

Walk thru David HaMelech's T'hilim

with Rabbi David Walk

Ed. note: This is a new column in which Rabbi Walk will present one perek of T'hilim each week. We have decided to begin with Shir shel Yom

Perek 24

DAY ONE: NEW BEGINNINGS

When I was a kid, I always knew the day of the week based upon the TV shows we watched. Tuesday was my favorite with Jack Benny, Red Skelton and F Troop. Through most of my professional life, I knew the day of the week because of job responsibilities. Now that I'm a retiree, I know what day it is because of T'FILA, and, specifically, the Shir Shel Yom. This is the beginning of a series of seven articles describing each day's SHIR, and its connection to its day of the week.

Sunday bats leadoff. Here in Eretz Yisrael, we really feel like Sunday begins the week because it's the back to work day. B"H that's the way the Torah and Jewish custom meant it to be. While living in the States, it didn't feel like the week had begun until Monday. But here we start our week with T'hilim chapter 24.

The selections for Shir Shel Yom are listed and partially explained in the Talmud: We learn in a B'rait'a (TANYA): Rabbi Yehuda says in the name of Rabbi Akiva on the first day what did they (the Leviyim) recite (while the Kohanim were bringing the daily offering)? 'To God is the world and the fullness thereof' (T'hilim 24:1). This is because God (created, and therefore) acquired the world and rules it (Rosh HaShana 35a).

So, according to Rabbi Akiva, the reason that chapter 24 is the Psalm for Sunday is that it declares that God owns and rules the earth based on the Creation process, which began on Sunday. It's sort of a variation on an announcement my adolescent incarnation would hear from store keepers when my friends and I would enter a store: If you break it, you own it! Here we announce: if you create it, you own it. Remember this was a long time before intellectual property legislation.

However, I believe that there's much more in our poem to suggest the spirit of YOM RISHON B'SHABBAT. For example: Who can ascend the mountain of God, and who can stand upon His holy place (verse 3)? The Malbim explains that inquiry is 'even if you can find someone who can scale the heights for an instant, but

can they remain permanently in that holy place?'

In the literal meaning of the question, this means that achieving permanent residence within the holy precincts is unusual and can only be achieved by the few who are described in verse 4, 'clean hands, pure hearts, hearts that avoid vanity, and never deceive.' However, I would submit for your consideration, that this question is asking about the sanctity achieved on Shabbat. It's cool that we can have a day, Shabbat, within the holy precincts, but when the profane days (CHOL) of the week arrive, can we maintain that holiness while interacting with the world at large? Not so easy!

Then we must consider verse 6. This is hard to translate. The Hebrew says ZEH DOR DORSHAV. Perhaps, we can render that, 'This is the generation that seeks God.' And then we refer back to Ya'akov Avinu, 'Those who seek Your face, Ya'akov.' Are we addressing Ya'akov? Weren't we trying to seek God, just a few words back? Two popular suggestions are

1. we mean the God of Ya'akov, or
2. we mean to seek God as Ya'akov did. Either could work.

I would like to strongly propose option 2. We want our generation to

emulate the efforts of Ya'akov Avinu to search for God at all times. Remember Ya'akov is the Patriarch of the Ladder (SULAM). In our Psalm, the SULAM is identified with the Temple Mount. Our beloved Patriarch taught us about ascending towards God. So, on Sunday we are Ya'akov at the bottom of the Ladder ready to resume the climb, striving for the top. There is also this strong desire for continuity, emulating Ya'akov. Similarly, we want this new week to be a quest for God, not just worldly needs. As we begin a new week, we reaffirm our commitment to this endeavor.

The rest of the Psalm, I believe, is a description of what exactly we desire from this pursuit of God. We seek God and, in return, we anticipate, God throwing open the gates which have separated us from our Divine King. We emphasize and repeat our request (verses 7 & 9), almost a demand for God to fling open the gates, and reveal the glory within. On the literal level the Psalm has two parts verses 2-6 are about us coming to the Holy Mountain and the Beit HaMikdash, the final verses are about God also arriving at the holy site to rendezvous with us.

