FESTIVAL HALLEL: CREATIVE RETREIVAL AND RITUAL INNOVATION

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Elizabeth P.G. Hirsch
Thesis Summary Page
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This thesis, *Festival Hallel: Creative Retrieval and Ritual Innovation*, includes five chapters and an introduction:

Introduction
Chapter 1: Annotated Translations, Structural Outlines, and Literary Analyses
Chapter 2: Origins of Hallel as a Liturgical Unit
Chapter 3: Creativity and Liturgical Change in Reform Jewish Liturgy
Chapter 4: Creative Interpretation of Egyptian Hallel for Passover Festival Services
Chapter 5: Conclusions

Chapter 1 is further subdivided into an annotated translation of Pss. 113-118, a structural outline for each psalm, and a literary analysis of each psalm. Chapter 2 discusses the development of the Egyptian Hallel unit based on rabbinic sources, and addresses its use in Reform liturgy today. Chapter 3 is further subdivided as follows:

I. Origins of liturgical change in Reform liturgy
II. Feminism: a Case Study for Liturgical Change
III. The Case for Creative Retrieval
IV. Creative Retrieval of Hallel Liturgy: My Methodology

Chapter 4 introduces, contextualizes, and includes my creative interpretations of two of the Hallel psalms, Pss. 117 and 118. Chapter 5 draws conclusions from the thesis as a whole and points to areas of future research.

The goal of the thesis was to study the Egyptian Hallel Psalms (Pss. 113-118), both in their original context and as a distinct unit of liturgy. This thesis contributes to the field by providing close annotated translations, structural outlines, and literary analyses of Pss. 113-118. This thesis also contributes to the study of creative retrieval and the liturgical change process in the Reform movement, citing successful examples and distilling principles accordingly. Finally, the thesis offers examples of creative interpretations of Pss. 117 and 118.

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Introduction

In *Liberating Rites,* Tom Driver quotes Stanely Walens, who claims that "to perform a ritual the same way twice is to kill it…"[1] Reform Judaism is a movement of change and exploration, so such a statement naturally supports our creative worship endeavors and experimentations. Change promotes interest, excitement, spontaneous response, and genuine expression. However, to change eternally and incessantly is jarring for everyone involved, leaders and participants alike. Without certain constants, we cannot utilize ritual for its ultimate purpose of building and strengthening community. Without a commitment to change, ritual will stagnate.

As a Reform rabbi and ritual leader, it is my sacred responsibility to dance between these two poles of consistency and change. Walens' words continue: while performing "a ritual the same way twice is to kill it," we can learn from the continuation of his words to understand this sentiment: "for the ritual grows as we grow, its life recapitulates the course of ours." In this thesis, I explore liturgical creativity through the lens of the Egyptian Festival Hallel. Through this work, I hope to inspire liturgical change in our communities, inviting ritual growth and change.

The general term Hallel refers to various selections from the book of Psalms when utilized in liturgy. There are several variations on this general unit. The full Hallel, recited during the festivals of Sukkot, Passover, and Shavuot and on the holiday of Chanukah, consists of psalms 113-118.[2] The this set of psalms, *Hallel Hamitsri*, or "The Egyptian Hallel," appears during *shacharit* (morning) synagogue

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[1] Tom F. Driver, *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 185.

[2] "Hallel," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, second edition, vol. 8 (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference, 2007), 280.

services on Sukkot, Shavuot, Chanukah, and Passover, as well as at home at the seder

during Passover; many note the name for this unit derives from the first verse of

psalm 114. The Daily Hallel, psalms 145-150, are recited during the preliminary

P'seukei D'zimrah portion of daily morning services, and the *Hallel Hagadol,* or

"Great Hallel," consists of Psalm 136 and appears during the Passover seder.[3] The

final variation is *Hetzi Hallel,* or the Half Hallel, which consists of the *Hallel*

Hamitsri excluding psalms 115:1-11 and 116:11-11. The Half Hallel is recited on

Rosh Chodesh, the first day of each Hebrew month, and on the last six days of

Passover. Some communities include *Hallel Hamitsri* in morning services on Yom

Ha'atzmaut, Israeli Independence Day.[4]

Scholars believe the term psalm, derived from the Latin "Liber Psalmorum," is a

translation of the Hebrew word *mizmor,* "song," or "melody," which appears frequently

throughout this book of the Bible. *Sefer Tehillim*[5] is the Hebrew name for this book,

which is further divided in five books or sections. The book is an anthology 150 poems,

with some variations in the number reflected in the Jerusalem Talmud and elsewhere,

largely dependent how certain psalms are divided or combined.[6] The Hallel psalms

appear in the fifth and final division of the book of Psalms. The word *halleluyah* ("Praise

God") distinguishes this broader unit (Pss. 107-150); it appears almost exclusively in this

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[3] Lawrence A. Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah,* vol. 2 (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008), 97.

[4] "Hallel." *Encyclopedia Judaica,* 280.

[5] See B.T. Bava Batra 14b for the original source of this name.

[6] Benjamin Segal, *A New Psalm: The Psalms as Literature* (Springfield, NJ : Gefen Books, 2013), Kindle Edition.

division of the book of Psalms and no where else in the Bible.[7] Ten psalms in the fifth

book begin with the word *halleluyah*: Pss. 106, 111-113, 135, 146–150; thirteen psalms

conclude with *halleluyah*: Pss. 104-106, 113, 115-117, 135, 146-150.[8] Of the Hallel

psalms, Pss. 113, 115, 116, and 117 include the word halleluyah; Pss. 114 and 118 do not.

Regarding the authorship of the book of Psalms, Walter Brueggemann and

William H. Bellinger, Jr. explain:

> Through the centuries a number of readers have taken…references to David as
> indications of authorship, but the preposition used with the famous royal name carries
> a wide variety of meanings, such as "dedicated to," "on behalf of," or "belonging to."
> It is best to take these references and other texts in the Hebrew scriptures that connect
> David with the Psalms in terms of a tradition of David as the patron or primary
> sponsor of psalmody in ancient Israel and the royal figure who authorized worship
> and its use of psalms in Jerusalem. A helpful analogy is the connection of King James
> I to the King James Version of the Bible.[9]

As for dating this biblical book, Robert Alter holds that the editors of the book of Psalms

redacted it during the Second Temple period, between the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.

While "[w]e have no precise knowledge about the identity of the editors…the usual

suspects—priestly circles in Jerusalem—seem plausible candidates, because they would

have had a particular interest in making the psalms authoritatively available for use in

worship."[10]

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[7] "Psalms," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, second edition, vol. 16 (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference, 2007), 665.

[8] Nahum M. Sarna, "Hallelujah," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, second edition, vol. 8 (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference, 2007), 280.

[9] Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Kindle Edition.

[10] Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2009), Kindle Edition.

Brueggemann and Bellinger offer a slight nuance to this perspective, noting that "not all interpreters today would emphasize the cultic setting the Psalms…still, most interpreters would agree that cult stands in the background of many psalms, and often this generative cult relates to the Jerusalem temple…"[11] Benjamin Segal further notes that "the book of Psalms is incredibly diverse, as different psalmists from different circles in different times confronted different situations, each poet individually."[12] We will see such diversity even in the limited selection of the Hallel psalms.

Delving into the translation, meaning, and themes of these psalms has informed my understanding of the Egyptian Hallel as a unit. In chapter one, I have written an annotated translation, structural outline, and literary analysis for each of the Hallel psalms. In my literary analysis, Robert Alter, Benjamin Segal, Konrad Schaefer, and Walter Brueggemann and William Bellinger were among the key commentators I utilized. Informed by a close analysis of the biblical text, in my second chapter, I explore how Psalms 113-118 developed into one of the oldest fixed liturgical units. As Dr. Lawrence Hoffman explains, "we hear about [Hallel] first with regard to the practice of Yose bar Chalafta, a second-century Rabbi, who is reported as saying, 'May my lot be among those who complete a *Hallel,* every day.'"[13] I will trace the development of the Hallel unit and consider its use in the current Reform movement *siddur*, *Mishkan T'filah.*

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[11] Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms.*

[12] Segal, *New Psalm.*

[13] Lawrence A. Hoffman, "Introduction to the Liturgy," in *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries,* vol. 3, L. Hoffman, ed. (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999), 7.

In my third chapter, I consider liturgical creativity, specifically investigating when creative liturgical interventions are successful and when they are not. Debbie Friedman's *Mi Shebeirach* is my key example of a successful creative liturgical development in the Reform movement and beyond in recent years. I propose that Reform Jews will more readily adopt a liturgical innovation made on a prayer with which they are less familiar, as there is little prior context for the prayer. Based on this analysis of successful creative liturgical change, I propose adapting Hallel in a variety of creative ways that clergy could employ in a communal worship setting. In my fourth chapter, I outline these creative interpretations of Hallel, which I will pilot at a service in the HUC-JIR chapel in March 2015. I offer conclusions and areas for further research in chapter 5.

Chapter 1: Annotated Translations, Structural Outlines, and Literary Analyses

I. Annotated Translations

Psalm 113

הַלְלוּ יָהּ
הַלְלוּ עַבְדֵי יְהוָה
הַלְלוּ אֶת-שֵׁם יְהוָה :

Praise God!
Praise, worshippers of the Eternal;
Praise the name of the Eternal.

הַלְלוּיָהּ This term of praise appears only in the book of Psalms, with the majority of the occurrences in the fifth book of the Psalter. Ten psalms begin with the word *Halleluyah*, including this pslam: Pss. 106, 111, 112, 113, 135, 146–150.

עַבְדֵי יְהוָה I chose to translate this phrase as "worshippers" because it appears in cultic temple settings when tied to יהוה, אל, or other gods (see Pss. 134:1, 135:1). The usage here is strongly linked to these psalms, where the worshippers of the Eternal are identified as those "who stand each night in the house the Eternal" (Ps. 134:1) and those "who stand…in the courts of the house of our God" (Ps. 135:2). The term is not exclusive to worship of יהוה and is also used to describe the temple worshippers of Baal in 2 Kings 10:23.

שֵׁם יְהוָה See note at Ps. 115:1.

יְהִי שֵׁם יְהוָה מְבֹרָךְ
מֵעַתָּה וְעַד-עוֹלָם :

May the name of the Eternal be blessed,
from now until eternity.

יְהִי שֵׁם יְהוָה מְבֹרָךְ The only exact parallel of this phrase appears in Job 1:21, when Job uses these four words to conclude the acceptance of his God-given fate. A close Aramaic parallel appears in Daniel 2:20, which is the basis for the Kaddish liturgy. While this phrase may not be liturgical in its original context, it certainly takes on this resonance in later usage.

מֵעַתָּה וְעַד-עוֹלָם This phrase also appears in Ps. 115:18, an example of a verbal linkage among the Hallel Psalms.

מִמִּזְרַח-שֶׁמֶשׁ עַד-מְבוֹאוֹ
מְהֻלָּל שֵׁם יְהוָה :

*From the [place of] the rising sun to its setting
the name of the Eternal is praised.*

מִמִּזְרַח-שֶׁמֶשׁ עַד-מְבוֹאוֹ My initial instinct was to continue with the temporal focus of previous verse and render this phrase as "from the rising of the sun until its setting." However, Malachi 1:11 clearly indicates that this is a spatial merism, indicating that the Eternal name is praised in all the places that sunlight touches through the use of the phrase "in every place" in conjunction with this phrase, as offerings are made in every place: כִּי מִמִּזְרַח-שֶׁמֶשׁ וְעַד-מְבוֹאוֹ, גָּדוֹל שְׁמִי בַּגּוֹיִם, וּבְכָל-מָקוֹם מֻקְטָר מֻגָּשׁ לִשְׁמִי. In this regard, I

agree with Alter that together, 113:2-3 indicate that the Eternal rules over every time and every place.

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113:4
רָם עַל-כָּל-גּוֹיִם יְהוָה
עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם כְּבוֹדוֹ :

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The Eternal is elevated above all the nations,
[the Eternal's] presence is above the heavens.

רָם I selected the more spatial and literal rendering, "elevated," rather than "exalted," used in the JPS translation. This image and wording are similarly found in Ps. 138:6, which also reflects 113:6, in that the Eternal lowers from this elevated spot to regard those below. This same word is used as an epithet for God in Isaiah 57:15, in which verse God is also described as dwelling in an "elevated and holy place" utilizing the same root.

כְּבוֹדוֹ In Ps. 7:6, this word is used to describe the human narrator's body, which raises the question, does God have a body as well that is referenced in this verse? Additionally, when Moses asks to see God's כבוד in Exodus 33:18, God says Moses cannot see the face of God. After safely securing Moses in the cleft of a rock, the same כבוד of God passes by Moses, and God says Moses has seen God's back rather than God's face (33:23). In much of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, God's כבוד is spatially associated with the tent of meeting (c.f. Exodus 40:34-35; Leviticus 9:6 and 9:23; Numbers 14:10); here, we see that God's כבוד can also be found in the heavens. I selected "presence" because it indicates a physical placement with a metaphysical overtone, indicating but not exclusively demanding that God appear in any sort of bodily form. A presence is felt more than it is tangibly or concretely observed.

מִי כַּיהֹוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ
הַמַּגְבִּיהִי לָשָׁבֶת :

Who is like the Eternal our God,
the One who is seated on high,

מִי כַּיהֹוָה This verse opens with a rhetorical question to emphasize the incomparability of the Eternal to other gods. This verse reflects the on-going transition from polytheism to monotheism in the biblical narrative, which we can also observe in Ps. 71:19; Isaiah 40:26; Exodus 15:11; and Deuteronomy 3:24.

הַמַּגְבִּיהִי As with הַמַּשְׁפִּילִי in the following verse, this is an archaic form of the common root ג.ב.ה.; both the extraneous ה and י. However, a true archaic form would not appear with the article ה at its beginning; S. David Sperling believes this to be an attempt by the author to make the psalm seem older than it actually is.[14]

113:6

הַמַּשְׁפִּילִי לִרְאוֹת
בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ :

the One who lowers to see
into the heavens and the earth.

הַמַּשְׁפִּילִי לִרְאוֹת God also goes down to earth in order to see what is going on in both Genesis 11:5 and 18:21. This emphasizes again the physical elevation of God's presence cited in the first half of the psalm, in direct contrast to the description of God's physical position in the preceding verse.

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[14] S. David Sperling, "Hallel Psalms," Class Notes, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, NY, Spring 2014.

מְקִימִי מֵעָפָר דָּל
מֵאַשְׁפֹּת יָרִים אֶבְיוֹן :

Who raises the poor from the dust,
lifts the needy from the trash heap

מְקִימִי ... Verses 7-9 present a strong parallel to Hannah's prayer (c.f. I Samuel 2:5-8) in several ways. We see the verbs יָרִים/מוֹרִיד in both contexts. The concept and language around elevating the poor and needy in this verse and verse 8 are nearly identical to I Samuel 2:8a. The reference to the barren woman in Ps. 113:9 and I Samuel 2:5 is yet another link. Berlin and Brettler indicate that Hannah's prayer and this psalm resemble to one another.[15]

מֵאַשְׁפֹּת This is the singular form; see Lamentations 4:5 for the plural form.

לְהוֹשִׁיבִי עִם-נְדִיבִים
עִם נְדִיבֵי עַמּוֹ :

to seat him with the princes,
with the princes of his people

נְדִיבִים From the root נ.ד.ב., meaning generous. This is a person who has a high social rank and is able to give.

לְהוֹשִׁיבִי Some believe this is a scribal error, should be לְהוֹשִׁיבוּ. It is possible that the scribe copied the ending from the archaic forms above, or that an author or scribe added the י as a poetic flourish.

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[15] Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, "Psalms," in *The Jewish Study Bible,* Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1410.

מוֹשִׁיבִי עֲקֶרֶת הַבַּיִת
אֵם-הַבָּנִים שְׂמֵחָה
הַלְלוּ יָהּ :

Who sets the happy mother of children
in the innermost parts of the house:
Praise God!

עֲקֶרֶת הַבַּיִת Alter prefers "who seats the barren woman in her home." However, Sperling

offers a compelling alternative from the parallel verse Ps. 128:3, which indicates that this

is actually a women בְּיַרְכְּתֵי בֵיתֶךָ - in the innermost parts of the house giving birth to

children.

Psalm 114

בְּצֵאת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם
בֵּית יַעֲקֹב מֵעַם לֹעֵז :

At the people Israel's departure from Egypt,
the house of Jacob from a people with an incomprehensible language,

בְּצֵאת יִשְׂרָאֵל, מִמִּצְרָיִם This psalm gives the festival Hallel unit the name "Egyptian Hallel,"
despite the fact that it is the only psalm in this collection that explicitly mentions the
Exodus.

לֹעֵז This word is a hapax legomenon. According to Alter, it corresponds to the Greek
terms "barbarous" and "barbaric." In commenting on the use of the phrase עַם נוֹעָז in
Isaiah 33:19, Rashi attests that the usage of לֹעֵז here represents a lamed-nun interchange,
allowing for the translation of "incomprehensible" because of the reference to a עַם עִמְקֵי
שָׂפָה מִשְּׁמוֹעַ, נִלְעַג לָשׁוֹן אֵין בִּינָה — "a people of a speech too obscure to comprehend, so
stammering of tongue they are not understood" in the Isaiah verse.

הָיְתָה יְהוּדָה לְקָדְשׁוֹ
יִשְׂרָאֵל מַמְשְׁלוֹתָיו :

Judah became [God's] sanctuary,
Israel [God's] realm.

יְהוּדָה...יִשְׂרָאֵל Judah and Israel refer to the southern and northern kingdoms, respectively.

הָיְתָה The verb applies to both nouns, יְהוּדָה and יִשְׂרָאֵל. Geographical names are generally
feminine, which explains the gender of this verb; a masculine verb would invoke the
particular biblical figures.

