543

© Copyright 1973 by Transcontinental Music Publications, 1874 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10019  
All Rights Reserved Including the Right of Public Performance for Profit.

International Copyright Secured

Printed in U.S.A.

my sup-pli - ca - tions. If Thou, — Lord, — should'st mark in-iq - ui-

ties, O Lord, — who could stand? —

*cresc.*

For with Thee — there is for - give - ness, That Thou may - est be feared. —

*mf*

I wait for the Lord, my soul — doth wait, And in His

*poco a --*

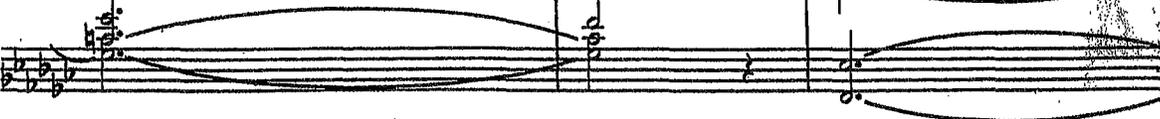
--- poco cresc.



word \_\_\_\_\_ do I hope... My soul wait - ed for the Lord, \_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_ More than the watch-men for the morn - ing; Yea, more than



(poco rit.)

Tempo I

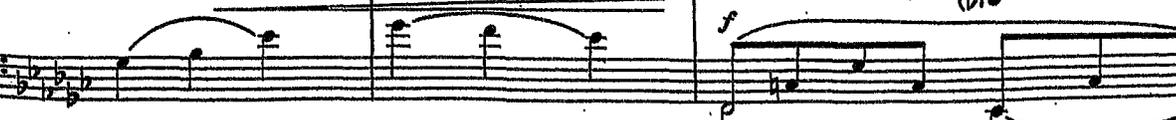


watch-men for the morn - ing.

O Is - ra - el,



hope \_\_\_\_\_ in the Lord; For with the Lord there is



mer - cy, And with Him — is plen - te - ous re - demp - tion. And

He — will re-deem Is - ra - el From all —

his in - iq - ui - ties.

# OLD JERUSALEM

(Psalm 134)

Sandy

JULIUS CHAI

Tranquillo

Soprano

Hin - neh bar'chu et a - do - nay kol av - dei a -

do - nay ha - om - dim b'veit a - do -

nay ba - lei - lot. S' - u ye - dei - chem

SP 22

\*Orchestration available.

NOTE: A Transcription of this Song for Violin or 'Cello and Piano is published under the title "The Chassid."

© Copyright 1975 by Transcontinental Music Publications, 1674 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10019  
All Rights Reserved Including the Right of Public Performance for Profit

International Copyright Secured

ko - desh, s' - u ye - dei - chem ko - desh

The first system consists of a vocal line on a single staff and a piano accompaniment on two staves. The vocal line begins with a melodic phrase in G major, marked with a '2' above it. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and a more active treble line.

va - ra - chu et a - do - nay. Ye - va - re - ch' cha. a -

The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has a more complex melodic structure with some grace notes. The piano accompaniment maintains its rhythmic pattern.

nay mi - tsi - on o - seh sha - ma -

The third system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The piano accompaniment has a more intricate texture with many sixteenth notes in the treble and bass.

yim va - a

*dim.*

*poco rit.*

The fourth system concludes the piece. The vocal line is simple. The piano accompaniment features several triplet figures in the bass line. The system ends with a *poco rit.* marking and a final cadence.

*poco più mosso*

rets.

*pp*

3

*p*

Bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam,

*p*

bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam,

*mf*  
yam, bam, bam, yam; bam, bam, bi - ri - bam. ————— Ya-ba-bam, bam, ya-ba-bam,