The image of the gates opening in anticipation of the arrival God the

King is also appropriate to Sunday. On Motza'ei Shabbat with Havdala, there is a sense of a curtain coming down on the Sabbath joy, and now on Sunday morning we chant about a new beginning with the gates flung open wide to receive the King who we pray will arrive this week.

This is our Sunday prayer and need. As we begin a new week of work and worldly involvements, we leave Shabbat in the rear-view mirror, and continue to anticipate a future filled with all the promises of a world, created and possessed by God, which will soon also be filled with God's revealed presence. 🎵

Walk thru David HaMelech's T'hilim

with Rabbi David Walk

Ed. note: This is a new column in which Rabbi Walk will present one perek of T'hilim each week. We have decided to begin with Shir shel Yom

Perek 48

DAY TWO: UNCERTAINTY

Monday, Monday, can't trust that day. Having grown up with the Mamas and the Papas singing about their misgivings about Monday morning, I have a healthy skepticism about Mondays in general. But this feeling about its vagaries comes from the Diaspora where the work-week begins on day 2, rather than day one of the week. Bearing that in mind, we Jews also have misgivings about Mondays because YOM SHEINI is only day of Creation Week, when God doesn't say, 'And it was good.' So, we begin to explore the SHIR SHEL YOM for day 2 with a little trepidation.

Let's begin with the famous Talmudic statement in Rosh Hashana explaining the choice of the daily Psalms: On Monday, they (the Leviyim) would sing "Great is the Lord, and highly to be praised in the city of our God, our holy mountain (Psalm 48)", as He

separated His works and reigned over them (31a). This requires a little explanation. On YOM SHEINI, God said, "Let there be an expanse (RAKI'A) in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water." God made the expanse, and it separated the water which was below the expanse from the water which was above the expanse. And it was so (B'reishit 1:6-7).

Even this doesn't totally clear up the matter, because T'hilim 48 may reference oceans (verse 5), but it really is all about Yerushalayim. Actually, on further consideration this makes a lot of sense because just as God separated the 'waters below' from the 'waters above', so God separated Yerushalayim from the rest of the inhabitable universe, and set the Divine Throne there (Rashi). Yerushalayim is also the interface point between this realm (OLAM HAZEH) and the Divine precincts. Therefore, the SHIR SHEL YOM for YOM SHENI discusses YERUSHALAYIM, which reminds us of the divide between the physical and spiritual.

This idea of separation is fully explored in chapter 48. The Psalm's description of Yerushalayim emphasizes its separateness. The text begins by describing the impregnable nobility of Yerushalayim: Lovely in its

elevation, distant extremity (verse 3), famed as a fortress (verse 4), Kings saw it and were dumbfounded, panicked, and dismayed (verse 5). Take note of the description towards the end: Walk about Tziyon, go all around her; count her towers. Take note of her ramparts, view her bastions, to recount to the last generation (verses 13-14).

Please, note the different tone from the earlier description (verses 3-5), and the latter account (13-14). At the beginning the Singer describes the impossibility of conquering Yerushalayim, its inviolability. We'll ignore the irony that Yerushalayim has been conquered dozens of times. However, towards the end of the Psalm the emphasis is on the boundaries. There are clear lines of demarcation between the inside of Yerushalayim and everything else in the world; between the holy and the profane. That delineation is very much a YOM SHENI topic.

Then there's the enigmatic middle section of our Psalm. What is our Singer getting at by telling us: We contemplate (meditate, imagine, reflect, DIMINU) O Lord, Your loving Kindness, in the midst of Your Sanctuary (holy precinct, sanctum, HEICHALECHA, verse 10)?

Rav Weinreb offered an explanation:

In Jerusalem, one cannot escape God's presence. Jerusalem is an antidote for feelings of alienation and abandonment... Magically, mysteriously God feels close to us when we are in His Holy City... the closeness to God that we feel there dispels the dark clouds of sadness and despair (Koren Psalms, p. 238). God's greatest kindness (CHESED) is to bridge the gaps in our existence.