לְקָדְשׁוֹ Alter notes that the Hebrew term represented as "sanctuary," qodesh, also has the more general meaning of "holiness."[16] From this word, Adele Berlin draws a connection to Exodus 15:16-17, which states, "You brought them and planted them in your mountain-possession…the sanctuary…which you have established."[17]

מַמְשְׁלוֹתָיו Berlin offers further insight into this somewhat ambiguous term, explaining that it "points to a geopolitical entity, a nation in a land, as does the composite Judah-Israel, the united kingdom…the term represents the ideal Israelite kingdom, an ideal that is read back into earlier times and that continues to be an ideal after the destruction of both kingdoms."[18]

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114:3
הַיָּם רָאָה וַיָּנֹס
הַיַּרְדֵּן יִסֹּב לְאָחוֹר :

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The sea saw and fled,
the Jordan turned back.

הַיָּם ... הַיַּרְדֵּן A parallel to this verse appears in Joshua 4:23, with more explicit references to these two events caused by God: the parting of the Reed Sea and the crossing of the Jordan river.

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[16] Alter, *Psalms.*

[17] Adele Berlin, "Myth and Meaning in Psalm 114," in *Diachronic and Synchronic: Reading the Psalm in Real Time,* Joel S. Burnett, W. H. Bellinger Jr., W Dennis Tucker Jr., eds. (T & T Clark, 2007), 4.

[18] Berlin, "Myth and Meaning in Psalm 114," 7-8.

הֶהָרִים רָקְדוּ כְאֵילִים
גְּבָעוֹת כִּבְנֵי-צֹאן :

The mountains danced like rams,
the hills like sheep.

הֶהָרִים The book of Psalms is replete with mountain imagery, for instance, Pss. 46:6; 65:7;

72:3. Mountains are often a symbol of strength and beneficence, as in Ps. 36:7.

Mountains can also serve as witnesses, as in Micah 6:2, perhaps here as joyful witnesses

to the miraculous events of the Exodus and crossing the Jordan. In Ps. 98:8 and Isaiah

44:23, we see mountains with the verb רנה, singing joyfully, which is similar to the usage

here with dancing mountains.

כִּבְנֵי-צֹאן Similes involving sheep appear elsewhere in the Bible, for example, 1 Kings

22:17; Ps 23:1; Ps 44:12; Isaiah 53:6. However, in those examples, the people of Israel

are depicted as sheep, often straying from God, the shepherd. We only see this exact noun

phrase here and in Jeremiah 31:11, which also refers to Israel as sheep and God as

shepherd. The noun, צֹאן, and verb, רָקְדוּ, appear together only here, Ps. 114:6, and Job

21:1: "They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance." Finally, the

author of Ps. 29 associates a calf, עֵגֶל, and young ox, בֶן-רְאֵמִים, with the same verb for

dancing. The diminutive בֶן in the latter example provides the closest connection to this

noun, בְנֵי-צֹאן.

מַה-לְּךָ הַיָּם כִּי תָנוּס
הַיַּרְדֵּן תִּסֹּב לְאָחוֹר :

What is wrong with you, sea, that you flee;
Jordan, that you turn back?

מַה-לְּךָ I draw upon Alter's translation for this phrase.[19] Brueggemann and Bellinger offer

"Why is it…"[20] and Segal suggests "What disturbs you…"[21] This phrase appears

throughout the Bible and sometimes implies the tension or assumption of a negative state,

as I have selected to translate it here. Further examples of this usage include God's

inquiry to Hagar in the wilderness (Genesis 21:17); the Valley of Vision prophecy (Isaiah

22:1); or Saul's inquiry, "What is wrong with the people *that they weep?*" (1 Samuel

11:5). Elsewhere, this phrase implies a more open ended question of "why?" as in Ps.

50:16, or "what have you?" as in Isaiah 22:16, an interesting direct contrast to its usage in

Isaiah 22:1. In this Hallel psalm, the question heightens the tension and marks the

transition into the repeated section of rhetorical questions that emphasize the great impact

of the Exodus upon the natural world.

114:6
הֶהָרִים תִּרְקְדוּ כְאֵילִים
גְּבָעוֹת כִּבְנֵי-צֹאן :

Mountains, that you dance like rams;
hills, like sheep?

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[19] Alter, *Psalms.*

[20] Bruggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms.*

[21] Segal, *New Psalm.*

מִלְּפְנֵי אָדוֹן, חוּלִי אָרֶץ
מִלְּפְנֵי אֱלוֹהַ יַעֲקֹב :

Whirl, earth, before the Master,
before the God of Jacob.

חוּלִי אָרֶץ I opt for Alter and Segal's translation of this verb, which others, including the NSRV, translate as "tremble." Alter notes that "the imperative verb here picks up the imagery of dancing and fleeing from the previous lines…. [as t]he Hebrew verb could mean 'tremble' or 'dance,'…the choice of "whirl" in the translation is an attempt to convey both these senses."[22] See Ps. 29:8 for repeated use of this verb in the context of both trembling and dancing.

114:8

הַהֹפְכִי הַצּוּר אֲגַם-מָיִם
חַלָּמִישׁ לְמַעְיְנוֹ-מָיִם :

Who turns the rock into a pond of water,
the flinty stone into a spring of water.

הַהֹפְכִי הַצּוּר While the strongest biblical image of a rock producing water involves Moses' anger and eventual prevention from entering the land of Israel (Numbers 20), this image is used here and elsewhere with positive associations, c.f. Exodus 17:1-7 and Ps. 78:20. We see this positive association again in Deuteronomy 8:15, where חַלָּמִישׁ appears in the same context.

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[22] Alter, *Psalms*.

Psalm 115

<div align="right">

115:1

לֹא לָנוּ יְהוָה לֹא-לָנוּ
כִּי-לְשִׁמְךָ תֵּן כָּבוֹד
עַל-חַסְדְּךָ עַל-אֲמִתֶּךָ :

</div>

Not to us, Eternal, not to us,
instead give honor to Your reputation
for Your steadfast love.

לְשִׁמְךָ Here, I chose a different translation for this word than in Ps. 113:1-3; Ps. 116:4 and 116:15; and 118:10-11. In all of those instances, the speaker or speakers offer the Divine Name as part of an invocation or prayer, offering a direct address to God. Here, I use the word "reputation" to offer further nuance and emphasize the main idea of this psalm. God's favorable actions toward Israel reflect positively on the Eternal in the eyes of the other nations, who play a prominent role in this psalm (also see Exodus 32:11-12; Numbers 14:16).

עַל-חַסְדְּךָ עַל-אֲמִתֶּךָ Taken together, these two descriptors for God indicate a reliable, enduring, relational kindness (also see Exodus 34:6; Ps. 40:12).

<div align="right">

115:2

לָמָּה יֹאמְרוּ הַגּוֹיִם
אַיֵּה-נָא אֱלֹהֵיהֶם :

</div>

Why should the nations say,
"Please, where is their God?"

אַיֵּה-נָא Compare this verse to Pss. 42:4 and 79:10, which are both close parallels that lack נָא. Its use here is sardonic.

וֵאלֹהֵינוּ בַשָּׁמָיִם
כֹּל אֲשֶׁר-חָפֵץ עָשָׂה :

While our God is in heaven;
all that one desires, [God] does.

115:4
עֲצַבֵּיהֶם כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב
מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי אָדָם :

Their idols are silver and gold,
the makings of human hands.

עֲצַבֵּיהֶם This noun communicates the idea of something fashioned or created, as in Job 10:8, or an empty vessel, as in Jeremiah 22:28. For further use of this noun in specific reference to idols, see Isaiah 48:5; Hosea 4:17; and Micah 1:7.

כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב In both Isaiah 2:7 and Hosea 2:10, we see a connection between the possession of an excess of gold and silver leading to idol creation and worship. These key words are also an initial link to parallel defamations of idols in Jeremiah 10:3-15; Ps.135:15-21; and Daniel 5:23.

מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי אָדָם This phrase frequently refers to idols. See Deut. 4:28 and, again, Ps. 135:15-21, for close parallels to vv. 4-7. In these citations, the authors describe these "makings of human hands" as made of various ordinary materials (wood, stone, silver, gold) and as unable to see, hear, eat, or smell.

פֶּה-לָהֶם וְלֹא יְדַבֵּרוּ
עֵינַיִם לָהֶם וְלֹא יִרְאוּ :

They have a mouth, but they do not speak;
they have eyes, but they do not see.

115:6

אָזְנַיִם לָהֶם וְלֹא יִשְׁמָעוּ
אַף לָהֶם וְלֹא יְרִיחוּן :

They have ears, but they do not hear;
they have a nose, but they do not smell.

115:7

יְדֵיהֶם וְלֹא יְמִישׁוּן
רַגְלֵיהֶם וְלֹא יְהַלֵּכוּ
לֹא-יֶהְגּוּ בִּגְרוֹנָם :

Hands, but they do not feel;
legs, but they do not walk;
they do not make sounds in their throats.

יְמִישׁוּן This verb should not be confused with the more common root , מ.ו.ש I, "to depart" or "to remove" (c.f. Ps. 55:12; Exod. 13:22; Micah 2:4). This second root, מ.ו.ש II, "to touch" or "to feel," rarely appears in the Bible, with the only two other instances appearing in Genesis 27:12, as Jacob expresses the fear to his mother Rebecca that his father, Isaac, will feel his face and know he is not Esau, and Judges 16:26.

יֶהְגּוּ This verb is always related to making a sound, whether loud or soft, animal or human, including in its usage here. See also Isaiah 31:4, Isaiah 38:14, Isaiah 59:3, Ps. 35:28, and Ps 37:30.

כְּמוֹהֶם יִהְיוּ עֹשֵׂיהֶם
כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־בֹּטֵחַ בָּהֶם :

May those who made them,
all those who trust in them become like them!

115:9

יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּטַח בַּיהוָה
עֶזְרָם וּמָגִנָּם הוּא :

Israel: trust in the Eternal,
Who is their help and their shield.

יִשְׂרָאֵל Verses 9-11 are parallel to Ps. 118:2-4, reflecting a strong verbal similarity between these two Egyptian Hallel psalms.

וּמָגִנָּם God-as-shield is a frequent image in the Psalms, including Pss. 3:4; 18:3; 119:114. This image conveys a God who is a protector, offering safety in battle or in other perilous situations.

115:10

בֵּית אַהֲרֹן בִּטְחוּ בַיהוָה
עֶזְרָם וּמָגִנָּם הוּא :

The House of Aaron: trust in the Eternal,
Who is their help and their shield.

115:11

יִרְאֵי יְהוָה בִּטְחוּ בַיהוָה
עֶזְרָם וּמָגִנָּם הוּא :

Those who fear the Eternal: trust in the Eternal,
Who is their help and their shield.

יִרְאֵי יְהוָה This group also appears in Ps. 118:4 and Ps.135:20. In commenting on this verse, Rashi believes they are the גרי הצדק, which Alter notes are possibly proselytes. In Genesis 20:11, Abraham uses the term יְרְאַת אֱלֹהִים to describe basic moral decency.

יְהוָה זְכָרָנוּ יְבָרֵךְ
יְבָרֵךְ אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל
יְבָרֵךְ אֶת־בֵּית אַהֲרֹן :

May the Eternal who remembers us bless [us];
may [the Eternal] bless the house of Israel;
may [the Eternal] bless the house of Aaron!

יְבָרֵךְ I chose to render these verbs here and in vv. 13-14 as jussive rather than in future

tense to reflect the sense of a petition or invocation, in which the speaker makes a request

of God, rather than predicting a clear future outcome.

יְבָרֵךְ יִרְאֵי יְהוָה
הַקְּטַנִּים עִם־הַגְּדֹלִים :

May [the Eternal] bless those that fear the Eternal,
the young along with the old!

יֹסֵף יְהוָה עֲלֵיכֶם
עֲלֵיכֶם וְעַל בְּנֵיכֶם :

May the Eternal increase you,
you and your children!

יֹסֵף Reflecting the covenantal promise of multiplying the descendants of the patriarchs

(see also Genesis 12:2; 13:16, 15:5; 17:5), this particular verb also appears, albeit

somewhat negatively, in Deuteronomy 1:10-11.

בְּרוּכִים אַתֶּם לַיהוָה
עֹשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ :

Blessed are you to the Eternal,
the Maker of the heavens and earth.

בְּרוּכִים אַתֶּם לַיהֹוָה The only exact parallel to this ritual statement appears in 1 Samuel 15:13. Judges 17:2 and Ruth 3:10 are close parallels as well, conferring a blessing upon a child instead. All three of these verses use the singular formulation rather than plural here.

עֹשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ This particular epithet for God appears only in fifth book of the Psalter, for example, Pss. 121:2; 124:8; 134:3; 146:6. It is synonymous with קֹנֵה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ, found in Genesis 14:19.

115:16
הַשָּׁמַיִם שָׁמַיִם לַיהֹוָה
וְהָאָרֶץ נָתַן לִבְנֵי-אָדָם :

The heavens are the heavens of the Eternal,
and the earth [the Eternal] gave to humans.

115:17
לֹא הַמֵּתִים יְהַלְלוּ-יָהּ
וְלֹא כָּל-יֹרְדֵי דוּמָה :

The dead do not praise God,
nor all those that descend into silence.

לֹא הַמֵּתִים יְהַלְלוּ-יָהּ Here, the psalmist reflects a common theological theme that people are better able to serve God when they are alive rather than when they are dead. We see this concept in Isaiah 38:18-19; Pss. 6:5-6; 30:10; 88:11-14, and in a parallel Akkadian prayer to Marduk.

דוּמָה The only other use of this word is in Ps. 94:17, in a similar context. According to Berlin and Brettler, those who descend into silence are the dead, for they can no longer

speak praises God.[23] The parallelism between הַמֵּתִים and כָּל-יֹרְדֵי דוּמָה also supports this

interpretation. Psalm 30:13 provides an illustrative example of the connection between

praise and lack of silence.

<div align="right">

115:18
וַאֲנַחְנוּ, נְבָרֵךְ יָהּ
מֵעַתָּה וְעַד-עוֹלָם
הַלְלוּ יָהּ :

</div>

But we will bless God
from now until eternity
Praise God!

מֵעַתָּה וְעַד-עוֹלָם A verbal link to another Egyptian Hallel psalm, Ps. 113:2. This verse also

serves as the conclusion for *Ashrei,* the liturgical florilegium comprised of quotations

from Psalms 84, 144, 145, and this verse.

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[23] Berlin and Brettler, "Psalms," 1412.

Psalm 116

<div dir="rtl">

116:1
אָהַבְתִּי כִּי-יִשְׁמַע יְהֹוָה
אֶת-קוֹלִי תַּחֲנוּנָי :

</div>

I love the Eternal, for [the Eternal] listens
to my voice, my supplications.

אָהַבְתִּי This verse reflects a use of anastrophe; while the expected grammatical order of a

sentence is reversed and altered to make a particular rhetorical point, the object of the

verb for "love" is still "the Eternal." As in the iconic example of Deuteronomy 11:1, Ps.

31:24, and elsewhere, אהב + יהוה is a standard word pair. This verse reflects the personal

tone of the psalms, stating a direct, individual, and loving relationship between the

psalmist and God.[24]

<div dir="rtl">

116:2
כִּי-הִטָּה אָזְנוֹ לִי
וּבְיָמַי אֶקְרָא :

</div>

For [the Eternal] turns an ear to me
whenever I call out.

הִטָּה אָזְנוֹ This expression is used both to ask or describe God (2 Kings 19:16; Daniel 9:18)

and people as listening (Jeremiah 11:8).

וּבְיָמַי אֶקְרָא These are Aramaic forms of the words, indicated by their spelling and

alternate form, particularly the א at the end of the word אֶקְרָא, suggesting that it is later in

its authorship and point toward Second Temple period dating. While the phrase more

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[24] For further commentary on love in a covenantal context, see Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy,* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996), xv.

literally means "and on the days that I call out," I selected to translate it more

idiomatically as "whenever I call out" to emphasize the personal nature of this psalm

described above. See Isaiah 39:8 for an additional usage of וּבְיָמַי.

<div align="right">

116:3
אֲפָפוּנִי חֶבְלֵי-מָוֶת
וּמְצָרֵי שְׁאוֹל מְצָאוּנִי
צָרָה וְיָגוֹן אֶמְצָא :

</div>

The chords of death encircled me,
and the narrowness of Sheol found me;
I found distress and sorrow.

אֲפָפוּנִי In Ps. 18:5, this same verb is used with the phrase "chords of death" to refer to

deliverance from a battle. In Ps 40:13, the speaker, surrounded by misfortunes, declares:

כִּי אָפְפוּ-עָלַי רָעוֹת, "for I am encircled by many evils." In Jonah 2:6, the protagonist prays to

God: אֲפָפוּנִי מַיִם עַד-נֶפֶשׁ, תְּהוֹם יְסֹבְבֵנִי; סוּף, חָבוּשׁ לְרֹאשִׁי, "water encircled me, the deep

surrounded me, reeds wrapped around my head;" a strong use of parallelism that

heightens our sense of the usage here.

חֶבְלֵי-מָוֶת This image is associated with death's active attempts to trap living humans.

Death is frequently personified in the biblical text, for example, Jeremiah 9:20; Proverbs

16:14. In 2 Samuel 22:6, the phrase appears in a slight variation as חבלי שאול, a clear link

between מות, שאול, and the means by which a person might be taken to those places.

וּמְצָרֵי This is the opposite of מרחב, "wideness/expanse;" the two words are found in

parallel structure in Ps. 118:5, another verbal link in this unit.

שְׁאוֹל This is a place or state associated with death (see immediately above), sorrow, illness, the grave, and lowness in comparison to earth and heaven (see Genesis 42:38; Amos 9:2; a place where God would not allow a faithful soul to be taken in Ps. 16:10).

וְיָגוֹן This word is best understood as sorrow or lack of joy. In Isaiah 35:10; Jeremiah 31:13; Esther 9:22 it appears in opposition to שמחה, happiness.

אֶמְצָא With the distinguishing א at the end of the word, this is yet another example of both an Aramaicized word usage and a first person verb, emphasizing the personal narrative of this psalm.

116:4
וּבְשֵׁם־יְהוָה אֶקְרָא
אָנָּה יְהוָה מַלְּטָה נַפְשִׁי :

I called out the name of the Eternal:
Please, Eternal, save my being!

אָנָּה There is an extraneous *dagesh* in the נ of this word, which is also in II Kings 20:3, Jonah 1:14, Jonah 4:2, and Ps. 118:25, yet another example of verbal similarity among the Egyptian Hallel psalms. Sperling believes that the Masorites may have utilized this grammatically-unwarranted *dagesh* to distinguish this exclamation as the language of prayer.