*mf più animato e cresc.*

ya-ba-bam, bam, bam, ya - ba-bam, bam, ya - ba-bam, bam, ya-ba-bam, bam, bam,

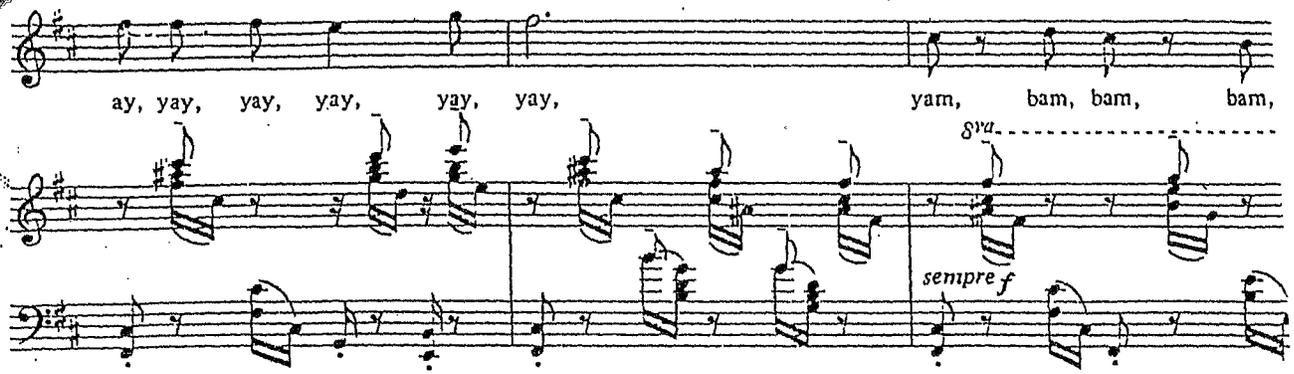
ya - ba-bam, bam, ya - ba-bam, bam, ya - ba-bam, bam, bam, yam, bam, bam, yam, bam, bam,

bi - ri - bam. ————— Ay, yay, yay, yay,

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*

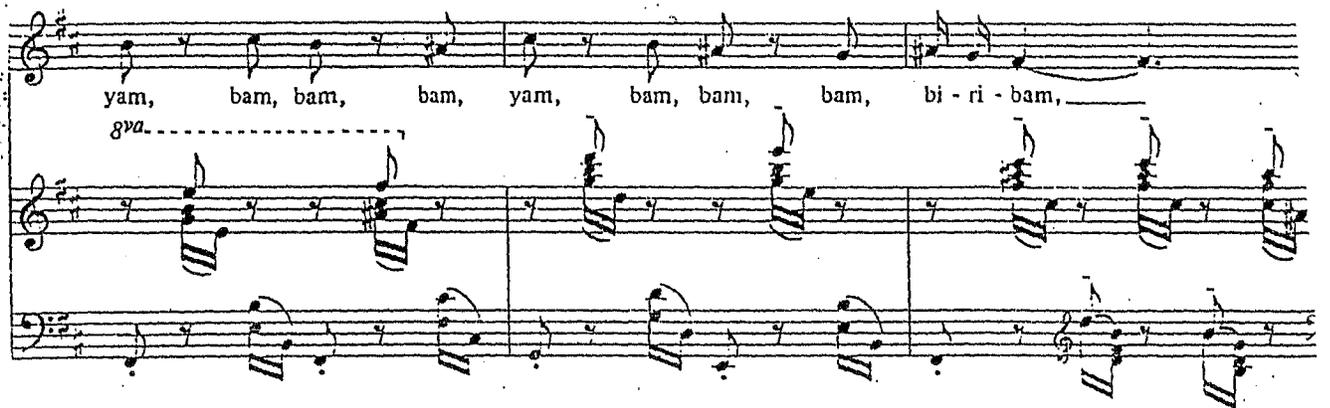


ay, yay, yay, yay, yay, yay, yam, bam, bam, bam,

*gva*

*sempre f*

This system contains the first three staves of music. The vocal line (top staff) has lyrics 'ay, yay, yay, yay, yay, yay, yam, bam, bam, bam,'. The piano accompaniment (middle and bottom staves) features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. Performance markings include 'gva' (glissando) and 'sempre f' (always forte).