Rav Kook and his students saw in this verse an allusion to prayer. Prayer is an act of imagination (DIMYON). Rav Ya'akov Moshe Charlop, among the closest students of Rav Kook, wrote to his son in America that through the DIMYON referred to in our verse, one can extend the atmosphere of Yerushalayim to aid in prayer, even in the States! The DIMYON of Yerushalayim can work even outside its precincts. But it's always the dream, image of Yerushalayim which transports us and our prayers to God's Sanctum (HEICHAL).

And, finally, our Psalm concludes: For this God is our God, forevermore; He will guide us beyond death (verse 15). YOM SHEINI in the Torah describes the separation between upper and lower waters (heaven and earth); most of Psalm 48 delineates the vast gulf between Yerushalayim and the rest of the universe; and, now, as the

poem ends, we allude to the final great divide - life and death. The connection to God, which Yerushalayim helps us to maintain, will carry us beyond death (AL MUT) to the next realm.

This truly remarkable Psalm helps us cope with the vagaries of Monday. There is great disappointment in realizing that our world is compartmentalized into many different zones of distance from God. Chapter 48 reassures us that God has given us the means to bridge this great gulf between our earthly life and our God. The greatest aid to overcome this challenge is that beautiful bridge to the next realm, Yerushalayim, our eternal haven on a hill. 🎵

Walk thru David HaMelech's T'hilim

with Rabbi David Walk

Ed. note: This is a new column in which Rabbi Walk will present one perek of T'hilim each week. We have decided to begin with Shir shel Yom

Perek 82

DAY THREE: DOUBLE GOOD

Back in the mid-80s we were moving from Moshav Elazar across the street (highway 60) to our new home in Efrat. So, we called one of the most venerable moving companies in Israel, HOVALOT YA'AKOVI, in business since 1950, just like me. On the phone, I asked to move the following Monday. The response? 'No, you want to move on Tuesday, YOM SHE'HUCHPAL BO 'KI TOV!' I was being informed that Tuesday is the best day for new endeavors, because that day God said, 'And it was good', twice. At that point, I was trying to remind myself who was the rabbi and who was the truckdriver. Of course, they may just have been fully booked on Monday, but I was convinced.

So, YOM SH'LISHI is a special day, and that must be reflected in the SHIR SHEL YOM for Tuesday. We recite Psalm 82. For the reason, we turn first to the Talmud in Rosh

HaShana: On the third day of the week. they would recite the psalm beginning: "God stands in the congregation of God" (Psalms 82:1), because on the third day of Creation He revealed the land in His wisdom and thereby prepared the world for His assembly that could now live on the dry land (35a). Not exactly what I was expecting.

Obviously, we've got to get a better understanding of the chapter itself to truly connect this Psalm to YOM SH'LISHI. The place to begin is the well-known declaration: God stands in the divine assembly; among the divine beings He pronounces judgment (Tehillim 82:1). This verse is used by our Sages to better understand court procedures (Sanhedrim 6b). However, it's most famous use is: Rabbi Yitzchak said: From where is it derived that God is located in synagogue? As it is stated: "God stands in the congregation of the Lord." The congregation of God is the place where people congregate to sing God's praises, and God is located among His congregation (B'rachot 6a).

We're still no closer to understanding what this has to do with YOM SH'LISHI. Rav Shmuel Eildels (Maharsha, 1555-1631) in his insights to Aggadot (non-Halachic material in

the Talmud) helps shed some light on the matter. He comments that just like God's separation of dry land from the oceans provides stability to the world, so, too, does the Divine Torah justice system provide needed balance to the world. The obvious connection between Tuesday and justice is, of course, the Flood. When human society loses its sense of fairness and security, as in the generation of the Flood, the stability of the areas of human habitation are threatened with inundation and destruction.

It is this potential for the world to lose its normal stability which is referred to in verse 5: They neither know nor understand, they go about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth totter. The 'they' in that quote are the rich and powerful judges who often use their wealth and position as the unchanging reality of the world. They are 'in the dark' to the true reality, that all stability comes directly from God, and began on that primordial Tuesday.

There is an ever-present danger of judicial corruption. This dangerous reality is described in verse 6. In Biblical Hebrew judges are often called ELOHIM. This term can also be used to refer to heavenly beings and even God. Its use demands that

society treat justice with tremendous reverence, but it can lead to abuse. That's why our Psalm warns those with judicial power: but you shall die as men do, fall like any prince (v. 7).