מַלְּטָה This verb is regularly used, as here, with נפש, meaning "to save." It is used in this way in the story of Lot in Genesis 19:17 and in I Samuel 19:11.

חַנּוּן יְהֹוָה וְצַדִּיק
וֵאלֹהֵינוּ מְרַחֵם :

Gracious is the Eternal, and just,
and our God is compassionate.

חַנּוּן This word is essentially a cliche in prayer language, used frequently to describe an attribute God, most notably listed as one of the "Thirteen Attributes of God in Exodus 34:6-7. For further usages, see also: Exodus 22:29, Exodus 34:6 Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2, Ps. 145:8.

116:6
שֹׁמֵר פְּתָאיִם יְהֹוָה
דַּלֹּתִי וְלִי יְהוֹשִׁיעַ :

The Eternal protects the simple,
I was brought low but [the Eternal] saved me.

פְּתָאיִם This word has the sense of simple foolishness, as it is most commonly used in the book of Proverbs (for example, 1:4, 1:22, 7:7, 8:5 14:15); it also refers to one who is lacking in wisdom, as in Ps. 19:8.

דַּלֹּתִי This word is associated with a physical and moral lowness and poverty brought on by punishment and/or shame, as in Judges 6:6, Ps. 79:8, with a verbal connection to the "the poor [in] the dust" in Egyptian Hallel Psalm 113:7.

יְהוֹשִׁיעַ This is another Aramaicism in the text. If this verb were in Hebrew, the ה would have been dropped in the הפעיל form; Psalm 45:18 displays a similar feature with יְהוֹדוּךָ.

שׁוּבִי נַפְשִׁי לִמְנוּחָיְכִי
כִּי-יְהֹוָה גָּמַל עָלָיְכִי :

Return my being to your resting place,
for the Eternal has given me my due.

נַפְשִׁי The author repeats this word three times in this psalm, here, and in vv. 4; 8. It is sometimes physical, referring to a human life, as in verse 4, Ps. 16:10 or Ps 33:19, and sometimes more spiritual or metaphorical, as here or Ps 35:9. I opt for Alter's translation "being" in each case time for consistency.[25]

לִמְנוּחָיְכִי In Genesis 8:9, Noah sends the dove to find a place to rest, מָנוֹחַ. This is a useful image for what is happening to the נפשׁ in this verse as well.

גָּמַל Literally, this term either means weaning or reaching maturity, as seen in Genesis 21:8, 1 Samuel 1:22, and Ps. 131:2. It also carries the sense of receiving or repaying something that one is due, as here and in Ps. 103:10 and Ps.137:8.

116:8
כִּי חִלַּצְתָּ נַפְשִׁי מִמָּוֶת
אֶת-עֵינִי מִן-דִּמְעָה
אֶת-רַגְלִי מִדֶּחִי :

For You have saved my being from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling.

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[25] Alter, *Psalms*.

מִדֶּחִי This word only appear in one other verse in the Bible and is used in nearly the exact

same context: כִּי הִצַּלְתָּ נַפְשִׁי מִמָּוֶת הֲלֹא רַגְלַי מִדֶּחִי (Ps. 56:14). However, the image of

stumbling appears frequently in the Bible, as in Ps. 121:3.

<div align="right">

116:9
אֶתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי יְהֹוָה
בְּאַרְצוֹת הַחַיִּים :

</div>

I will continually walk before the Eternal
in the lands of the living.

בְּאַרְצוֹת הַחַיִּים Interestingly, this is the only usage of this phrase in the plural. However,

similar usages of the singular form, בְּאֶרֶץ הַחַיִּים, "land of the living," appear in Ps. 146:6,

Isaiah 38:11, and with a variation in the preposition to מֵאֶרֶץ חַיִּים, "from the land of the

living," in Isaiah 53:8.

<div align="right">

116:10
הֶאֱמַנְתִּי כִּי אֲדַבֵּר
אֲנִי עָנִיתִי מְאֹד :

</div>

I trusted [in God] even as I was afflicted,
I was tortured greatly.

הֶאֱמַנְתִּי The likely object, God, is implied.

אֲדַבֵּר While this looks very much like the future first person of ד.ב.ר., "speak" or "say,"

we discussed that as in Ps 18:48 or Ps. 47:4, this is a second root ד.ב.ר. II, meaning to

subdue or afflict. This secondary meaning of דבר is related to pestilence, as in Exodus

9:3. Others translate this verb as ד.ב.ר I. Alter offers: "I trusted, though I did speak— Oh,

I was sorely afflicted"[26] and Brueggemann and Bellinger, utilizing the NSRV, translate the verse as "I kept my faith, even when I said, 'I am greatly afflicted.'"[27]

עִנִּיתִי This root has multiple meanings and usages in the Bible. For instance, it is used in the sense of "mistreat"in Genesis 16:6 and "rape" in Genesis 34:2, but it connotes self-affliction and fasting in Leviticus 16:29.

116:11
אֲנִי אָמַרְתִּי בְחׇפְזִי
כׇּל־הָאָדָם כֹּזֵב :

I declared in my haste,
all people are liars.

116:12
מָה־אָשִׁיב לַיהֹוָה
כׇּל־תַּגְמוּלֹוהִי עָלָי :

How could I repay
all the Eternal has done for me?

אָשִׁיב...תַּגְמוּלֹוהִי This particular form of תַּגְמוּלֹוהִי is a hapax legomenon. We see the idiomatic combination of these two words together in the sense of giving a reward or repaying what is due in Ps. 94:2 and Lamentations 3:64. The rhetorical question is employed here, for a human narrator could never reward or repay God.

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[26] Alter, *Psalms.*

[27] Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms.*

כּוֹס-יְשׁוּעוֹת אֶשָּׂא
וּבְשֵׁם יְהוָה אֶקְרָא :

I will lift the cup of salvation
and I will call out in the name of the Eternal:

כּוֹס-יְשׁוּעוֹת This may be a description of a specific ritual, or a metaphoric description of a

ritualistic behavior to express thanksgiving for God. In Isaiah 51:17, we see a כּוֹס חֲמָתוֹ, a

cup of vengeance. In Jeremiah 16:7, the כּוֹס תַּנְחוּמִים, the cup of consolation is used in a

more ritualistic setting. Psalm 23:5 strengthens the argument for a metaphorical cup. This

verse parallels Ps. 116:4 and could conclude the ritual, if one were to take place.

116:14
נְדָרַי לַיהוָה אֲשַׁלֵּם
נֶגְדָה-נָּא לְכָל-עַמּוֹ :

May I complete my vows to the Eternal
before all [God's] people!

נְדָרַי This term, commonly translated as "vow," differs from שבוע, "oath." A person does

not have to make a נדר, but if he or she does, it must be paid, as specified in Deuteronomy

23:22-23, Ecclesiastes 5:3-4, and Jonah 2:10. These biblical passage go so far as the

express the opinion that it is better not to make a vow at all than to not be able to fulfill it.

The individual making a נדר sets its terms. In Genesis 28:20-22, Jacob establishes the

terms of a vow, which he must only keep once Good meets his stipulations. A נדר is not

restricted by sex; women are able to make a נדר, as in Numbers 30:4 and following, and 1

Samuel 1:11.

אֲשַׁלֵּם Psalm 76:12 refers to two words in this verse, נָדְרוּ וְשַׁלְּמוּ, *vow and complete,* emphasizing the importance of a fulfilling a vow that one has taken upon oneself.

<div align="right">

116:15
יָקָר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה
הַמָּ֫וְתָה לַחֲסִידָיו :

</div>

Costly in the eyes of the Eternal
is the death of [God's] covenantal partners.

יָקָר The translation of this verse is challenging due to this word - how does God view the death of those who are most faithful? Keeping with the theme of the psalm - thanksgiving for *redemption* by God from death and sorrow - I cannot translate יָקָר as "precious," implying that God favors martyrdom. As in Pss. 49: 9 and 72: 14, יָקָר can also mean "costly," as in, the death of the faithful would be costly, a loss for God.

לַחֲסִידָיו This word is very common in the book of Psalms, although its definition is somewhat ambiguous. The word חסיד is related to the word חסד (see note at Ps. 117:2) and must be translated according to context. In Pss. 4:4 and 12:2, חסד describes one who is loyal and faithful to God. In Ps. 145:17, we see that God can also be called חסיד, the One who can be counted upon, trusted, and faithful. In Ps. 79:2 we see חסיד as parallel to עבד, a servant or a worshipper. In Ps. 89:20, God speaks to חסידים, faithful partners in a vision. In Pss. 50:5 and 89:29, חסד and ברית are associated; the חסידים are those who make a ברית and perform a sacrifice. In Hosea 6:6, God requests חסד rather than sacrifices. God prefers a covenantal relationship to the empty ritual of sacrifice. I chose to translate חסידיו

as "covenantal partners" to emphasize this faithfulness aspect, and the fact that the

psalmist is attempting to repay God for the חסד God has shown him or her.[28]

<div align="right">

116:16
אָנָּה יְהוָה כִּי-אֲנִי עַבְדֶּךָ
אֲנִי-עַבְדְּךָ בֶּן-אֲמָתֶךָ
פִּתַּחְתָּ לְמוֹסֵרָי :

</div>

Please, Eternal,
for I am Your servant,
I am Your servant,
the son of Your handmaiden;
You loosened my bonds.

אָנָּה See note at v. 4.

בֶּן-אֲמָתֶךָ Being the son of a female slave means one is born into slavery, as in Judges 9:18.

Here, God free or saves the psalmist to put him or her into another kind of servitude - to

be a חסיד of God.

לְמוֹסֵרָי This is a poetic term for a rope or chord, as in Job 39:5. This image nicely reflects

the earlier reference to חבלי מות in v. 3 (see above).

<div align="right">

116:17
לְךָ-אֶזְבַּח זֶבַח תּוֹדָה
וּבְשֵׁם יְהוָה אֶקְרָא :

</div>

To You, Eternal, I offer an offering of thanksgiving
and I will call out in the name of the Eternal:

זֶבַח תּוֹדָה A direct reference to this sacrifice appears in Leviticus 7:12. Here, we cannot be

sure if this is a liturgical statement that would actually accompany the thanksgiving

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[28] Alter, Brueggemann and Bellinger, and Segal all translate this word as "his faithful ones."

offering, or if it is a description of the ritual for rhetorical purposes to emphasize the

psalmist's expression of gratitude.

<div dir="rtl">

116:18

נְדָרַי לַיהֹוָה אֲשַׁלֵּם
נֶגְדָה-נָּא לְכָל-עַמּוֹ :

</div>

I will complete my vows to the Eternal
before all [God's] people.

<div dir="rtl">

116:19

בְּחַצְרוֹת בֵּית יְהֹוָה
בְּתוֹכֵכִי יְרוּשָׁלָ͏ִם
הַלְלוּ יָהּ :

</div>

In the courts of the house of the Eternal,
within you, Jerusalem:
Praise God!

Psalm 117

117:1
הַלְלוּ אֶת-יְהֹוָה כָּל-גּוֹיִם
שַׁבְּחוּהוּ כָּל-הָאֻמִּים :

Praise the Eternal, all the nations;
laud [God], all peoples.

שַׁבְּחוּהוּ The root ש.ב.ח. is more commonly found in later texts that utilize Aramaic forms,

as in Ps 106:47, Ps. 147:12, and 1 Chr. 16:35.

117:2
כִּי גָבַר עָלֵינוּ חַסְדּוֹ
וֶאֱמֶת-יְהֹוָה לְעוֹלָם
הַלְלוּ יָהּ :

For [God's] covenantal love surpasses ours,
and the Eternal is True forever:
Praise God!

גָבַר עָלֵינוּ The word גבר when used with the preposition עַל means "to surpass" or "to

prevail over." We see the concept of God's חסד surpassing that of human partners in

Hosea 6:4, where the חסד of Ephraim and Judah are described through metaphor as

ephemeral and fleeting. In Genesis 49:26, we see an example of the blessings of one

surpassing the blessings of another utilizing this verbal phrase. In Ps 103:11, we have

another metaphorical description making clear the theological concept that God's חסד

surpasses ours: as high as the heavens are above the earth, so is God's חסד is above

human חסד.

Psalm 118

118:1

הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה כִּי־טוֹב
כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ :

Praise the Eternal, for [the Eternal] is good,
for [God's] covenantal love is forever.

חַסְדּוֹ A verbal and ideological link to the earlier Egyptian Hallel psalms that address

God's חסד; see notes on Pss. 116:15 and 117:2.

118:2

יֹאמַר־נָא יִשְׂרָאֵל
כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ :

Let Israel say
that [God's] covenantal love is forever.

יֹאמַר־נָא יִשְׂרָאֵל Segal and Brueggemann and Bellinger, utilizing the NSRV, view the

second hemistich of vv. 2-4 as a quotation rather than a subjunctive statement.[29]

118:3

יֹאמְרוּ־נָא בֵית־אַהֲרֹן
כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ :

Let the House of Aaron say
that [God's] covenantal love is forever.

בֵית־אַהֲרֹן See Ps. 115:9-11 for parallel usage, as addressed above.

118:4

יֹאמְרוּ־נָא יִרְאֵי יְהוָה
כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ :

Let those who fear the Eternal say
that [God's] covenantal love is forever.

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[29] Segal, *New Psalm* and Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms.*

מִן־הַמֵּצַר קָרָאתִי יָּהּ
עָנָנִי בַמֶּרְחָב יָהּ :

From a narrow place I called out to God,
God answered me in a wide place.

הַמֵּצַר ... בַמֶּרְחָב See Ps. 116:3 for a parallel use of these terms.

קָרָאתִי ... עָנָנִי The use of these verbs in this order is a fixed sequence, which we can also

see in Isaiah 58:9 and Job 5:1.

118:6
יְהוָה לִי לֹא אִירָא
מַה־יַּעֲשֶׂה לִי אָדָם :

The Eternal is with me, I will not fear;
what could a person could do to me?

118:7
יְהוָה לִי בְּעֹזְרָי
וַאֲנִי אֶרְאֶה בְשֹׂנְאָי :

The Eternal is with me as my help,
and I will see the defeat of my haters.

אֶרְאֶה בְשֹׂנְאָי In the context of a battle, the use of ראה with the preposition ב implies

defeating and overcoming an enemy, best translated idiomatically in English as "see the

defeat." See further examples in Ps. 54:9 and Ps. 92:12; the latter verse employs a

different verb with the same meaning, ותבט.

טֹוב לַחֲסֹות בַּיהוָה
מִבְּטֹחַ בָּאָדָם :

It is better to take refuge in the Eternal
than to put trust in people.

לַחֲסֹות This root, which the author uses here and in verse 9, is quite common in the book

of Psalms, conveying messages of trust, shelter, and protection. It appears in over 20

psalms, including Pss. 5:12; 11:1; 34:9, although this is the only time this root appears in

Pss 113-118. Notably, this is also the only usage of this particular infinitive form in the

book of Psalms; Ruth 2:12 and Isaiah 30:2 are the only two other examples of this verbal

form.

118:9
טֹוב לַחֲסֹות בַּיהוָה
מִבְּטֹחַ בִּנְדִיבִים :

It is better to take refuge in the Eternal
than to put trust in princes.

מִבְּטֹחַ This is a verbal link to Ps. 115:8, 9, 11.

בִּנְדִיבִים This is also a verbal link to Ps. 113:8.

כָּל-גּוֹיִם סְבָבוּנִי
בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה כִּי אֲמִילַם :

All the nations surrounded me,
with the name of the Eternal I cut them down.

בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה This is a verbal link to many psalms in this unit: Pss. 113:1-2; 115:1; 116:13; 116: 17. See note at Ps. 115:1. Brueggemann and Bellinger note that this phrase indicates victory for the speaker through God's help.[30]

אֲמִילַם As in Ps. 90:6, this repeated verbal trope of the next several verses does not directly relate to circumcision; rather, here it means "to destroy." I opt for Alter's translation, "cut them down," which communicates this potential connection to מול, the commonly known verb meaning "to circumcise."[31]

118:11
סַבּוּנִי גַם-סְבָבוּנִי
בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה, כִּי אֲמִילַם :

They surrounded and encircled me,
with the name of the Eternal I cut them down.

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[30] Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms.*

[31] Alter, *Psalms.*

סַבּוּנִי כִדְבוֹרִים
דֹּעֲכוּ כְּאֵשׁ קוֹצִים
בְּשֵׁם יְהֹוָה כִּי אֲמִילַם :

They surrounded me like bees,
*they were extinguished like burning thorns**,***
with the name of the Eternal I cut them down.

כִדְבוֹרִים For another use of a bee simile to describe surrounding enemies, see

Deuteronomy 1:44.

118:13
דָּחֹה דְחִיתַנִי
לִנְפֹּל וַיהֹוָה עֲזָרָנִי :

You surely pushed me
to fall, and the Eternal helped me.

דָּחֹה דְחִיתַנִי This verb, used here in an infinitive absolute form, implies death or extinction,

as in Proverbs 20:20.

118:14
עָזִּי וְזִמְרָת יָהּ
וַיְהִי-לִי לִישׁוּעָה :

God is my strength and might,
and [God] has been my deliverance.

וְזִמְרָת Here, Alter, Segal, and NSRV all translate this word as "might," (זמרה II) rather than

"song," (זמרה I). The appearance here and elsewhere in a word pair with עז, strength,

emphasizes the former definition for זמרה in this context. Direct parallels of the entire

verse appear in the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:2) and Isaiah 12:2, which opens the

liturgy of the Havdalah service at the conclusion of Shabbat.

קוֹל רִנָּה וִישׁוּעָה בְּאָהֳלֵי צַדִּיקִים
יְמִין יְהוָה עֹשָׂה חָיִל :

A voice of joy and deliverance in the tents of the righteous,
the right hand of the Eternal does valiantly!

118:16

יְמִין יְהוָה רוֹמֵמָה
יְמִין יְהוָה עֹשָׂה חָיִל :

The right hand of the Eternal is exalted,
the right hand of the Eternal does valiantly!