yam, bam, bam, bam, yam, bam, bam, bam, bi-ri-bam,

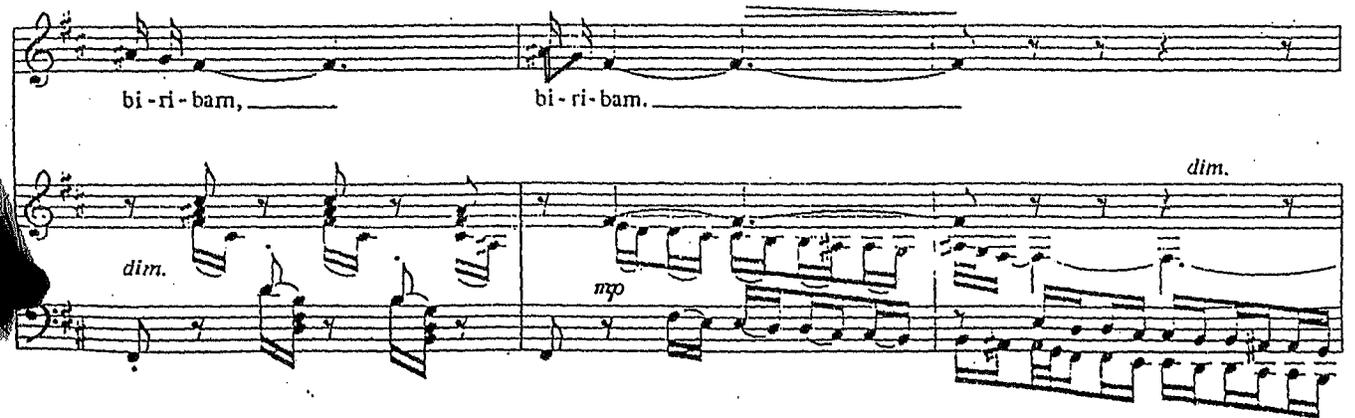
*gva*

This system contains the next three staves. The vocal line has lyrics 'yam, bam, bam, bam, yam, bam, bam, bam, bi-ri-bam,'. The piano accompaniment continues with the same rhythmic pattern. A 'gva' marking is present at the beginning of the system.



yam, bam, bam. bam, yam, bam, bam, bam, yam. bam, bam, bam,

This system contains the next three staves. The vocal line has lyrics 'yam, bam, bam. bam, yam, bam, bam, bam, yam. bam, bam, bam,'. The piano accompaniment continues with the same rhythmic pattern.



bi-ri-bam, \_\_\_\_\_ bi-ri-bam. \_\_\_\_\_

*dim.*

*mp*

*dim.*

This system contains the final three staves. The vocal line has lyrics 'bi-ri-bam, \_\_\_\_\_ bi-ri-bam. \_\_\_\_\_'. The piano accompaniment features a more complex rhythmic pattern with sixteenth notes. Performance markings include 'dim.' (diminuendo) and 'mp' (mezzo-piano).

Hin - neh bar'-chu et a - do - nay kol

av - dei a - do - nay ha - om dim

b'veit a - do - nay bu - lei - lot.

*pp poco più mosso*

*ppp*

*dim. e morendo* *ppp*

Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, who stand in the house of the Lord in the night seasons. Lift up your hands towards the sanctuary, and bless ye the Lord. The Lord bless thee out of Zion; even he that made heaven and earth.

הגדו ברכו אלהינו קלעבדו וְ הַקְטִיבוּ  
 בְּבֵית יְיָ בַּלַּיְלוֹת : שִׁבְחוּהוּ : הַלְלוּהוּ וְרַבְּדוּ אֱתֵינוּ : וְהִקְדוּ  
 וְ סִבְּחוּ עִלְיָהּ שָׁמַיִם וְאָרֶץ :

## Bibliography

- Alter, Robert. *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007.
- Crow, Loren D. *The Songs of Ascents: Their Place in Israelite History and Religion*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996.
- Clines, David J.A. ed. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* vol.6. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007.
- Hakham, Amos. *The Bible Psalms with the Jerusalem Commentary: Psalms 101-150* vol. 3. Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, (2003): 286-7.
- Herzog, Avigdor. "Book of Psalms." *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Vol. 16. Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., (2007): 663-682.
- JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and The New JPS Translations*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999.
- Koehler, Ludwig and Walter Baumgartner. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* vol. 3 and 4. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
- Kraus, Hans-Joachim *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*. trans.by Hilton C. Oswald. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989.
- Limburg, James. "Book of Psalms." *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, ed. by David Noel Freedman. New York: Doubleday, (1992): 522-536.
- Marx, Jacqueline. "Shir ha Ma'a lot." MSM Thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1997.
- The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 4. Nashville: Abigdon Press, 1997.
- Rosenberg, Rabbi A.J. *Mikraoth Gedoloth: Psalms A New English Translation* vol. 3. New York: The Judaica Press, 2001.
- Schaefer, Konrad. *Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narratives and Poetry: Psalms*, ed. by David W. Cotter. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001.
- Seebass, Bonn. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* vol. 9, trans. by David E. Green. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.
- Zobel. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* vol. 5. trans.by David E. Green. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.