The rock-solid nature of our continents usually instills within us a sense of stability and security, which isn't always justified. We must remember the cataclysmic flood of the generation of No'ach. The only bulwark against a future disastrous inundation is our judicial system. Its fairness forms the dyke against the raging seas.

Tuesday and its Psalm are a reminder that this sense of safety is based upon our reliance on God, the only true Judge. So, the poor and needy, who must search for justice in this often-difficult world, are advised to best seek this fairness on Tuesday. God doubled the declaration that this world is good on that day. That's why our Psalm reminds us: Judge fairly the wretched and the orphan, vindicate the lowly and the poor, rescue the poor and the needy; save them from the hand of the wicked (v. 3 & 4).

Our poem reminds us of the dangers in our societies, but it's Tuesday, so have some hope. Like Ya'akovi said, 'It's a wonderful day to start something new and exciting.' 🎵

Walk thru David HaMelech's T'hilim

with Rabbi David Walk

Perek 94

DAY FOUR: THE STRUGGLE

Yiddish gets it right. The fourth day of the week is called Mitvoch, mid-week. No reference to the Marvel Universe and Thor's father Woden, sometimes Odin, as in Woden's Day or Wednesday. It's just the middle of the week. Somehow, we all have to make it through the perils of life until Shabbat. It's sort of true that Wednesday's child is full of woe. This difficult reality is reflected in Psalm 94, the poem chosen to be recited by the Leviyim during the daily offering (TAMID), and our Psalm for Day Four.

The Talmud (Rosh HaShana 31a) explains that the Leviyim picked this Psalm because it calls to God to wreak vengeance upon the worshipers of the sun, moon and celestial objects, which were all created on Day 4 of that first week. And, indeed, our poem begins with the declaration: Lord, God of revenge, O God of revenge appear! There's a lot more to this wonderful Psalm, but it does begin with this plea for God to 'Rise up, O Judge of the world and repay

the deeds of the arrogant (verse 2).

Now because we're asking the Divine Judge to 'repay' the bad guys for their dastardly deeds, I prefer translating KEL NEKOMOT as God of retribution or punishment. This beginning part of the Psalm continues to ask the tough questions about Divine justice (theodicy) by asking how long the bad guys (RISHA'IM) will rejoice or be happy (verse 3). This first section of the poem (verses 1-7) ends by decrying the worst possible situation in any society: the widow, stranger and orphan are oppressed. This all occurs because these corrupt rulers neither see nor understand the righteous God of Ya'akov (verse 7).

The middle section of our Psalm (verses 8-15) addresses these oppressors and demands that they begin to understand that God rules this world and that justice will eventually prevail. The individuals who are chastised by God for their crimes should feel fortunate (ASHREI, verse 12) that God is correcting their behavior so that they don't end up in the pit (GEHENNIM?, SHACHAT, verse 13). This middle section ends with the most famous verse of our Psalm: God never abandons His nation; His portion is never forsaken (verse 14, it appears in

the YEHI CH'VOD prayer before ASHREI every morning).

Finally, we come to the last section of the poem, which is what I think about when I recite this poem every YOM R'VI'I. Here we discuss the 'woe' of Wednesday's child: How am I going to make it through the week. The days are passing and I am bogged down with life's strife. The critical verse is: If I feel that I'm falling (my foot is slipping), I must believe that Your kindness (CHESED) will support me (verse 18). I used to sing this verse every week after davening on Wednesdays. There is a beautiful tune for this written Reb Meir Shapiro of Lublin (the originator of DAF YOMI), which can be found online

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBfTF_otlwc

This song was sung in the Camps during the Holocaust, and a very moving version can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0iXe0qEsDg>

Verse 19 completes the thought of verse 18. I felt that I was falling, and couldn't make it through my difficulties or, perhaps, the week. Then, in spite of 'my many anxieties within me, Your consolations delighted (cheered up) my soul.'