118:17

לֹא-אָמוּת כִּי-אֶחְיֶה
וַאֲסַפֵּר מַעֲשֵׂי יָהּ :

I will not die, but live,
and I will tell of the deeds of God.

118:18

יַסֹּר יִסְּרַנִּי יָּהּ
וְלַמָּוֶת לֹא נְתָנָנִי :

God surely chastised me,
but did not give me to death.

יַסֹּר The usage of this verb is similar to Deteronomy 21:18, with case of the rebellious son

who is to be chastised. A similar grammatical construction appears in v. 13.

118:19

פִּתְחוּ-לִי שַׁעֲרֵי-צֶדֶק
אָבֹא-בָם אוֹדֶה יָהּ :

Open the gates of righteousness for me,
I will enter them and praise God!

118:20

זֶה־הַשַּׁעַר לַיהוָה
צַדִּיקִים יָבֹאוּ בוֹ :

This is the gate of the Eternal,
the righteous will enter it.

118:21

אוֹדְךָ כִּי עֲנִיתָנִי
וַתְּהִי־לִי לִישׁוּעָה :

I will praise You, for You answered me,
and You were my deliverance.

118:22

אֶבֶן מָאֲסוּ הַבּוֹנִים
הָיְתָה לְרֹאשׁ פִּנָּה :

The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.

118:23

מֵאֵת יְהוָה הָיְתָה זֹּאת
הִיא נִפְלָאת בְּעֵינֵינוּ :

From the Eternal, this was done,
it is miraculous before our eyes.

118:24

זֶה־הַיּוֹם עָשָׂה יְהוָה
נָגִילָה וְנִשְׂמְחָה בוֹ :

This is the day that the Eternal made,
let us rejoice and be happy in it.

118:25

אָנָּא יְהוָה הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא
אָנָּא יְהוָה הַצְלִיחָה נָּא :

Please, Eternal, deliver [us], please!
Please, Eternal, grant [us] success, please!

אָנָּא יְהוָה This formula of request is another verbal link to Egyptian Hallel Psalm 116:16.

הוֹשִׁיעָה ... הַצְלִיחָה The author implies the direct object, "us," based on the subjects in

verses 24 and 26.

118:26
בָּרוּךְ הַבָּא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה
בֵּרַכְנוּכֶם מִבֵּית יְהוָה :

Blessed is one who enters in the name of the Eternal,
we will bless you from the House of the Eternal.

118:27
אֵל יְהוָה וַיָּאֶר-לָנוּ
אִסְרוּ-חַג בַּעֲבֹתִים עַד קַרְנוֹת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ :

God is the Eternal, [who] shined upon us,
bind the festival offering to the horns of the altar.

וַיָּאֶר We find similar language in the Priestly Benediction (Numbers 6:25), with a request

for God's face to shine upon us.

אִסְרוּ-חַג בַּעֲבֹתִים עַד קַרְנוֹת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ Segal states that the translation of this phrase is

"'uncertain'… possibly because we lack exact knowledge of the details of vow-

fulfillment sacrifices."[32] Alter suggests that "Israelite and Canaanite altars were fashioned

with carved horns—perhaps symbols of strength—at their four corners."[33] The general

sense of the phrase implies a sacrificial ritual of thanksgiving for salvation, particularly

with the use of the key word הַמִּזְבֵּחַ, "altar."

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[32] Segal, *New Psalm.*

[33] Alter, *Psalms.*

אֵלִי אַתָּה וְאוֹדֶךָּ
אֱלֹהַי אֲרוֹמְמֶךָּ :

You are my God, I will praise You,
my God, I will exult You.

הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה כִּי-טוֹב
כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ :

Praise the Eternal, for [the Eternal] is good,
for [God's] covenantal love is forever.

הודו… The psalm concludes as it began with the exact parallel of verse 1, forming an

inclusio.

II. Psalm 113

Structural Outline:

I. **Call to Praise (vv. 1-3)**
    A. *Who?* Servants of God shall praise God's name (v. 1)
    B. *When?* Praise the name of God at all times (v. 2)
    C. *Where?* Praise the name of God in all places (v. 3)

II. **Reasons to Praise (vv. 4-9)**
    A. *Why?* God rules above all others (v. 4)
    B. *Who else?* God on high is incomparable (v. 5)
    C. *Why?* God elevates the lowly to a higher status (vv. 6-9)
        i. The poor and needy become wealthy (vv. 7-8)
        ii. The barren woman becomes a mother of children (v. 9)

Structure:

Dirk Human suggests that the theological agenda of the fifth division of the book of Psalms promotes God's rule as illustrated by divine "provision for and deliverance of the whole creation and all…creatures," a message further expressed in Psalms 108-110, 111-112, 138-144, and certainly evident in this psalm.[34] However, Marc Z. Brettler interprets Psalm 113 as "a complete, self-enclosed unit…clearly separate from what precedes and follows," recognizing the use of *halleluyah* at both the beginning and end of this psalm as a "border marker."[35]

Utilizing his threefold schematic division of the psalms, Walter Brueggemann groups Psalm 113 with the psalms of "reorientation," specifically identifying it as among the "hymns of praise" sub-genre.[36] In Brueggemann's psalms commentary authored with

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[34] Dirk Human, "Yahweh, the Israelite High God Bends Down to Uplift the Downtrodden: Perspectives on the Incomparability of Yahweh in Psalm 113," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 30:1 (2004), 41-64.

[35] Marc Zvi Brettler, "A Woman's Voice in the Psalter: A New Understanding of Psalm 113," in *Built by Wisdom, Established by Understanding: Essays on Biblical and Near Eastern Literature in Honor of Adele Berlin*., Maxine L. Grossman, ed., (Bethesda, Maryland: University Press of Maryland, 2013), 155.

[36] Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary,* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 161.

William H. Bellinger Jr., he articulates the division between verses 1-3 and verses 4-9 of the psalm as typical of the genre, stating that "[t]his psalm follows the conventional pattern of a hymn, being divided into a summons (vv. 1– 3) and reasons for praise (vv. 4– 9)…"[37] I considered this structural division together with Brettler's analysis of Psalm 113 as comprising an earlier core (vv. 4-9) with a later appended introduction (vv. 1-3) which he believes reflects an older psalm addressing a woman's praise for God after giving birth, with an introductory section added by an editor to subsume the woman's voice and integrate this psalm into the rest of the book.[38] These two analyses influenced me to divide the psalm into two major divisions along these lines in my structural outline for this psalm.

Poetic features:

The most noticeable of the key words in this psalm is *halleluyah,* the call to praise God (see the explanation above). This root appears three times in verse 1, 3, and 9. The use of *halleluyah* at both the beginning and the end of this psalm represents an inclusio consistent with the main, merism-driven message of this psalm: that God should be praised by all people, at all times, in all places.

Notably, the author employs the key phrase *shem-Adonai* ("name of the Eternal") three times in this psalm, twice in verse 2 and once in verse 3. This key word also appears throughout the Hallel psalms (see Pss. 115:1; 116:4; 116:13; 118:26), and represents one of the linking words in this unit. Further, as reflected in the major division in my

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[37] Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms.*

[38] Brettler, "A Woman's Voice in the Psalter," 157.

structural outline for this psalm, the pattern of usage for *shem-Adonai* is one of the essential factors that allows Brettler to argue that a later author or editor appended verses 1-3 to the older, original segment of the psalm, verses 4-9. In verses 1-3, the author uses the tetragrammaton only in conjunction with *shem,* while in verses 4-9, the author exclusively employs the tetragrammaton by itself (vv. 4 and 5). Brettler holds that the initial three verses reflect a later theological perspective which eschews mentioning the tetragrammaton without a qualifying word or phrase.[39] Additionally, Benjamin Segal notes that "[t]here is an assonance effect through several words using the sh-m combination: 'name' (*shem*, vv. 1, 2, 3); 'sun' (*shemesh*, v. 3); and 'heavens' (*shamayim*, vv. 4, 6),"[40] emphasizing a phonetic link between the repetition of *shamayim* as connected to the primary key word, *shem-Adonai*. Human indicates that the repetition and word play of shem-shemesh may be a polemic against sun-worship, elevating the worship of Yahweh.[41]

The final key word is the root *y.sh.v.*, "sit" or "dwell," which appears in vv. 5, 8, and 9. Similar to *ram,* which appears only twice in the psalm, the author uses this verb to situate the key players in the psalm, emphasizing the initial gap between God's status and the people's status. God is "the One who dwells - *lashavet* - on high" (my translation, v. 5) and elevates those who are low to a higher place, socially and physically - "to seat - hoshivi - [the poor/needy] with the princes" (v.8) and "who sets - *moshivi* - the happy mother" (v. 9) inside the house, as one who can now bear children. Brueggemann and

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[39] Brettler, "A Woman's Voice in the Psalter," 157.

[40] Segal, *New Psalm.*

[41] Human, "Yahweh," 51.

Bellinger note that the use of the active verbs to describe God juxtaposed with the *hiphil*

verbs with the same key root to describe God's actions "attests in remarkable ways that

the incomparability of YHWH is constituted at the same time by a *power on high* and

compassion below."[42] Schaefer expresses the repetition of *ram* as "meaningful…[as] God

is priased because, in spite of the infinite distance from the created world, [God] is not

cut off from creation but rather is inclined toward it."[43] As Segal explains,

"Transcendence and imminence meet."[44]

Robert Alter asserts that the parallel use of the root *yashav* in vv. 8 and 9 reflects

the "gender divisions of biblical society…the woman is accorded her triumphant

fulfillment within the house, as childbearer, whereas the man is elevated to a position of

political preeminence in the public realm, among princes."[45] However, Brettler holds that

verse 9 represents both the "climax" of the psalm and "the reason for its initial

composition," which was obscured by the creation of the literary and liturgical unit of the

Hallel psalms.[46] Therefore, the example of the poor person elevated to sit with princes in

vv. 7-8 simply illustrates an explanation of the woman's experience using more general

terminology to describe a change in status. Brueggeman and Bellinger note that "the

rescue of the triad of the wretched – poor, needy, barren women – is characteristic in the

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[42] Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms.*

[43] Konrad Schaefer, *Berit Olam - Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry: Psalms,* David W. Cotter, ed. (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 281.

[44] Segal, *New Psalm.*

[45] Alter, *Psalms.*

[46] Brettler, "A Woman's Voice in the Psalter," 164-5.

hymnody of Israel," so it is not surprising to find these individuals grouped together.[47]

The prayer of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:5-8 provides the strongest parallel usage of this triad, often linked to this psalm for this reason. Proverbs 30:14-16 also references these three, with a synonym for *dal, anniyim,* representing the only variant word.

Further, the barren woman reflects one of the most important images and allusions in the psalm. Nearly every commentator addresses the similarity between Hannah's prayer (I Samuel 2:7-8) and Psalm 113, particularly vv. 7-9, and drawing upon the status of the woman in v. 9 and Hannah's barrenness as the reason for her prayer. While potentially an allusion, commentators are divided on which text predates the other, as is often the case with shared biblical material. I find Brettler's use of this shared material most compelling. As only vv. 4-9 shares overlapping vocabulary and themes with Hannah's prayer, he holds this as further evidence that a later editor added vv. 1-3 and that the author of vv. 4-9 knew of Hannah's prayer and deliberately incorporated similar material to address a similar woman's concern regarding fertility, as well as the general theme of transformation for all kinds of people.[48]

The author uses merism, hyperbole, and rhetorical questions to illustrate God's power, building the sense of God's predominance over all times, places, and peoples. Alter elaborates on the compounding use of merism to make this point:

> [the] spatial indication, from east to west [v. 3] follows the temporal indication of the preceding verset, "now and forevermore" [v. 2]. Both in time and space, God's praise extends between all conceivable limits. The next line [v. 4] then

[47] Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms.*

[48] Brettler, "A Woman's Voice in the Psalter," 159.

complements the horizontal extension of God's greatness with a vertical extension, "High over all nations."[49]

Schaefer further notes that the chiastic structure of vv. 2-3 verbally illustrates the extent of the temporal and spatial dimensions, following an ABBA structure:

A (praise)   **B** (time)
May the name of [God] be blessed   now and forever

B' (space)   **A'** (praise)
From the rising of the sun to its setting   the name of [God] is to be praised[50]

I explored this horizontal axis as specifically illustrated by the key root y.sh.v.; the inclusio of the key word halleluyah affirms God's power and praise as all-encompassing. The author's use of rhetorical questions in v. 5 further affirms the psalm's overriding message of God's incomparability.[51] I utilized question words in my structural outline to emphasize this same sentiment.

Conclusions:
        The *halleluyah* inclusio, use of merism, and key word repetition strongly articulate the main message of this psalm: God should be praised now and forever, by all peoples, from beginning to end of time, and from the beginning to the end of the psalm itself. God is also situated physically above the people, at the highest of heights. The people are lower than God, both physically and in their status. However, God can and will raise them up, presently and throughout history, as with the poor, the needy, and the barren woman. The allusion and connection to Hannah's prayer, as well as the distinction

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[49] Alter, *The Book of Psalms,* 113.

[50] Schaefer, *Psalms,* 281.

[51] Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms.*

between the key words used in vv. 1-3 and vv. 4-9, allow Brettler to make his fascinating

argument that this psalm could represent a woman's voice in the psalter.

III. Psalm 114

Structural Outline:

I. **Israel Leaves Egypt and Becomes Holy to God (vv. 1-2)**
   A. The people leave Egypt (v. 1)
   B. Israel becomes God's holy people and place (v. 2)

II. **All of Creation Responds to Israel (vv. 3-6)**
   A. The Sea of Reeds and the Jordan River Flee (v. 3)
   B. The Mountains and the Hills Dance (v. 4)
   C. *Why* Do You Flee, Sea of Reeds and Jordan River? (v. 5)
   D. *Why* Do You Dance, Mountains and Hills? (v. 6)

III. **All of Creation Responds to God (vv. 7-8)**
   A. Earth Trembles before God (v. 7)
   B. God Turns Rock into Water (v. 8)

Structure:

Alter notes the grammatically and structurally unique opening of Psalm 114,

explaining:

> It is unusual for a biblical poem to begin in this way with a subordinate clause
> (doubled, with the verb elided, in the second verset), given the strong
> predominance of parallel independent clauses (parataxis) in this body of
> literature. It is a strategy for sweeping us up from the beginning of the poem in a
> narrative momentum that invokes but also goes beyond the story of the exodus.[52]

Beyond the first line, each of Psalm 114's eight lines displays a tight structure of

"doublets composed in synonymous parallelism."[53] Segal notes that in each doublet, the

first half of the verse includes "an element that must also be applied to the second half,

where it is absent."[54] Yair Zakovitch holds that "the necessary assumption of the missing

word contributes to a feeling of fluidity [and] dynamism, which matches the movement

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[52] Alter, *Psalms.*

[53] Schaefer, *Psalms,* 282.

[54] Segal, *New Psalm.*

that is described in the psalm."[55] Schaefer provides a clear schematic of the psalm's

elegant chiastic structure, reflected in the divisions in my outline:

> **A**   vv. 1-2, Israel, Jacob, Judah — God's sanctuary and dominion
>   **B**   vv. 3-4, sea, Jordan, mountains and hills
>   **B**   vv. 5-6, sea, Jordan, mountains and hills
> **A'**   vv. 7-8, presence of [God],…the God of Jacob[56]

Segal adds that some medieval translators and manuscripts join Psalms 114 and 115,

likely based on the lack of the word *halleluyah* in Psalm 114, but that each psalm's

distinct "content and structure…dictate otherwise."[57]

Poetic features:

Due to the structure of the psalm, the author repeats many words, phrases, and

even entire verses; however, this does not necessarily mean any of these repeated words

are key words in the psalm. Each verse, from vv. 3-8, contains at least one word that the

author uses more than once in a sequential verse. However, we can consider *ya'akov* (vv.

1 and 7) a key word, as its repetition forms an inclusio for the beginning and near-end of

the psalm. I address the significance of several other important words in the annotated

translation.

Creation and redemption play a central role in the metaphors and imagery of this

psalm, although commentators differ in their interpretation of what these poetic elements

represent. Zakovitch believes Psalm 114 compresses creation and redemption into a new

narrative, stating, "our psalm contains a significant innovation in how it fastens the

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[55] Yair Zakovitch, "The Exodus from Egypt: The Big Bang - A Study of Psalm 114," unpublished manuscript, n.d. PDF, 5.

[56] Schaefer, *Psalms,* 282.

[57] Segal, *New Psalm.*

Creation with the Exodus together, into one event."[58] Alter holds that the references to

these two events should be taken literally, arguing that "[t]he original intention of the

psalmist, however, seems clearly literal—which is to say, historical—a celebration of

God's spectacular intervention in history on behalf of the people of Israel."[59] Finally,

Segal emphasizes the personification of nature in all of the imagery, highlighting the use

of active verbs for inactive land and water formations.[60]

In her interpretation of the psalm's imagery, Adele Berlin differs slightly from

Zakovitch, Alter, and Segal. While she does not disagree that the psalm equates creation

and redemption, she expands upon its implications for post-exilic times, the period to

which she dates this psalm. Berlin brilliantly interprets the symbolic nature of these

biblical references:

> Irrespective of their historicity, the narratives of the creation and the exodus had
> taken on a mythic dimension, serving as archetypes, symbols of God's power that
> transcend actual historicity. This is what enables the psalmist to use them as he
> does… [further] the allusions to the creation and the exodus are not simply dead
> metaphors or literary flourishes. At the same time, we should not mistake the
> mythic past as the main topic of the poem…Mythic references are building-blocks
> to shape new ideas…they succinctly capture a bundle of traditional associations
> that are used to evoke meaning in a new context.[61]

Berlin holds that this psalm's connection to God's past redemption creates hope for the

present, postexilic audience for a future redemption. She deemphasizes the historical

Exodus in favor of the return to Israel after 586 BCE, explaining that "the point of the

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[58] Zakovitch, "The Big Bang," 22.