Wednesday is the day that we need that old bumper sticker: Hang in

there, Shabbat is coming! In the Ashkenazi custom, the first three verses of Kabbalat Shabbat are recited at the end of chanting Psalm 94 every Wednesday morning. When I was looking in the OTZAR HaTEFILOT SIDDUR for ideas about this Psalm, I noticed (for the first time) the following introductory line: And have intent (VAYECHAVEN) that the light of the extra spirit (RUACH YETEIRA) of the coming Shabbat should come to us. Wednesday morning is all about finding the strength and Divine support to make it through the difficulties of the week.

There's actually a famous custom, based on the teachings of Beit Hillel, that starting on Wednesday, if you find some special treat while shopping, you should save it for Shabbat. In other words, starting YOM R'VI'I, we must begin getting into the Shabbat mood. It helps combat the mid-week blahs.

So, Psalm 94 applies to YOM R'VI'I in two ways. The first 15 verses discuss the terrible rebellion against God by worshiping the heavenly hosts created on that primordial fourth day, and relying upon Divine justice that these crimes will be punished. However, the last 8 verses concentrate on the belief that God will help us get through life's vicissitudes. And

nothing helps us carry on more than
the expectation of the upcoming
wonderful, restful, rejuvenating
Shabbat. 🎵

Walk thru David HaMelech's T'hilim

with Rabbi David Walk

Perek 81

DAY FIVE: THUNDEROUS UNCERTAINTY

Please, forgive me as I reminisce about my misguided youth. Growing up I loved comics books. You know, sort of like action movies that don't move. My favorite was The Mighty Thor. Thank you Stan Lee a"h. So, now that I'm writing about Thursday (Thor's Day), I feel right at home. Even the Psalm chosen by our Sages for YOM CHAMISHI cooperates with my youthful predilections, but more on that later.

The choice of chapter 81 as the Day 5 Psalm is not immediately obvious. The famous Talmudic statement about the daily Psalms (Rosh HaShana 31a), explains that the fifth day of Creation saw the emergence of birds and fish. Rashi then comments that these denizens of air and sea are so beautiful and awesome that we earthbound humans can't help but burst into song, or as the Singer of our Psalm declares: Sing joyously to God, our

strength; raise a shout for the God of Jacob. Take up the song, sound the timbrel, the melodious lyre and harp. Blow the horn on the new moon, on the full moon for our feast day (T'hilim 81:2-4).

But there's a lot more going on than just a happy song for Thursday, and, in our tradition, this Psalm has other roles. This Psalm is the Song for Rosh HaShana and Day 6 of Sukkot according to the custom of the Vilna Gaon. The blowing of the horn, SHOFAR, clearly references Rosh HaShana, and 'the feast day' (CHAGEINU) can be assumed to be Sukkot, which is called CHAG by the Torah and our Sages.

Only after this joyous opening does our Singer (Maybe Assaf) get more serious. The Psalm describes the various Mitzvot which God has ordained. We have CHUKIM (decrees we don't fathom), MISHPATIM (laws for society, which we would have legislated if God hadn't) and EIDUT (testimonies, commemorations like CHAGIM and Shabbat). At his point our Psalm reviews the Jews' historic relationship with God. We begin with God removing the yoke of servitude ('I relieved his shoulder of the burden', verse 7) back in Egypt. According to most authorities, this relief from the burdens of bondage

also took place on Rosh HaShana. This began the six month program of Ten Plagues, resulting in the Exodus on Pesach. It also previously referenced Yosef, who was released from prison on Rosh HaShana.

With our relationship with God clearly delineated, our Father in heaven begins to warn us that everything will be fine if we only can eschew idolatry and remain loyal to God, who brought us up out of Egypt (MA'ALCHA). This is a variant on the more usual 'took us out (Y'TZI'A) of Egypt'. We are recognizing that the Exodus experience raised this slave people up and transformed them into a great nation.

Hidden in verse 8 is the Thor reference. God tells us that, 'I answered you from the thunder's hiding place'. God's voice is like thunder. Forgetting about Norse mythology, thunder is both exciting and scary. Just as the Jews experienced it at Mt. Sinai. We're, therefore, also referring to Shavuot, as we paraphrase the first two Commandments in verses 10 and 11, just in reversed order.