[59] Alter, *Psalms.*

[60] Segal, *New Psalm.*

[61] Berlin, "Myth and Meaning in Psalm 114," 21-23.

psalm is not to commemorate the exodus from Egypt but to celebrate the new exodus, the

return from exile."[62]

Zakovitch spells out specific allusions to biblical events beyond the general

references to creation and redemption. Notably, the biblical authors address the crossing

of the Jordan river (vv. 3, 5) in Joshua 3-4, and the miracles of the cleaving rock and

issuing of water in Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:1-13.[63]

The repetition of words and phrases is another significant element of both the

psalms structure and poetic features. Alter understands the use of rhetorical questions in

vv. 5-6 in conjunction with this repetition, calling this strategy: "unusual—a verbatim

repetition of the two previous lines, merely recast as rhetorical questions that register the

extraordinary disruption of the order of nature in God's miraculous intervention."[64]

Zakovitch holds that "the authors questions contain both humor and irony," which, to me,

suggests a connection to the mocking questions for the idol-worshippers that I discuss

regarding Psalm 115.

Conclusions:

Zakovitch argues that Psalm 114 breaks the continuity between Psalms 113 and

115, which are largely similar in subject and form; he holds that an editor inserted Psalm

114 "for the sake of the Egyptian Hallel…to create a link between the Exodus and Hallel,

[as n]o other psalm in the Hallel even includes an allusion to the memory of the Exodus

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[62] Berlin, "Myth and Meaning in Psalm 114," 3.

[63] Zakovitch, "The Big Bang," 12.

[64] Alter, *Psalms.*

from Egypt."[65] However, Berlin sites a link between Pss. 113 and 114, citing GTM

Prinsloo who notes that both psalms "originate in a postexilic community as an

exhortation to believe that Yahweh can and indeed will turn the misery of his poor,

defenseless and exploited people into a new era of salvation."[66] I agree with Berlin's

interpretation of this psalm, particularly her theory that the symbols of creation and

exodus transcend their original historicity, providing meaning and hope for those living in

the period of this psalm and for us, today. Further, I believe that the themes of God's

redemptive power transcending both time and space is evident in many of the Hallel

psalms, drawing a deeper line of connection between them.

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[65] Zakovitch, "The Big Bang," 1.

[66] Berlin, "Myth and Meaning in Psalm 114," 16-17.

<u>IV. Psalm 115</u>

Structural Outline:

I. Communal Call to Praise (v. 1a)
II. Reasons to Praise God, Not Idols (vv. 1b-8)
      A. God is merciful and true (v. 1b)
      B. Satire: Do not trust in idols (vv. 2-8)
III. Call to Trust in God (vv. 9-11)
      A. Trust, House of Israel (v. 9)
      B. Trust, House of Aaron (v. 10)
      C. Trust, Those Who Fear God (v. 11)
IV. A Prayer for God's Blessing (vv. 12-14)
      A. Prayer that God will bless the House of Israel (v. 12)
      B. Prayer that God will bless the House of Aaron (v. 12)
      C. Prayer that God will bless those who fear God (v. 13)
V. Communal Declaration of Praise (vv. 15-18)
      A. God made the heavens, and the heavens are God's (v. 15-16a)
      B. God made the earth, and the earth is for humanity (v. 16b)
      C. We, not the dead, will praise God forever (vv. 17-18)

Structure:
      I based this structural outline on a format proposed by Schaefer[67] and adapted it to

incorporate some of Brueggeman's common elements for this classification of psalm,

such as "call to praise" and "reasons for praise," which I also used in Psalms 113 and 117.

Brueggeman and Bellinger group this psalm with their "General Hymn,"[68] category as it

includes these structural forms of praise. However, as they further note:

> [Psalm 115]…does not fit the usual classifications of psalms. It includes praise and
> lament and the call to trust [in God] …The structure of the poem is also not easy to
> delineate; perhaps the intensity of the poem pushes beyond traditional interpretive
> categories.[69]

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[67] Schaefer, *Psalms,* 283.

[68] Brueggemann and Bellinger provide a useful schematic classification of all 150 psalms at the beginning of their anthology.

[69] Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms.*

The inclusion of both praise and lament and its complex structure differentiates Ps. 115 from other General Hymns, including Pss. 113 and 117 in this unit. The particular message and composition of this psalm can be attributed to this structural variation.

Poetic features:

There are several significant key words in this psalm. The author uses the word *lo* ten times throughout the psalm, highlighting a central message of negation; Segal describes futility as a leitmotif of the psalm.[70] I believe that together with other rhetorical devices in the psalm, the use of *lo* emphasizes an insider/outsider mentality, as the author defines the community of worshippers by what they are *not;* that is, they are not idol-worshippers and they are not dead.

The word *l'shimcha* in 115:1 serves as a link to *shem Adonai* in 113:1-2, 116:13, 116:17, and 118:26, suggesting a verbal connection between the Hallel psalms.[71] *Hesed v'emet* (v. 1) is another key word pair that also appears in Psalm 117; these are defining characteristics of the God whom we praise.

The author uses the root *asah* in verses 3, 4, 8, and 15 to emphasize that God makes all, while people make idols. In the middle of the psalm (vv. 8-11), the word *batach* appears once in each verse, highlighting a contrast between those who trust in idols and those who trust in God. Similarly, the root *barach* dominates vv. 12-18. God blesses us, and then we, in turn, bless God. I find both of these verbs as notable evidence of a covenantal relationship between God and the people. Brueggemann and Bellinger

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[70] Segal, *New Psalm.*

[71] The use of *shem, shem-Adonai,* and *l'shimcha* throughout the book of Psalms in comparison to this unit is a potential area of future study.

observe that "[t]he sense of the verb 'trust' has to do with structuring life based on a relationship with God."[72] Further, the use of *barach* supports the claim that the author makes in vv. 17-18; as the dead cannot praise, but we will bless God forever, we can observe another clear contrast between the dead and the living.

In addition to the author's repeated use of *batach,* vv. 8-11 are, in fact, identical except for the group of people indicated in the first word/position of the line. The author has structured each of these verses as follows:

__(changing noun)_____ *batach ba'Adonai, ezram u'maginam hu.*

The groupings of people that the author invokes are *beit yisrael, beit aharon,* and *yirei Adonai.* The author repeats these exact groupings in the *barach* section of the psalm in vv. 12-13. Notably, the author of Psalm 118 employs these same three groups in vv. 2-4; the author also structures 118:1-4 similarly to 115:8-11, with only the words *beit yisrael, beit aharon,* and *yirei Adonai* changing at the beginning of each verse. Alter comments on the possible identities of these groups and how they might differ from each other:

> Different groups of celebrants in the temple rite are enjoined to trust in [God]: the general community ("Israel"), the priests and Levites ("the house of Aaron"), and what may be a distinct third group ("those who fear [God]")—the early rabbis identified these as proselytes, a possibility not to be excluded in the Second Temple period.[73]

Beyond these key words and phrases, Psalm 115 exhibits numerous rhetorical devices that contribute to the meaning and artistry of the psalm. The psalm begins and ends with

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[72] Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms.*

[73] Alter, *Psalms.*

first person plural prepositions, *lanu* (v. 1) and *anachnu* (v. 18), creating an inclusio of communal declarations.[74] Segal further notes that

> [t]he role of 'we' … changes as the psalm progresses. "We" appears in verses 1– 3, 12a, and 18, and herein lies one of the psalm's subtle ironies. "We" moves from being discounted (v. 1), to being remembered (v. 12), to blessing God (v. 18).[75]

Several rhetorical devices in this psalm contribute to the mockery directed toward idols and idol-worshippers. Alter refers to vv. 2-8 as a polemic against idolatry;[76] I prefer Schaefer's designation of satire for this section of the psalm.[77] The author employs a rhetorical question in v. 2 to take a satirical jab at idol-worshippers: why would the other nations ask where is our God?[78] Even the word order of these verses contributes to the mockery of idols. Alter notes that "[t]he syntactic positioning of all these body parts at the beginning of a sequence of versets sharpens…these lines…the shape of the idols is anthropomorphic, but the idols, sheer inert stuff, have none of the capacities of sentient life, making those who worship them ridiculous."[79]

As detailed above, vv. 8-18 contain extensive repetition of key verbs and phrases, as well as the double usage of *beit yisrael, beit aharon,* and *yirei Adonai.* In the satirical section, the author also repeats a similar formula in every verse, referring only to different body parts and senses in each line.

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[74] Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms.*

[75] Segal, *New Psalm.*

[76] Alter, *Psalms.*

[77] Schaefer, *Psalms,* 283.

[78] Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms.*

[79] Alter, *Psalms.*

The author employs merism in a similar fashion to many of the Hallel psalms, to emphasize that God should be praised by all people and at all times. We see this in *ha'ktanim im ha'g'dolim* in v. 13, as well as the key phrase *m'ata v'ad olam* in v. 18, which also appears in psalm 113 to similar ends. The all-inclusive emphasis on who should praise God further mocks the behavior of idol-worshippers and distinguishes the living from the dead, who cannot praise God from below (v. 17).

Conclusions:

The author's satirical attitude toward idolatry distinguishes Psalm 115 from the rest of the Hallel psalms. However, we can find other similar examples of such mockery throughout the Bible, notably from the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. Isaiah 40:19-20 and 44:9-20 display similar themes. In the latter parallel text, we find a similar description of the body parts and senses of idols (Isaiah 44:18). Throughout the verses from Isaiah 44, the author uses the key root *asah* to again emphasize that idols are made by humans; the author of Jeremiah 10:3-15 uses this verb similarly.

Alter also notes that "psalms [such as 115 and 118]…offer strong evidence of their use as liturgical texts.. bear[ing] indications that three distinct groups of participants in the temple service—'Israel,' 'the house of Aaron,' and 'those who fear the [Eternal]'— were called on to chant the refrain "forever is [God's] kindness."[80] As both psalms features this connection to a temple service, either metaphorical or real, we see a further connection between the Hallel psalms and the eventual use of this unit in a liturgical setting.

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[80] Alter, *Psalms.*

<u>V. Psalm 116</u>

Structural Outline:

I. First Psalm of Thanksgiving (vv. 1-7)
      A. I Give Thanks to the God Who Hears Me (vv. 1-2)
      B. Crisis: My Near-Death Experience (v. 3)
      C. I Petitioned the Merciful God (vv. 4-5)
      D. God Delivered Me (vv. 6-7)
II. Second Psalm of Thanksgiving (vv. 8-14)
      A. I Give Thanks to the God Who Keeps Me from Harm (vv. 8-9)
      B. Crisis: I Trusted in Lying Mortals (vv. 10-11)
      C. Delivered, I Vow to Praise God (vv. 12-14)
          1. I Declare My Thanks to God (v. 12)
          2. Thanksgiving Ritual: the Cup of Salvation (v. 13-14)
III. Third Psalm of Thanksgiving (vv. 15-19)
      A. I Give Thanks to the God Who Cherishes Covenantal Partners (vv. 15-16)
      B. Delivered, I Vow to Sacrifice to God (vv. 17-19)

Structure:
      Brueggemann classifies Psalm 116 as a "psalm of new orientation" according to

his threefold categorization. In a thanksgiving song, "the speaker is now on the other side

of a lament or complaint."[81] Brueggemann and Bellinger further identify Psalm 116 as an

"individual psalm of thanksgiving."[82] Segal explicates the individual orientation of this

psalm:

> Many commentators have noted the radically individual concentration of Psalm 116 (there are thirty-five first-person references), particularly as opposed to Psalm 115. However, the speaker is not the focus of the poem, for such an analysis does not pay sufficient attention to his intention. Disappointed with human reaction and determined to share his knowledge of God's acts, the speaker takes his message to the public. He wants all the people to understand, both so that they learn to depend on God and that in the future they also will support those in need. This ending is clearly communal, both in its message and in its locale. The reader, as he is 'transported' to

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[81] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms,* 125.

[82] Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms.*

Jerusalem, is treated vicariously to a communal celebration of this individual salvation.[83]

My outline reflects the highly individual nature of this psalm through the use of the first person. According to Brueggemann, psalms of thanksgiving traditionally begin with a statement of the purpose for giving thanks and praise to God, then continue with a narrative of deliverance by God, and close with a renewed vow of praise.[84] Psalm 116 includes these elements, but its poetic structure is a bit more complex.[85] The Greek and Latin textual traditions divide the psalm into two sections: verses 1–9 and 10–19, Segal notes that most commentators reject this division,[86] although Schaefer does opt for a two-part structural format.[87] Brueggemann and Bellinger suggest segmenting the psalm as I have above, arguing that "the characteristic form of the thanksgiving psalm appears in verses 1– 7, and the additional sections build from there to focus on gathering in the sanctuary with the worshiping community to offer gratitude and sacrifice….each section of the psalm..includes a narrative of salvation as well as praise and thanksgiving in worship."[88]

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[83] Segal, *New Psalm.*

[84] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms,* 126. Psalm 30 provides Brueggemann's clear example of this structural type.

[85] The narrator repeats these elements in the three sub-psalms of thanksgiving that comprise it, as delineated in the structural outline above. The statement of purpose for thanks appears in vv. 1-2, vv. 8-9, and vv. 15-16. The narrative of deliverance appears only in the first and second psalms of thanksgiving in vv. 3-7 and vv. 10-11. The renewed vow of praise appears only in the second and third psalms of thanksgiving in vv. 12-14 and vv. 17-19.

[86] Segal, *New Psalm.*

[87] Schaefer, *Psalms,* 285.

[88] Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms.*

Poetic features:

Alter notes the peculiar syntax at the beginning of the psalm, in which God

appears at the end of v. 1a, which he considers a statement uncharacteristic of the psalms.

This use of anastrophe reverses the expected grammatical form to make a particular point

about the relationship between God and the speaker. While uncommon in the psalms, the

verb *ahav* with God as an object appears throughout the Bible (c.f. Deuteronomy 11:1), in

liturgy, and theology.[89] Schaefer understands the use of *ahav* in connection to *ekrah,* the

repeated first person noun of calling upon God, explaining that "[l]ove here means to call

on God by name."[90]

As noted above, the author employs many first person references, including

ekrah. This contributes both to intensely individual nature of the message, and poetically

fills the psalm with assonance. We see this in the verbs *ahavati* ("I love"), *ekrah* ("I call

out"*), ashiv* ("I repay"*),* nouns *nafshi* ("my being"), and *mavet* ("death")*,* and the

repeated call to God, *ana* ("please") (vv. 4, 16)*. Nafshi* (vv. 4, 7, 8) and *mavet* (vv. 3, 8,

15) are key words; the author repeats each three times throughout the psalm, emphasizing

the deliverance of the soul speaker from death.

Schaefer notes that the refrain in vv. 13b-14 and 17b-18 repeatedly utilizes the

key word *ekrah.*[91] The repeated use of this invocation contributes to the structural

intensification of the psalm, which consists of three sub-psalms of thanksgiving, as noted

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[89] For further commentary on love in a covenantal context, see Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy,* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996), xv.

[90] Schaefer, *Psalms,* 285.

[91] Schaefer, *Psalms,* 286.

above.[92] The liturgical sense of this refrain and its associated renewal of vows contributes to potential for a ritual association for this psalm, as detailed in the annotated translation. The repeated use of vows also connects to the theme of individual crisis and redemption; a vow is specific and personal to the individual speaker. Additionally, the ritual of the cup and the sacrifice of thanksgiving particularly situate this psalm in a ritual context. Amos 5:23 provides evidence for use of music and psalms in a sacrificial context on a festival; perhaps Psalm 116 or other similar psalms provided a liturgical frame for ritual sacrifice.

In an interesting link to Psalm 115, the author refers to body parts, particularly eyes and feet (*eini* and *ragli*, 116:8; *b'einai,* 116:15) which also appear in the previous psalm regarding idols. *B'shem Adonai,* in 116:13 and 116:17, serves as a link to shem Adonai in 113:1-2, 115:1 and 118:10-12 and 26, suggesting further verbal connection between the Hallel psalms.

Conclusions:

Psalm 116 presents a message of individual crisis and redemption. This personal, first-person emphasis distinguishes Psalm 116 from the Hallel psalms addresses thus far, although Psalm 118 shares some of these characteristics. Psalm 116 also features a strong emphasis on ritual, either imagined or metaphorical, emphasizing a connection between this particular Hallel psalm and the eventual use of this unit in a liturgical setting.

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[92] Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms.*

VI. Psalm 117

Structural Outline:

I.   **Call for the Nation to Praise God (v. 1)**
II. **Reasons to Praise: God is Merciful and True[93] (v. 2)**

Structure:

Psalm 117 is the shortest of all the psalms and the shortest chapter in the Bible,

consisting of only two verses. In a simplified and generalized way, Psalm 117 contains

the same structure and message as other psalms in this sub-genre of "general hymn of

new orientation,"[94] such as Psalm 113. We see the same sections of call to praise in v. 1

and reasons for praise in v. 2 as identified by Bruggemann and Bellinger, who note in

particular the use of the word *ki* in v. 2 to introduce these reasons.[95]

Poetic features:

Psalm 117 is significant in its use of universal language, in contrast to the other

psalms in Hallel unit, which focus specifically on the particular covenanted people

Israel.[96] Brueggemann notes that:

> [t]he address is comprehensive…intended to include all peoples…[and] the
> ground of praise lacks all specificity…this Psalm articulates in brief all that is to
> come in other, fuller expressions.

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[93] I use the same language as the structural outline for Ps. 113 and 115 by design. These terms, offered by Brueggemann, highlight the fact that these two psalms share a genre (psalms of new orientation) and a sub-genre (hymn of praise) according to his analysis. See Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms,* 159 and 161.

[94] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms,* 159.

[95] Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms.*

[96] Psalm 117:1 uses universal language, referring to *kol goyim…kol ha'umim* "all nations, all peoples." Psalms 115 and 118 both include references to Israel and the House of Aaron (Pss. 115:9-11 and 118:2-4).

Alter also comments on any lack of specific detail as to the reasons to praise God or what

God has done for humanity in this psalm.[97]

The word *aleinu* in v. 2 is somewhat ambiguous, and commentators differ in how

they understand to whom the suffix translated as "us" to refers. Segal argues that "[i]f

'us' refers to Israel, then the call to other nations is a summons to celebrate God's

particularistic beneficence, [but i]f 'us' incorporates others in worship…this is perhaps

the most immediate of 'international' psalms.[98]"

The author has included a significant and well-known key word pair in these two

verses, *hesed* ("covenantal love") and *emet* ("true"). Psalm 115 employs this same word

pair to describe God in 115:1, highlighting another verbal similarity between two Hallel

psalms.[99] As Brueggemann and Bellinger explain,

> [t]he reasons given for such exuberance [of praise] express Israel's oldest,
> deepest theological conviction, that YHWH has been experienced in the life of
> Israel and in the life of the world as steadfast and faithful . The two terms *ḥesed*
> and *'emeth* constitute a defining word pair in Israel's rhetoric that is likely rooted
> in the stylized recital of Exod 34:6–7.[100]

As with many of the Hallel psalms, *halleluyah* and its variants represents another

key word that the author employs. In this brief psalm, *hallelu* acts as an inclusio as the

very first and very last word, with a slight variation in the final word to include the divine

name, *Yah.*

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[97] Alter, *Psalms*.

[98] Segal, *New Psalm.*

[99] Berlin and Brettler, "Psalms," 1413.

[100] Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms.*

We see semantic equivalence in v. 1, presenting a contrast between an indefinite and a definite object. *Goyim* (v. 1a) are an indefinite group with semantic equivalence to the peoples, *haumim* (v. 1b). *Hallelu* and *shabchuhu* are the equivalent verbs in this verse. Through this equivalence, we see that God is the implied object of praise for both of these groups, even though YHWH only appears in the first part of the verse. Despite the absence of God's name in v. 1b, the author invokes God by name three times in this briefest of psalms, utilizing YHWH again in v. 2b and in the concluding statement, *halleuyah.* God is at the center of this psalm.

The parallelism in v. 2 is chiastic and utilizes the *hesed/emet* word pair. Schaefer highlights this rhetorical device:

A	B
great toward us	is [God's] covenantal love [*hesed*]

B'	A'
and the [Eternal's] faithfulness [*emet*]	is forever[101]

The magnitude of *hesed,* expressed through the use of the word *gavar* ("surpasses") is equivalent to the magnitude of *l'olam,* ("forever"). Although only used once in this psalm, *l'olam* provides a link to other Hallel psalms that use this terminology, including Pss. 113 and 118. This word emphasizes the eternality of the praise due to God and is a key message of the Hallel psalms. In this case in particular, as all nations and people are called to praise God, the use of l'olam also emphasizes the universality of praise. Taken together, Psalm 117 expresses that praise for God should transcend all times and all peoples. I believe the lack of a specific place in this psalm, even by inference or allusion,

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[101] Schaefer, *Psalms,* 287.

indicates a certain universality of place for praise of God as well. Alter notes that "[o]ne could easily imagine that such a concise psalm of thanksgiving[102] might have been composed to celebrate the restoration of the cult in the rebuilt temple, but the evidence is far too scanty to make any confident identification of this sort."[103]

Conclusions:

      With its succinct message of universal praise for God, Psalm 117 enables modern Reform Jews to address the pressing dilemma of how to accept our role as God's covenant people who still deeply value universalism. Psalm 117 offers an accessible message of universal covenant that would make this psalm especially applicable in an interfaith setting. However, the reference to *hesed* and its links to the other, more particular Hallel psalms emphasizes the unique relationship between God and the Jewish people.

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[102] Alter classifies this psalm differently than I do above, where I follow Brueggemann and Bellinger.

[103] Alter, *Psalms.*

<u>**VII. Psalm 118**</u>

Structural Outline:

I. Call to Thank God (vv. 1-4)
   A. Reasons to Thank: God is Good and Merciful (v. 1)
   B. The Community Should Thank God (vv. 2-4)
      1. Declare, House of Israel, that God is Merciful (v. 2)
      2. Declare, House of Aaron, that God is Merciful (v. 3)
      3. Declare, Those Who Fear God, that God is Merciful (v. 4)
II. Personal Narrative of Deliverance (vv. 5-18)
   A. In Crisis, I Petitioned God (vv. 5-7)
   B. Proverbs of Praise for God (vv. 8-9)
   C. With God's Help, I am Victorious (vv. 10-18)
III. I Enter the Gates to Thank God[104] (vv. 19-21)
IV. Communal Celebration of Deliverance (vv. 22-27)
   A. We Petition and Praise the God Who Saves Us (vv. 22-26)
   B. Salvation Ritual: The Festival Offering (v. 27)
V. Personal Conclusion (vv. 28-29)
   A. I Will Thank God (v. 28)
   B. Reprise: Reasons to Thank (v. 29)

Structure:

     Psalm 118 displays and complex and multi-faceted structure, moving between

individual and communal declarations of thanksgiving. My structural outline highlights

this shift from communal (vv. 1-4), to personal (vv. 5-19), to communal (vv. 22-27), and

finally concluding with a personal reprise of the introductory verses (vv. 28-29). Alter

notes that *hodu,* the opening word in verse 1, identifies this as a thanksgiving psalm.[105]

While Brueggemann and Bellinger further classify this as an "individual psalm of

thanksgiving,"[106] I disagree that the voice of this psalm is entirely personal; the

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[104] Brueggemann and Bellinger, citing H.J. Kraus, note that this psalm could have served as an "entrance liturgy…[recited by w]orshipers gather[ed] for a festival…process[ing] with praise and thanksgiving."

[105] Alter, *Psalms.*

[106] Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms.*

communal voice plays a large and significant role in vv. 1-4 and 22-27, as I indicate in my outline.

Segal suggests two major movements to the psalm (vv. 5-21 and vv. 22-29), which also influenced my structure. However, he views the first, personal section as concluding with v. 21, while I understand vv. 19-21 as a beautifully formulated transition between the main personal (vv. 5-18) and communal (vv. 22-27) sections. The key root, "thank" (vv. 19 and 21), and key image, the gates, drive the visual and verbal imagery in these verses. The individual, after extensively praising God personally in vv. 5-18, approaches the gates and thanks God while standing before them in v. 19. Verse 20 could potentially reply or affirmation from the community waiting within the walls of the Temple, which they recite as the the individual physically walks through the gate itself. Verse 21 returns to the individual as the speaker, again thanking God; at this moment, the individual arrives on the other side of the gate to face the assembled community. From this point on, until the brief conclusion in vv. 28-29, the individual and the community praise and thank God together (vv. 22-28). A break between two distinct sections at either v. 18[107] or v. 21[108] does not fully capture the physical imagery of an individual approaching the gates to pray with a community as I describe.

In addition to returning to the personal voice, vv. 28-29 serve as both a conclusion and an inclusio to v. 1, an elegant ending to multi-vocal psalm.

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[107] As suggested by Brueggemann and Bellinger.

[108] Segal suggests that v. 21 "bridges the two sections" but does not consider vv. 19-21 as a transition unit, as I do.

Poetic features:

Many key words highlight the message and meaning of Psalm 118. The genre-defining verb, *hodu*, also appears in vv. 19, 21, 28, and at the conclusion of the psalm in v. 29. The role of this verb shapes the transition between the personal and communal sections of the psalm, as I detail above. One could almost envision the speaker's use of *odeh* (v. 19) and *odecha* (v. 21) as the hinge of both the psalm and the gate. The replication of the exact form of the verb in vv. 1 and 29 emphasizes the inclusio structure of the psalm as a whole.

The key phrase, *shem Adonai,* appears here in v. 26, linking Psalm 118 to the uses of this phrase in Pss. 113:1-2; 115:1; 116:13, 17. As Schaefer notes, *hesed* is another key word in this psalm and in many of the other Hallel psalms (c.f. Pss. 116:15; 117:2) but significantly it only appears in the framing introductory and concluding verses (vv. 1-4 and 29). We can find this particular usage, *ki l'olam chasdo,* in several other psalms, including Pss. 106:1, 107:1, and, as Segal explains, "…most importantly in Psalm 136, where it opens the psalm and where the second half of the verse appears as a refrain in each line (as in verses 2– 4 here)."[109] The connection to Psalm 136 is especially significant as a further verbal linkage between a broader group of Hallel Psalms, as Pss. 113-118 recited together with Psalm 136 comprise the Great Hallel.

The speaker emphasizes two further characteristics of a God deserving thanks and praise through the use of key words. We hear repeatedly of God's ability to save, *y'shua,* in vv. 14, 15, and 21, and God's goodness, *tov,* in vv. 1, 8, 9, and 29. *Tzedek,* righteousness (vv. 15, 19, 20) also plays a prominent role in the psalm. God's justice is

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[109] Segal, *New Psalm.*

evident in Psalm 113 (c.f. vv. 7-9) although not explicitly mentioned; the same key word

does appear in Psalm 116:5. Here, it is the people (vv. 15 and 20) and the gates (v. 19)

that embody righteousness, a subtle but important shift from Psalms 113 and 116.

Beyond key words, the exact repetition of many different key phrases is a

defining feature of this psalm. I outline these in the figure below:

Psalm 118, repeated phrases highlighted.

The highlighting demonstrates the remarkable preponderance of grouped and repeated phrases in this psalm. We see repeated phrases in vv. 1 and 29; vv. 2-4; vv. 6 and 7; vv. 8 and 9; vv. 10 and 11; and vv. 15 and 16. Except for the inclusio of vv. 1 and 29, all of the repeated phrases also appear in sequence. This rhetorical element provides the strongest evidence for this psalms initial and certainly eventual use in a liturgical setting, with consistent and potentially antiphonal, responsive chanting of the verses that share these repeated phrases.

On an interesting related note, Segal explains that we often see the repeated phrase structure of vv. 8-9, "better X than Y," in Wisdom literature, particularly the book of Proverbs.[110]

Psalm 118 also includes several artful similes and metaphors. Verse 12 introduces a simile to describe the enemy that the individual faced: "they surrounded me like bees, they were extinguished like burning thorns." As noted in my translation, bee imagery associated with an appears in Deuteronomy 1:44 and elsewhere. Highlighted by my structural outline, the gates are the central image of the psalm. As Segal explains:

> The gates of verses 19 and 20 are both metaphoric and real. "Gates of Righteousness" might be a proper name for the Temple gates, similar to gate names in Babylonia. "Gate to [God]" might indicate access to [God's] presence or a place name.[111]

The author introduces another strong metaphor, the cornerstone, in v. 22. This metaphor appears in the longer communal section of psalm, and, appropriately so, describes the

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[110] Segal, *New Psalm.*

[111] Segal, *New Psalm.*

community of Israel. Schaefer sees the metaphor as representative of Isaiah's remnant theology (c.f. Isaiah 28:16):

> Though deemed unimportant by imperial neighbors, Israel plays a distinguished role in the architecture of God's reign. "The builders," that is, the nations' rulers, despised the Jews and sought their annihilation. But with the dawn of redemption, all nations will realize that Israel is the "cornerstone" of world redemption.[112]

As with the cup of salvation in Psalm 116, the end of Psalm 118 introduces a ritual that may have been real or metaphorical. Here, the speakers bind a festival thanksgiving offering upon the altar (v. 26). Alter notes that "Israelite and Canaanite altars were fashioned with carved horns—perhaps symbols of strength—at their four corners."[113]

Segal suggests an allusion to the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15) in vv.14-16, particularly in the repeated use of the words "deliverance," "right hand," and "exalted."[114] This provides a connection to Psalm 114 and supports the use of these psalms on Passover and other festival celebrations.

Conclusions:

Psalm 118 provides a fitting conclusion to the Hallel Psalms unit. As Schaefer explains, Psalm 118 reflects various themes of Psalm 113-117, providing a summation to the unit. Psalm 118 touches on God's role as a helper and deliverer (v. 7; see Pss. 113:6-9; 116:6-7); God's rule over all times, peoples, and places (v. 1; see Pss. 113:2-5; 114:3-8; 115:15-16; 117:1-2); calling out from a narrow place (v. 5; see Ps. 116:3); and offering praise to God (v. 1; see, for example, Pss. 113:1; 115:17-18; 117:1-2). For me, the shift

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[112] Schaefer, *Psalms,* 291.

[113] Alter, *Psalms.*

[114] Segal, *New Psalm.*

from the personal to the communal defines the psalm. The numerous repeated key words and key phrases highlight the structural and verbal artistry of the psalm. These repeated words and phrases also easily allow us to decipher and internalize the main messages of the psalm, and indeed, the entire Hallel unit: God is merciful, God is good, God delivers us, and for all these reasons, we should thank and praise God.

Chapter 2: Origins of Hallel as a Liturgical Unit

After a close analysis of the biblical texts that comprise the Hallel psalms, I now

turn to the origins of Hallel as a liturgical unit. Marc Z. Brettler articulates the role of the

Bible in rabbinic liturgy as follows:

> Given the central importance of the Bible within Judaism, it is not surprising that it
> should exert a disproportionate influence on the liturgy. In some cases, entire biblical
> texts like Exod. 15:1-19, the Song of the Sea (*Shirat Hayam*), or Deut. 6:4-9, the
> *Sh'ma* itself, are cited in full as part of the liturgy. The same is true of psalms. Entire
> psalms are regularly cited verbatim in this or that liturgical context.[115]

S. David Sperling proposes an interesting theory as to the grouping of these

particular psalms. As explored in chapter 1, the Egyptian Hallel psalms vary greatly in

their content and themes, yet they are connected by their sequential order in the book of

psalms, by their eventual grouping as a liturgical unit, and by their repeated verbal

linkages. In Chapter 1, I particularly note the repeated usage of the groupings of *Yisrael/*

Beit Aharon/Yirei Adonai ("House of Israel"/"House of Aaron"/"those who fear the

Eternal"), the phrases *shem Adonai* ("the name of the Eternal") and *m'ata v'ad olam*

("from now until eternity")*,* and the words *ana* ("please")*, dal* ("poor")*, chesed*

("covenantal love")*, batach* ("trust")*,* and *n'divim* ("princes")*.* As Sperling explains

regarding Psalms 1 and 2:

> In terms of content, Psalm 2 has no connection with Psalm 1, but there a number of
> verbal similarities between the two…These verbal similarities prompted the
> compilers of the book of Psalms to place the two psalms in sequence, as was done
> with many other Psalms on the principle of what Delitzsch called "Gleichartigkeit,"

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[115] Marc Zvi Brettler, "Prayer in the Bible and the Use of the Bible in Later Jewish Prayer," *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries,* vol. 3, L. Hoffman, ed. (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999), 15.

"similarity." The same similarities caused some early readers to view them as one psalm.[116]

We see these same types of verbal similarities among the key words mentioned above throughout the Hallel unit.

Compared to later liturgical compositions, Hallel has a long history as a distinct liturgical unit. As Lawrence Hoffman explains:

Psalms 113-118 are said to have been recited in Temple times, during the sacrifice of the Passover offerings…Originally, the choice and number of *Hallel* psalms varied. Until the Crusades, for example, Palestinian Jews said up to thirty psalms for the Daily *Hallel* or even a seemingly random melange of verse taken from a verity of psalms.[117]

Various talmudic sources speak about the potential origins of Hallel. B.T. Pesachim 117a offers several options for the original author of this unit of prayer:

Our Rabbis taught: This *hallel,* who said it?

Rabbi Eliezer says: **Moses and Israel said it** at the time they stood at the sea. They said, "Not to us, O [God], not to us…" (Ps. 115:1), and the holy spirit responded and said to them, "For my own sake, for my own sake I will do it…" (Is. 48:11)

Rabbi Judah says: **Joshua and Israel said it** at the time that the kings of Canaan stood against them…

Rabbi Elazar haMaodi says: **Deborah and Barak said it** at the time Siserah stood against them…

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria says: **Hezekiah and his helpers said it** at the time that Sanaherib stood against them…

Rabbi Akiba says: **Hanniah, Mishael, and Azariah said it** at the time that the evil Nebuchadnezzar stood against them…

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[116] S. David Sperling, " A Study of Psalm 2," *Ugarit Forschungen* 43 (2011), 435-445.

[117] Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah,* 106.

Rabbi Yose the Galilean says: **Mordechai and Ester said it** at the time that the evil Haman stood against them…

And the Sages say: **The prophets** between them established for Israel that they should recite it in every time of trouble, so that they should not come upon Israel, and that when they are redeemed they should recite it on their redemption.[118]

Regarding this text, Feigelson notes that "hallel is repeatedly associated with historical events and personalities…[and] in each case…was originally a spontaneous outpouring of emotion to God."[119] Each rabbi hypothesizes that Hallel originated with a pair or group of people, not an individual. This could emphasize the communal nature of worship or perhaps the largely communal voice of the psalms themselves.[120]

Further sources add to our understanding of the development of Hallel liturgically. In Tosefta Sukkah 3:2, we learn that Hallel was read eighteen times during the day and once at night, and that the single instance in the evening is the Passover seder. Tosefta Pesachim 95b states that Hallel was recited in the Temple by the Levites. *Encyclopedia Judaica* notes that "hallel became part of the synagogue service at an early stage, and in talmudic times, communities in Erez Israel added it to the end of the evening service for Passover."[121] As Hoffman further observes:

[w]hen the synagogue service developed in place of the cult, psalms played a major role there too. As much as possible, psalms for special occasions were just moved

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[118] Translation by Joshua M. Feigelson, "Singing and Solitude - Hallel and History," in *Milin Havivin - Beloved Words*, vol. 1 (2005), 77-78.

[119] Feigelson, 77.

[120] Excluding Ps. 115 and 118.

[121] "Hallel," *Encyclopedia Judaica.*

from one locale to the other…the Egyptian Hallel was transferred from Temple to synagogue use as holiday liturgy.[122]

Since that time, authors and editors of *siddurim* have largely included Hallel in their worship services; a full survey of prayer books from across movements and time is beyond the scope of this thesis. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, excerpts of the Egyptian Hallel appear in the previous Reform *siddur*, *Gates of Prayer.* Moving to present day usage in the Reform Movement, the majority of Reform congregations and gatherings utilize *Mishkan T'filah,* which the CCAR Press published in 2007.

Mishkan T'filah offers two options for Hallel.[123] The first option, *Hallel I,* includes an opening blessing, Psalm 117, and a selection from Psalm 118 (vv. 1-4, v. 26, vv. 28-29), both in Hebrew and English translation. The left-hand page offers a poetic reading, "As I looked the poplar rose" by Delmore Schwartz[124] and there is no concluding blessing. While labeled as "From Psalm 118," there are no notations that indicate which verses the authors selected to include and which they decided to omit. The authors do not offer a concluding blessing.