This moves the Psalm into the arena of MUSAR, or ethical motivation. God continues speaking to the Jewish people and warns us 'there shall no foreign god with you... I alone am your God.' But God shares with us the

sad reality that we Jews don't listen. Then we are left to our own resources, and that leaves us open to the vicissitudes of history. This could spell our doom, because we only survive the storm tides of the centuries with Divine intervention.

Clearly, this is again a Rosh HaShana theme. I believe that it's also a Thursday matter. On the fifth day of the week, the Jewish courts traditionally sat (along with Mondays), and we feel the pressure of judgment. We also feel a certain sense of the week winding down towards Shabbat. Has this week been one of accomplishments? Will I enter Shabat with a feeling of content and fulfillment? Judgment comes in many forms. Our Psalm motivates us to self-judgment. Are we living up to God's expectations? And our own?

As our poem moves into its final phase, there is almost a lament: If only My nation would heed Me! God would vanquish our foes, and in a final burst of poetic splendor, we are assured that God would 'feed us from the fat of the wheat, and honey from the very rocks (verse 17). Our Divine Patron can make the simplest of items into ambrosia if we just allow God into our lives.

Psalm 81 alludes to Rosh HaShana, Sukkot, Pesach, and Shavuot. But its

greatest achievement is its encouragement to get us through the trying week by inviting God and Jewish tradition into our lives. Each Thursday can help us move peacefully towards Shabbat by listening carefully for God's hidden thunder. It's there in the daily mitzvot we perform. 🎵

Walk thru David HaMelech's T'hilim

with Rabbi David Walk

Shir shel Yom Shishi

DAY SIX: CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN

Perek 93

Finally, it's Friday, TGIF! You don't have to be Jewish to love Friday. There are so many great Friday quotes, but one of my favorites is: Every Friday I like to high-five myself for getting through another week on little more than caffeine, willpower and inappropriate humor. Thank you Nanea Hoffman, whoever you are, for expressing how I feel many Fridays. Of course, she's leaving out my anticipation of Shabbat, but you get the idea: Fridays are cool.

We observant Jews express our sentiments about YOM SHISHI in our SHIR SHEL YOM, which is Psalm 93. It's very short, which also makes me happy. According to the famous Talmudic list of the daily Psalms: On the sixth day of the week, the Leviyim would recite the psalm beginning: HaShem reigns, He is clothed with

majesty (T'hilim 93:1), because on that day He completed His labor and ruled over all of creation in full glory (Rosh HaShana 31a). With a completed Creation activated, God dons the splendid mantle of Cosmic Ruler.

That's a wonderful image. God's Day Six garments are Friday finery. This is cool, and I have no idea what it's talking about. How do God and clothing work? And why is HaShem clothed twice (LAVESH LAVESH)? What can it possibility mean for us mortals?

The Ohr HaChayim explains that the doubling of God's raiment on Friday can be understood like the double GA'O GEI'EH ('glory') from the Song of the Sea. God's 'glory' increased as a result of this momentous event. Similarly, God's completion of Creation increased the Divine clothing ensemble. Perhaps, because the completed magnificent Universe, in some way, bedecks the Creator.

Again, can we apply this image to ourselves? I believe strongly that we can. But first allow me a technical aside. We have two major terms for clothing in Hebrew: BEGED and LEVUSH. We normally assume that Biblical Hebrew has no synonyms, and, therefore we ask, 'What's the difference between BEGED and LEVUSH?'

It's been said (by Rav Moshe Shapiro and others) that BEGED comes from 'treachery' (like BAGADNU, 'we have rebelled'). A BEGED, therefore, often will hide the real nature of the person wearing the garment. Like BIGDEI KAHUNA, hide the fact that these mere humans are serving in the Beit HaMikdash like angels serve in heaven. LEVUSH, on the hand, enhances the reality of the wearer. Some clothes hide who we really are; others bring out our true nature.

The completed universe gave us a glimpse of God's true glory. On YOM SHISHI, as we prepare and dress for Shabbat, we should feel a certain power surging through us. We are sloughing off our weekday worries, and ready ourselves to allow our spiritual reality to shine through. The real us emerges as we adorn ourselves with our best clothing.

Most importantly, there should be two separate projects developing. First, the physical reclamation enterprise of our Shabbat appearance emerging from our weekday drab chrysalis, the first LAVEISH. Then, comes the full butterfly effect as we endeavor to allow our NESHAMA to assume control of our personality, with the advent of our Shabbat NESHAMA YETEIRA (double dose spiritual identity), the second LAVEISH.

When I consider this transformation, I think of the great Kabbalists of Tzfat. As the sun dipped behind Mount Meron, they would wrap themselves in garments of white and go out to greet the Shabbat Queen/Bride. I have this powerful image of a dual transformation. One happening as they slip into the white robes; the other as they witness the simultaneous exit of the week and the glorious entrance of Shabbat.

Boy, do I wish that I could report that this describes my personal Friday afternoon. But I cannot tell a lie. Usual my Friday is hectic, and I'm rushing to get to shul in time. I'm neurotic about punctuality, which exacerbates my Friday issues, and annoys those around me.

However, the end of the Psalm comes to the rescue. The penultimate verse declares: Above the thunder (KOLOT) of the mighty waters, more majestic than the breakers of the sea is HaShem, majestic on high (verse 4). Even if my Friday transformation left something to be desired, the Kabbalat Shabbat experience in shul and then Kiddush at home often succeed in instilling a sense of God's glory, which Shabbat is about. And hopefully the singing provides the KOLOT ('thunder', especially Psalm 29, 'The voice of HaShem is over the

waters; the God of glory thunders, HaShem, over the mighty waters. Verse 3).

Then we actually celebrate Shabbat, which is beautifully described in our Psalm's final verse: Your decrees are indeed enduring; holiness befits Your house, O LORD, for length of days (verse 5). Those 'decrees' are called EDOTECHA, Your testimonies. Those are Mitzvot which bear witness to God's great deeds, like Pesach. Here our Shabbat observances testify to our perfect faith in God the Creator, and our appreciation of the wonderful world provided. And that's what we'll describe next in the Shabbat Psalm. 🎵

Walk thru David HaMelech's T'hilim

with Rabbi David Walk

Shir shel Shabbat

SHABBAT: THE CULMINATION

Perek 92

So, for every day of the week we had to figure out the SHIR SHEL YOM based on some poetic reference to what happened on the corresponding day during that first week of Creation. Well, it's not true for Shabbat. Psalm 92 begins: MIZMOR SHIR L'YOM HaSHABBAT, This song is the poem of Shabbat day. That opening declaration makes it clear that we must recite this Psalm as our Shabbat SHIR SHEL YOM. Instead, we have another conundrum: What does the content of his Psalm have to do with Shabbat?

The Psalm itself divides quite neatly into three parts. The first part (verses 2-6) informs us that it is a 'good thing' (TOV, correct, appropriate?) to thank and acknowledge (L'HODOT) God. That HODA'A involves singing and waxing poetic over the awesomeness of God's Creation. This joy and

gratitude results in us being totally blown away by the greatness (GADLUT) of God's burst of creative energy. We finish by acknowledging that God's perfectly thought out (MACHSHEVOTECHA) Creation is too deep for us to ever completely fathom (AMKU).

Sidebar: I'm always fascinated by scientific discoveries, whether through microscopes or telescopes. I follow this kind of stuff in websites for laypeople. But the coolest thing is that every new discovery (either in the microscopic or macroscopic realm) uncovers new vistas, usually completely unanticipated. There is still more that we don't understand about God's Cosmos than we do ken, and that's likely to remain true forever.

At this point in our Psalm, there's a sort of transitional verse (7), which I find almost sad. There are people who just don't get it. 'It' being the wonder of God's world. There are two types of individuals described in this verse, the boor or brute (BA'AR) and the fool (K'SIL). The Malbim describes the 'boor' as more animal-like, in other words, the truly unlettered, and, therefore, unaware or oblivious to the wonders of our world. While the K'SIL might be truly knowledgeable, but through either personal

desires (TA'AVO) or nefarious inclinations (RISH'O) denies the wonders of God's Creation. Being indifferent to the world's glories is a serious defect.