The second option, *Hallel II,* begins with a note that it "offers no alternative readings."[125] As in *Hallel I,* the editors translate the verses they selected from each psalm. This version is more complete with respect to the authors' inclusion of the original

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[122] Hoffman, "Introduction to the Liturgy," 12.

[123] Elyse D. Frishman, ed., *Mishkan t'filah*: *a Reform siddur,* (New York, NY: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2007).

[124] Frishman, *Mishkan t'filah,* 559.

[125] Frishman, *Mishkan t'filah,* 560.

biblical text. *Hallel II* opens with the same blessing as *Hallel I,* and continues with the

full text of Psalms 113 and 114. The authors include a selection from Psalm 115; unlike

in *Hallel I,* the authors indicate that verses 12-18 appear here. The same is true for Psalm

116, for which the authors include verses 12-19. Psalm 117 appears in full. Psalm 118

also appears in full, although in two parts. The authors label verses 1-18 as "Psalm 118,"

break to translate those verses, and then begin a second section entitled "Psalm

118:19-29," perhaps due to common usage of vv. 19-20 as a particularly singable section

of the psalm. The *Hallel II* service concludes with a blessing that begins "Y'Hal'lucha

Adonai Eloheinu," which liner notes in *Mishkan T'filah* indicate "is referred to as *Birkat*

HaShir (Blessing of the Song) in *P'sachim 118a.*

With the nearly full text of Hallel available in our current Reform movement

siddur, we open possibilities for creative exploration and usage that clergy and

congregations could adopt widely.

Chapter Three: Creativity and Liturgical Change in Reform Jewish Liturgy
I. Origins of liturgical change in Reform liturgy

In many ways, the Egyptian Hallel represents a unit of liturgy that has

experienced little to no change since the biblical era, and certainly since its transfer from

Temple to synagogue service, as detailed in chapter 2. All Jewish liturgy and prayerbooks

evolved consistently overtime, and we can view Reform worship in particular as change-

oriented since its origins. Dr. David Ellenson presents two guiding concepts to understand

the formulation of modern Reform liturgy:

> Two principles have guided liberal Jews in their approach to the construction of the
> modern prayer book: a principle of content and a principle of length. The principle of
> content meant that as they reformulated the classical Jewish service, they refashioned
> the manifest content of the Siddur to comport to the actual beliefs of modern
> worshipers. They simply changed the wording wherever the content of the traditional
> prayers was deemed problematic…
>
> But the principle of content was supplemented by the principle of length, in that non-
> Orthodox prayer books also addressed what their authors viewed as the undue length
> of the traditional service. From the very first liberal prayer book that came out of
> Hamburg in 1819 all the way down to our own day, Reform Jewish liturgists have felt
> that the traditional service is so long that it precludes proper devotion in prayer. They
> have therefore abbreviated the liturgy by omitting parts of the service that seemed
> superfluous or needlessly repetitious, not because they had ideological objections to
> what those prayers said, but just to shorten the service. They were convinced that by
> excising repetitious content, they did no harm to the essential content of the service,
> while actually enhancing the quality of the prayer experience precisely because the
> service had been abridged.[126]

These two principles, content and length, are essential to understanding Reform liturgy

and its continued development in the present day. To these to concepts, I would add a

third: innovation and creativity. While beyond the scope of this thesis, the creative

worship culture of the Reform movement that blossomed in summer camps and youth

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[126] Rabbi David Ellenson, "P'sukei D'zimrah and the Problem of Length in Modern Prayer Books," *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries,* vol. 3, L. Hoffman, ed. (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999), 29.

group in the 1960s and beyond have, in turn, deeply influenced the style and spontaneity

of synagogue services. Rabbi Elyse Frishman, familiar with both worlds, comments on

the challenges of maintaining this constant creativity:

> We thought ongoing innovation would refresh our worship. Not only was this
> exhausting for the worship leaders, it was impossible to sustain. The very idea of
> worship is that it should provide an ongoing familiarity and comfort, of inclusiveness
> amidst that constancy.[127]

Frishman goes on to explain that the current Reform movement prayer book, *Mishkan*

T'filah, aims to strike a balance between creativity, flexibility, and consistency. Keeping

Ellenson and Frishman's principles in mind, I turn to explore a particular case study of

modern liturgical change: the impact of feminism on liberal Jewish worship. Ellenson's

principle of content and Frishman's principle of balancing creativity and consistency will

be especially relevant to the case of feminism. Ellenson's additional principle of length

particularly relates to the theoretical underpinnings of creative retrieval, which I discuss

toward the conclusion of this chapter.

II. Feminism: a Case Study for Liturgical Change
   Feminism provides one way to understand liturgical change in our time. Through

cases and examples from the feminist liturgical tradition, I will uncover useful guidelines

for successful creative adaptation of the Egyptian Hallel liturgy.

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[127] Elyse D. Frishman, "Entering Mishkan T'filah," *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly* (Fall 2004):
60.

A. Egalitarianism

Ellenson recalls the spread of egalitarian ideals in the Reform movement in the 1970s, beginning with the first women rabbinical students and the gradual culture change at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Ellenson reflects that Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, as president of HUC-JIR, was committed to the egalitarian ideal that opportunities presented to men should be offered to women as well. He was committed to a liberal ideal of equality, which meant that if men could become rabbis, women could become rabbis, too. Soon, changes to Reform liturgy followed, observing a similar principle.[128] As Hoffman explains, *Gates of Prayer,* the Reform prayerbook from this era, "emend[ed] masculine language for people so as to include women, but [did] not alter masculine references to God. It also add[ed] women to the all-male lists of biblical heroes that constitute basic prayers in the liturgy."[129]

Ellenson further notes that we can understand this egalitarian shift as a first stage of feminism, with women being afford the same opportunities as men throughout liberal Jewish world. To have fulfilled an largely egalitarian model of worship and Jewish life is no small achievement, although today, it is almost ubiquitous. To this day, the vast majority of Reform Jews support and uphold this ideal, but struggle with further feminist developments in liturgy and beyond.[130]

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[128] David Ellenson, *Feminist Liturgy*, Class Lecture, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, NY, November 25, 2014.

[129] Lawrence D. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press), 1989, 146.

[130] Ellenson, *Feminist Liturgy.*

B. Marcia Falk's Feminist Approach

Ellenson argues that the work of *Marcia Falk* represents a genuine feminist

sensibility, embodying an entirely different approach to liturgy, which remains much

more controversial in Reform circles to this day. In 1996, Falk, a poet, translator and

liturgist, published *The Book of Blessings: New Jewish Prayers for Daily Life, the*

*Sabbath, and the New Moon Festiva*l, a *siddur* that "offers new, egalitarian Hebrew and

English blessings, along with poems and meditations, as alternatives to the traditional

Jewish liturgy."[131]

Ellenson understands Falk as influenced by the work of psychologist Carole

Gilligan, who held that women are inclined toward relational, non-hierarchical

interactions. From these principles, Falk derives a feminist liturgical methodology that is

relational and non-hierarchical with respect to God, the historical legacy of Jewish

liturgy, and the Jewish people as a praying community. Her methodology prompts her to

challenge hierarchical notions, such as God's kingship or sovereignty, ideas of God's

transcendence and separateness from humanity in favor of an immanent God who dwells

with and within us, and notions of a God described in masculine terms. These guiding

principles lead her to make the following changes to Jewish liturgy in *The Book of*

Blessings:

1. Falk radically departs from the traditional the blessing formula (*Baruch Ata Adonai,*

    Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam - Blessed are You (masc.) God, Our God and King of the

    Universe) because it is hierarchical, non-immanent, non-relational, and masculine.

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[131] Lucille Lang Day, "Marcia Falk," in *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, edited by Paula E. Hyman and Dalia Ofer, Jewish Women's Archive, article published March 1, 2009, http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/falk-marcia.

She consciously rejects the historical position of rabbinic Judaism that this consistent blessing formula must be maintained to make a prayer *halakhically* viable.

2. Falk alters language, form, and entire blessings that have comprised the body of Jewish liturgy for thousands of years. Her rationale is that in a non-hierarchical system, in which the past authority of rabbinic Judaism has no influence over her, she has the authority to do so.

3. Falk employs use feminine metaphors and language for God, heavily emphasizing the use of imagery that is "grammatically feminine although semantically without gender."[132] Falk accordingly develops new forms of address and description for the Divine.[133]

Falk's *Book of Blessings* received both praise and critique upon its publication in response to a wide variety of her liturgical choices.[134] The Reconstructionist movement has embraced Falk's work most favorably today, and their movement's siddur, *Kol Haneshama,* maintains various options for blessing formulae, with Falk's work influencing many of them. Reform communities and clergy have been far less open to Falk's work, and her new blessings have not become standard in our current siddur, *Mishkan T'filah.*[135]

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[132] Marcia Falk, *The Book of Blessings: New Jewish Prayers for Daily Life, the Sabbath, and the New Moon Festival,* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 429.

[133] Ellenson, *Feminist Liturgy.*

[134] See Simone Lotvan Sofian, "Pushing the Envelope: Reflections on The Book of Blessings by Marcia Falk," *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly* (Spring 1999): 84-95; Arnold Jacob Wolf, "The New Liturgies," *Judaism* (Spring, 1997), 235-242.

[135] Ellenson, *Feminist Liturgy.*

Rachel Adler engages with Falk's work not through a critique of its theological

standpoint, that women should be represented and engaged in liturgy, but through a

sophisticated analysis of what it means to change the *experience* of liturgy itself, as

enacted by ritual worship. As Adler explains,

> Ritual moves people powerfully and non-rationally, independent of the intellectual
> content of its prayer texts. Its sensuousness and predictability make us year for future
> performances. Woe to the theologian who tries to reason people out of believed ritual
> behaviors or prayers on theological or rational grounds![136]

Adler holds up a mirror for those who would advocate completely altering liturgy in

favor of advancing a particular ideology. For me, Adler clearly makes the case because

she herself supports Falk's position that women should be reflected in the prayers they

are reciting, but she understands the challenges of changing familiar language and

formulae:

> For feminists to advocate the complete replacement of traditional liturgical language
> is to accept the same narrow understanding of meaning as that espoused by earlier
> Reform Judaism, which also held that all that was important about prayer was its
> intellectual dimension…[therefore,] we learn that we cannot ask people to alter or
> replace traditional rituals until we can fully acknowledge with them what we are
> asking them to relinquish.[137]

Adler further notes that longstanding and extremely familiar liturgy, such as *Kaddish*

Yatom, Kol Nidre, and the *Sh'ma* are key examples of the enduring significance of this

inherited ritual experience, "whose very syllables are filled with spiritual meaning for

worshippers."[138] Falk's call to prayer, "*Barchu et Ein Hachayim,"[139]* will never sound

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[136] Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism: an inclusive theology and ethics* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1998), 77.

[137] Adler, *Engendering Judaism,* 78.

[138] Adler, *Engendering Judaism,* 78.

[139] Falk, *Book of Blessings*, 16.

like "*Barchu et Adonai Ham'vorach,*" the familiar, traditional, and masculine *Barchu* prayer. It is Marcia Falk's adaptation of the very language, syllables, and sounds of these *familiar prayers* that has limited their acceptance and impact upon the broader liberal Jewish world. For a feminist intervention in our liturgy to be successful, we must examine alternative means to implement these changes.

C. Friedman and Setel's *Mi Shebeirach*

Debbie Friedman and Drora Setel's *Mi Shebeirach* represents a successful feminist creative liturgical development. Its widespread use in liberal communities throughout the country is a testament to its enduring strength and popularity. As William Cutter explains, "the Misheberach impulse had, by 1995 or so, migrated throughout clal Yisrael because of Debbie Friedman's rendition of this ancient prayer."[140] With the publication of *Mishkan T'filah,* the editors standardized Friedman and Setel's version by including the text on page of "Prayers for Healing," integrated seamlessly with an equally egalitarian but more traditionally worded formulation.[141]

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[140] William Cutter, "A Prayer for Healing: The Misheberach," *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Ideas* 41 (June 2011): 4-5, http://shma.com/2011/06/a-prayer-for-healing-the-misheberach.

[141] Frishman, *Mishkan T'filah*, 371.

Cutter notes that the traditional form of this blessing was one "we vaguely knew before we heard Debbie's translation."[142] Traditionally associated with the Torah or Haftarah reading, prayers of this type did not include mention of *imoteinu,* "our mothers," or any reference to God in a feminine gender, as the phrase *M'kor hab'rachah,* "Source of Blessing" implies. Rabbi Drora Setel's description of the composition's origin provides insight into their process and their product:

> The story of "*Mi Shebeirach*" begins in 1987, when a friend of Debbie's, Marcia Cohn Spiegel, decided to hold a Simchat Hochmah, a ceremony celebrating aging… [she] specifically asked Debbie to create a composition of the *Mi Shebeirach* prayer. Debbie, in turn, asked me to collaborate with her on the blessing…[a central] issue was our desire to retain the familiar feeling of the prayer while making it gender inclusive. The opening line, *mi shebeirach avoteinu* ("The One who blessed our fathers"), spoke to the hearts of many Jews. Rather than replacing it, we added the words *makor ha-barachah l'imoteinu* ("Source of Blessing for our mothers"). The phrase also used traditional theological language, taken from the Shabbat song "*Lecha Dodi*." Finally, to reject the association of one aspect of the divine as male and another as female, we reversed the words in the second verse so that it became "The One who blessed our mothers, Source of Blessing for our fathers.[143]

In comparison to Falk's *Book of Blessing* compositions, I believe Friedman and Setel's *Mi Shebeirach* was successful for the following reasons:

1. *Lack of Familiarity or Prior Association:* Liberal clergy and congregants were largely unfamiliar with any and all forms of a *Mi Shebeirach* prayer prior to Friedman and Setel's composition; the prayer does not appear in the prior Reform movement *siddur, Gates of Prayer*. As such, few worshippers had a strong previous association with the

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[142] Cutter, *Prayer for Healing.*

[143] Drorah Setel, "Debbie Friedman's Healing Prayer," *The Jewish Daily Forward,* January 18, 2011, http://forward.com/articles/134774/debbie-friedman-s-healing-prayer/.

prayer. This is in stark contrast to Falk's compositions, which attempted to alter the wording and experience of familiar blessings.

2. *Communal Response:* Beyond the wish of Friedman, Setel, and others to adapt liturgy in a feminist way, Cutter observes that the introduction of this liturgical composition coincided with a communal desire for an outlet for the pain associated with illness and loss. It was simply "the right moment" for a healing prayer to take center-stage in liberal Jewish communities.[144] Unlike Falk, who sought to reshape standard liturgical units, Friedman and Setel introduced a new piece of liturgy, offering a message that was both previously and presently desired.

3. *Accessible Music:* Friedman and Setel's melody is powerful and has stood the test of time. A singable melody adds to the experience of worship and increases the likelihood that congregants will learn, internalize, and participate in the prayer. Falk's blessings are not written with musical notation or associated with a particular *nusach,* and the unfamiliar Hebrew words present a barrier to the average congregant.

These three reasons for the success of the *Mi Shebeirach* as a feminist liturgical intervention are transferable beyond this particular example. As discussed at the opening of this chapter, Ellenson and Frishman offer three principles to understand the development of liberal liturgy. Ellenson's principle of content and Frishman's principle of consistency are both evident from the case study of feminist liturgy, particularly Falk's

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[144] Cutter, *Prayer for Healing.*

work. Ellenson's principle of length, coupled with the theory of Creative Retrieval, offer

the opportunity to repeat the feminist success story of the Friedman/Setel *Mi Shebeirach.*

III. The Case for Creative Retrieval

As Ellenson explains above, Reform liturgists have applied the principle of

content and the principle of length in the development of prayer books since the 19th

century, leading to deletion of material from the traditional worship service for both

theological and temporal reasons. Additionally, certain prayers and liturgical rubrics

appear in either an altered or shortened form, reflecting these same concerns of ideology

or length.

For example, in the *G'vurot* blessing of the *Amidah,* liberal Jews have substituted

the phrase *m'chayeh meitim,* "the One Who revives the dead," for *m'chayeh ha'kol,* "the

One Who gives life to all" in the vast majority of prayer books until the most recent

Mishkan T'filah, which offers the former, traditional option parenthetically in Hebrew

and English.[145] This substitution of just one word reflects a change made under the

principle of content, not the principle of length. Ellenson offers the shortening of the

weekday *P'sukei D'zimrah* as his prime example of the application of the principle of

length, providing us with a useful parallel for historical and current treatment of the

Egyptian Hallel. He explains:

> Most non-Orthodox authors of prayer books have expressed few theological problems
> with or objections to Psalms 145-150, the biblical writings that compose the basic
> content of this service. Nor did the other psalms and biblical citations in the *P'sukei
> D'zimrah* bother liberal prayer book composers…[for example] Abraham Geiger…
> and Isaac Mayer Wise…have shortened the number of psalms and passages to be

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[145] David Ellenson, Commentary on "The Liturgy," in *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries,* edited by Lawrence A. Hoffman, vol. 4, 49-210, (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999), 77.

recited so that worshipers can focus their thoughts on the few psalms that are retained without having to hurry through all the psalms that the traditional rite prescribes.[146]

The longstanding application of these principles of content and length present us with an incredible opportunity: a wealth of available material from our historical liturgical tradition that we can reincorporate into our worship practice today. Rabbis Herbert Bronstein and Leon Morris have each written on this process, which they term "creative retrieval." Morris explores creative retrieval in the context of the forthcoming new Reform *machzor, Mishkan Ha'Nefesh.* Some of the prayers and liturgical poetry in this *machzor* will be new for liberal liturgy but drawn from traditional material that editors previously removed.[147] Bronstein states:

> [By this,] I mean the retrieval from our own traditional sources and our own roots, from the design of our own liturgy, of meaningful elements relevant to our own time. From another perspective, I have also used the term borrowed from Gabriel Marcel, "resourcement." This is meant to imply that our own tradition itself has the resources for an approach to our world in our time and with our needs, which demands that we put ourselves back into the essential meaning of those sources. This process also is the source of our own spiritual renewal.[148]

Both Bronstein and Morris see the value in looking into our tradition for abandoned liturgical elements and imbuing them with deeper meaning and alternate understandings today. Rather than shying away from liturgy due to its content or length, Morris believes that due to the predominance of text study, modern liberal Jews are both comfortable reading prayers on multiple, metaphorical levels, and eager to engage with a greater

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[146] Ellenson, "P'sukei D'zimrah," 29-30.

[147] Leon Morris, "The End of Liturgical Reform as We Know It: Creative Retrieval as a New Paradigm," *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly*. (Summer 2013): 293-8.

[148] Herbert Bronstein, "Yom Kippur Worship: A Missing Center?," *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly*. (Summer 2004):14.

variety of texts. Drawing on Bronstein, Morris emphasizes that "the liturgical decisions of previous generations of Reform Jews may be noteworthy, but each generation needs for its own response to come directly from the inherited texts of our tradition."[149]

While we are fortunate that the majority of Hallel liturgy appears in *Mishkan T'filah,* creative retrieval provides a basis to explore and experiment with Hallel in new ways.

IV. Creative Retrieval of Hallel Liturgy: My Methodology

As discussed in Chapter 2, the editors of *Mishkan T'filah* included the majority of the Egyptian Hallel psalms. Only Pss. 115:1-11 and 116:1-11 do not appear in this *siddur,* a decision that seems to adhere to the principles of content and length. With regard to potentially objectionable or foreign content, Ps. 115:1-11 includes the harsh polemic against idolatry. The edits made to Ps. 116 strike me more as a consideration of length. Frishman's principle of consistency is actually *not* at play here, as the verses of Psalms 115 and 116 that the editors selected to add and remove in *Mishkan T'filah* differ from *Gates of Prayer.*[150] However, I believe that the Egyptian Hallel in the Hallel II service in *Mishkan T'filah* represents the application of creative retrieval in its break from the consistency of *Gates of Prayer,* providing clergy and congregants with a greater percentage of the material that comprises the entirety of the Egyptian Hallel. Finally, the choice of verses in *Mishkan T'filah* is efficient, as it correlates exactly to the Half Hallel, recited on Rosh Chodesh.

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[149] Morris, *Creative Retrieval,* 31.

[150] A survey, comparison, and analysis of the Hallel unit in the various prayerbooks from the course of the Reform movement's liturgical history presents an interesting area for future study.

Returning to Morris, I apply his "hermeneutic of embrace" when applying

creative retrieval to my treatment of the Hallel unit:

- A hermeneutic of embrace begins with a love for the classic liturgy and a firm belief that it can be mined for contemporary meaning and relevance.
- A hermeneutic of embrace is rooted in the idea that the classic text has a great deal to teach us and that our primary task is to realize how it might be reframed, explained, or translated in such a way as to allow it to live in our Reform synagogues….
- A hermeneutic of embrace argues against apologizing for wanting to restore the traditional text if it can be restored in ways that allow it to inspire, to teach, and or elicit creative interpretations….
- A hermeneutic of embrace raises the bar for the work of liberal liturgy. It is much easier to delete and to change than to explain…or to use in new ways.[151]

As the editors selected to include nearly all of the Egyptian Hallel in *Mishkan*

T'filah, we are empowered to take creative retrieval one stage further, experimenting and

innovating with our interpretations and expressions of this liturgical unit in our worship.

In chapter 1, I employed Morris' hermeneutic of embrace through my annotated

translation and close literary analysis of the biblical text of these psalms. I gained a deep

understanding of the themes and language of each psalm and the rhetorical features that

unite the psalms as one liturgical unit. These insights will provide the basis for my

creative interpretations of each psalm, highlighting particular poetic and thematic

characteristics of each psalm in the type of interpretation I choose.

In chapter 2, I explored the rabbinic and *halachic* history of the Egyptian Hallel as

a liturgical unit, valuing and emphasizing its long and important history as a classic text

of our tradition. In chapter 4, I will offer two examples of creative interpretations of the

psalms in the Hallel unit. I base my interpretation on the themes I uncovered in my

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[151] Morris, *Creative Retrieval,* 32-33.

biblical analysis in chapter 1. In employing the hermeneutic of embrace, I look to the classic texts to teach us while reframing and creating new meanings for our time. I encourage enriching the Hallel experience rather than omitting or abbreviating it.

Further, my methodology follows the principles I distilled from the case study of the Friedman/Setel Mi Shebeirach: Lack of Familiarity or Prior Association, Communal Response, and Accessible Music. From my own personal experience at several Reform synagogues and through conversations with others, it is clear to me that morning services are sparsely attended in the majority of liberal congregations, creating a lack of familiarity or personal association with the Egyptian Hallel. Some may connect with the use of the Egyptian Hallel in the Passover seder, the only evening usage of this liturgical unit, and I have reflected this in my creative choices for Psalm 114.

Friedman and Setel succeeded in incorporating a new piece of creative liturgy into common usage throughout liberal Jewish communities, distinguished and still widely accepted, for some despite of and for others because of its feminist language. I believe this was especially effective due to the lack of familiarity with this piece of liturgy, in contrast to Falk's *Bar'chu* or *Sh'ma.* By incorporating a feminist interpretation into Psalm 113, I experiment with altering the language of a piece of liturgy with which congregants are much less familiar and lack any strong associations, thereby opening the door for experimentation in language and form.

The second principle, Communal Response, will not be one that I can necessarily gauge until after I and others explore the creative methods I suggest for the Egyptian Hallel. Another related idea that I glean from the case of the *Mi Shebeirach* is that clergy

did not confine the use of this prayer to its original context, during a morning Torah or Haftarah service. At the Reform synagogue where I grew up, we recited this prayer every Friday evening. By not tying *Mi Shebeirach* or the Egyptian Hallel to a particular time or type of service, a greater variety and number of community members can experience it and respond accordingly. I will shape future development of my creative interpretations of these psalms in response to the community, and the community will continue to respond in a dialectic fashion. I therefore propose including the Egyptian Hallel not only at the sparsely attending festival morning services, but also to conduct these creative interpretations on the Friday evening prior to the beginning of each festival. The Egyptian Hallel is so strongly connected to the celebration of these holidays, but the exact timing of its usage should meet the needs and habits of congregants so that the greatest number and variety of people can experience it.

Finally, following the principle of Accessible Music, I emphasize a variety of styles and applications of creative and artistic means to experience these psalms. Each psalm is different, so my choices differ for each psalm. Accessible music plays a particular role in Psalm 118. As Adler emphasizes, worship is highly experiential, transcending the words on the page to incorporate physical, spiritual, emotional, auditory, and sensory elements.

Frishman highlights the importance of balancing her principle of consistency with improvisation, stating, "[e]ven with the essential advance planning, there also must be a spontaneous response to the people present." Based on a careful plan and understanding the biblical text, I explore improvisational worship throughout my interpretation of two

of the Egyptian Hallel Psalms. I credit and thank my teachers and classmates in the

course I took at Union Theological Seminary on this subject, particularly our work with

Ps. 117.

Chapter 4: Creative Interpretation of Egyptian Hallel

In this chapter, I offer two examples of creative interpretations of psalms in the Hallel unit, Pss. 117 and 118. As detailed in chapter 3, I apply Morris' "hermeneutic of embrace" and the principles I developed, particularly those of lack of familiarity and accessible music, in developing these interpretations. These interpretations are appropriate for a variety of settings, including festival worship services, Shabbat services prior to a festival, an adult or young adult study session regarding the Hallel psalms, or a religious school setting. I developed each interpretation after close study of the biblical texts, employing thematic and poetic understandings I have gleaned to my creative approaches.

I. Psalm 117

This creative interpretation utilizes improvisational singing, an approach that I studied with Janet Walton and Troy Messinger at Union Theological Seminary. As a psalm with universal language and themes, it was particularly appropriate to explore in an interfaith setting at Union. Meredith Monk, an improvisational dancer and singer, provides a powerful and useful illustration of vocal improvisation. As Monk explains:

> Some people imagine that we do free-for-all improvisation, but that's not the way we work at all. I don't go into rehearsal where we're just going to do an improvisation. I never know how to use material generated like that. I come in with a small parameter that I'm interested in and then we can play with the material. There's a lot of room for play and I give total credit to the amazing creativity and intelligence and patience of my performers.

The leader explains that Psalm 117 is the shortest psalm and shortest chapter of the entire Bible, consisting of two verses. The psalm has a core

message of a universal call to praise God. The psalmist invites every nation and every people to praise God, because God is merciful and true. Each person receives a slip of paper with one word of the psalm (in Hebrew, English, and transliteration), and receives an invitation to improvisationally sing that word in any language, any way the participant would like. The leader will conduct the group, slowly reciting each word of the psalm about 10-15 seconds apart, which is the cue for anyone holding that word to begin singing. The leader can allow the improvisation to continue for as long as the group remains engaged, and then provide a non-verbal cue to conclude.

Improvisational singing in a group setting allows for individual freedom of expression within the safety of a community. Individuals can experiment with noises, pitches, and language, without singing solo. This musical improvisation represents the diversity of individuals within a community, a key message of this psalm, which calls upon "every nation" and "every people" to "praise God." This symphony and blend of musical expression is how I imagine such universal praise would sound, and provides a community with an experience of universal praise.

II. Psalm 118

This creative interpretation using yoga and meditation focuses on Ps. 118:14, 19-21 and highlights the themes of strength, support from God, redemption, righteousness, uprightness, and entering through a gateway.

Opening Meditation

The leader reads these verses slowly in Hebrew and English. The leader then begins a guided meditation, asking participants to think about personal images and associations with these verses. What does it mean to be strong? What does it mean to be upright? How are you righteous in the world? What gateways have you come through in your life? What gateways are in front of you? Think about the endings of the words. This is personal, first person language. God is *my* strength. Open the gates *for me.* How often do you take time to think inwardly, to think about yourself? This is a psalm celebrating the self, and the self in relationship with God and community. Now is our time to focus on our individual selves, on our bodies and our souls, and we empty our minds of stray or troubling thoughts.

The leader begins to sing these three verses to any tune that will be familiar to the community. If musical and vocal accompaniment is available, the music should continue through the yoga practice.

Yoga and Movement

Begin on the floor, seated cross-legged, with hands resting gently wherever they are most comfortable. In this practice, we will link our breath with our movement. Now is the time to check in with your body. Notice your breathing, and where the air travels through each part of your body.

The first pose is tabletop, transitioning into cat and cow. Begin to feel a fluid motion in your body. Begin to sense your strength. As you move from cat to cow, your

head moves though the gateway of your shoulders. *Pitchu li sha'arei tzedek* - open the gate of your body and your breath.

Now rise to mountain pose, beginning with your arms at your sides, and slowing lifting your arms overhead. Gaze toward your arms, palms touching, overhead. What are you looking at? What do you see? What are you looking toward? What are you aspiring toward?

From mountain, swan dive down into a forward fold. Forward fold is a true release. Sometimes we aim high very high, and we and lose sight of where we stand. Release yourself from lofty expectations and standards. Ground yourself.

Move into a half-way lift, with a flat back, arms resting lightly on your shins, gazing straight forward. You are making progress. You are looking forward to all you can do in the future. This is a transitional pose. Remember where you stand. Your legs ground you and give you strength. *Ozi v'zimrat Yah!*

From the half-way lift, move into warrior one, first with the left foot forward, then the right. Your arms create a gateway that you can see, but you have not yet entered. What will it take to enter through the gateway? What lies on the other side? *Pitchu li sha'arei tzedek* - open the gates of righteousness, of peace, of strength!

Returning to the floor, lie down and reconnect with yourself, with your breath. Next, move into bridge lifts, with your back on the floor and your foot on the floor, knees bent, you lift from your hips. Open up a gateway - *Pitchu li sha'arei tzedek!* Feel your strength. Feel that you are grounded in your strength. *Ozi v'zimrat Yah!*

Now, move into shavasana, corpse pose. Lie on your back, with your legs and arms flat to the floor. Return to your breathing. Let your thoughts drift away away. Move into yourself. Move into rest. After a few minutes of shavasana, conclude with singing vv. 14, 19-21.

The use of movement and meditation in this creative exploration allows participants to experience Psalm 118 in a new, embodied way. Participants will gain a deeper sense of the psalm's imagery of strength (v. 14) and the gates of righteousness (vv. 19-21) by physically experiencing the text and concretizing its language through movement. A yoga and meditation setting allows for quiet reflection on selected passages and for individual expression within communal prayer. This mirrors the shift from personal to communal praise that defines this psalm.

III. Ideas for Remaining Hallel Psalms

For the remaining Hallel psalms, I propose the following creative interpretations, utilizing movement, poetry, interpretive translation, film, and art.

Psalm 113

Applying Marc Brettler's feminist interpretation of this psalm, I will write a creative translation voiced by the happy mother in v. 9. In writing my translation, I will apply Marcia Falk's understanding of a relational, non-hierarchical God. While the original psalm emphasizes God's spatial separateness from the lowly, needy people, the original author also marvels at God's ability to cross this distance and develop an

immanent relationship with people on earth. I intend to write in the voice of a first person female narrator, emphasizing the relational aspect of a feminist interpretation, imagining a grateful woman who speaks directly to God. In addition to the barren woman, I will include modern examples of the "poor" and "needy" (v. 8), in an attempt to give a contemporary, accessible voice to this ancient text.

Psalm 114

For this psalm, I propose a musical, movement, and visual interpretation, reflecting the sounds and sights associated with this psalm. To musically represent the psalm, drums, shakers, and other instruments could be available. To add a visual component, images or film of water and mountains will be projected on a screen to represent the Sea of Reeds, Jordan River, mountains, and hills. Rather than using stock images, the organizer are encouraged to invite congregants in advance to share their personal photos or videos of oceans, seas, rivers, mountains, hills, and forests. For an additional kinesthetic element to this creative psalm interpretation, long pieces of blue and green fabric will be available for participants to move up and down in a wave-like pattern to represent these bodies of water and pieces of earth in motion, as the psalm describes. With instruments playing and the visuals in the background, the leader invites the group to sing this psalm to a tune familiar to the community. This multi-faceted, active interpretation of Psalm 114 would be particularly fitting for a multi-generational program or a Tot Shabbat types service.

Psalm 115

For Psalm 115, I propose a creative interpretation focused on personal reflection. This activity will translate the psalm's focus on idol worship to a contemporary setting by asking participants to identify what might be considered modern idols. This is a collective psalm, largely voiced in the first person plural. However, today, the possessions, people, ideas, or activities that we treat as idols are much more personal and perhaps sensitive. I will explore offering a musical selection after the reflection to allow the community to come together to conclude in the collective. If the worship or educational setting permits, I suggest utilizing artistic media, such as paint or clay, to allow each person to express his or her modern idols.

Psalm 116

This creative interpretation will involve ritual improvisation focused on the "cup of salvation" in v. 13. After contextualizing the ritual within the larger psalm, especially vv. 12-14, the leader will invite anyone who wishes to lift a physical cup and offer a blessing or hope for the community. If the setting is appropriate for water, each person who offers a blessing will be given an opportunity to add water to the cup until it overflows into a bowl that is beneath it, representing a cup overflowing with blessings. A larger group could utilize multiple cups in different parts of the room, and the blessings can overlap each other as people offer their words in smaller groups. The leader will conclude by inviting everyone to return to seats and recite vv. 18-19. This activity intends to concretize the metaphor of the "cup of salvation" and to connect participants' personal experiences with the imagery and message of this psalm.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

In this thesis, I closely translated and analyzed Psalms 113-118. This detailed work with the biblical material enabled me to articulate broader themes, poetic similarities, and unique nuances within this group of psalms, which I detail in chapter one. Among the broader themes of these psalms are God's role as a helper and deliverer (Pss. 113:6-9; 116:6-7; 118:7); God's rule over all times, peoples, and places (Pss. 113:2-5; 114:3-8; 115:15-16; 117:1-2; 118:1); calling out from a narrow place (Pss. 116:3; 118:5); and offering praise to God (Pss. 113:1; 115:17-18; 116:17; 117:1-2, 118:28-29).

After studying the liturgical origins of the Hallel unit and its current use in the Reform movement prayerbook, *Mishkan T'filah,* I explored and articulated principles for successful liturgical change. I identified the Friedman/Setel *Mi Shebeirach* as a key example of a successful liturgical innovation and used it as a model for my work with Hallel. As with the *Mi Shebeirach,* the Hallel liturgy lacks the type of strong personal connections or associations that the majority of Reform Jews may have with more familiar prayers, such as the *Bar'chu* or *Sh'ma*. Therefore, as somewhat of a *tabula rasa,* Hallel is a flexible liturgical unit that offers creative and interpretive possibilities for Reform Jewish worship settings and beyond. This flexibility enabled me to engage with improvisational, musical, and movement-based interpretations of two of the Hallel psalms, Psalms 117 and 118.

Through the writing process, I have identified several areas of future potential research that interest me. Sperling's theory about verbal linkages among units and groups

of psalms presents a potential future area of study, particularly comparing the preponderance of certain key words in a given unit. For example, I could investigate the frequency of major key words in the Hallel unit, such as *shem* ("name")*, l'olam* ("eternity")*,* and *dal* ("poor"), as compared to their frequency in the broader book of Psalms.

Further, a survey, comparison, and analysis of the Hallel unit in the various prayerbooks from the course of the Reform movement's liturgical history presents an area for future study. I am also interested in researching liturgical change and communal reception to these changes with other units of liturgy beyond Hallel. I intend to continue my investigation and application of creative retrieval to under-utilized material from within Jewish liturgical tradition.

Finally, I plan to explore movement, poetry, interpretive translation, film, and art as further means of engaging with the Hallel psalms, particularly Psalms 113-116. I will experiment with a practical application of selected creative interpretations of Hallel psalms in an HUC-JIR chapel service in New York later in March, 2015.

This thesis enabled me to engage with biblical textual analysis in an in-depth way and to explore the topic of liturgical change. The Hallel unit provided me with an excellent case study to begin my examination of these subjects. I look forward to continuing to explore biblical texts and liturgical creativity in both academic and practical settings in order to bring biblical and liturgical texts to life in ways that enrich people's lives and enhance their connection to our tradition.

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