The rest of the Psalm consists of two parts. The first (verses 8-12) describes the success of the wicked. They spread and sprout like grass (I would have suggested weeds or thorns) across the world, but they will be destroyed in rather short order. The demise of the evil will only further aggrandize the glory of God in our world.

I'm much more interested in the final portion of our MIZMOR (verses 13-16). Here we describe the flourishing of the righteous (TZADIK). The irony is that the same agricultural term is used to report the success of both TZADIK and RASHA, namely POREI'ACH, to sprout or blossom. However, the P'RICHA of the RASHA is like that of grass, widespread and fast, but only for a single, short season. The P'RICHA of the TZADIK is like that of the date palm and the cedar, slow but enduring.

The comparison of the TZADIK to the date is fascinating for two reasons. The date tree produces copious fruit, just like the abundant good of a TZADIK benefiting the world immediately and for future times. But the

comparison goes a step further. The S'fat Emet describes a TZADIK as one whose inner reality and outer appearance are exactly the same, nothing hidden from the observer. That's similarly true of the date. The outside of a date is a thin membrane which looks very similar to the inside. What you see is what you get.

The poem continues to describe the abundant good and influence of the TZADIK, which doesn't go bad with advanced years (verse 15). TZADIKIM, like dates and cedars, tend to age well. The abundant grasses wither and die quite quickly, and to grow they must be replanted every season. Yes, there are many bad guys in Jewish history, but each one is a new phenomenon. Our TZADIKIM remain with us forever.

Before I leave this description of Shabbat's Song, I'd like to share an important aspect of this beautiful poem. We're addressing God directly and personally. The poem is constantly speaking in the second person to God. As the poem develops, it also uses the first-person singular format seven times. Perhaps, once for each day of that primordial week. My Shabbat joy and appreciation of God and Creation is very personal and unique to me. I may daven in a minyan and eat my meals with a

crowd, but ultimately each one of us must have a powerful and visceral Shabbat experience unique to me.

The Shabbat cessation of creative activities (the 39 M'LACHOT) isn't just to allow me to rest and recharge my creative juices. This full stop on weekday life is to give me pause to acknowledge, appreciate, and adulate God for this universe created in seven days, ages or stages. STOP! Look around, because it is, indeed, a wonderful world. 🎵

Walk thru David HaMelech's T'hilim

with Rabbi David Walk

Shir HaMaalot, Mimaamakim

Perek 130

OUT OF THE DEPTHS - INTO THE HEIGHTS

There's a Psalm which evokes very strong memories for most of us, because of its prominent place in our High Holiday prayers. It is recited responsively with the Ark opened before the recitation of SHMA during Aseret Y'mei T'shuva - from RH thru Yom Kippur, inclusive.

However, for me Psalm 130 evokes totally different memories: all night guard duty. I remember as a relatively new immigrant in Efrat during the 1980s, twice a month I had to do the rounds of our small community. I don't know how effective we were, but I do remember how much I pined for the sunrise. Just like verse 6 in our poem: My soul yearns for God, even more than the night guards yearn for sunrise, watching for that sunrise. And we're just as certain in God's compassion as we are in the

inevitability of the sun's rise in the east.

But let's go back to the beginning. Psalm 130 starts with a fascinating irony. This compact poem is one of the 15 Psalms which open with the phrase SHIR HAMA'ALOT, a Song of the Ascents. These songs describe the climb to the spiritual pinnacle which is the Temple Mount. Many authorities explain that the Leviyim sang these musical Psalms while mounting the 15 steps between the outer and inner courtyards of the BEIT HAMIKDASH. But here we are ten Psalms into this ascent, yet our Singer claims to be in MA'AMAKIM, profound depths. Most probably the Singer is recalling some traumatic event. In our High Holiday prayers, we use this expression to describe our spiritual state during these Days of Awe.

Our Psalm neatly divides into two parts. The first half (verses 1-4) is addressed directly to God, and declares that only God can solve humanity's spiritual ills. Part two (verses 5-8) is a declaration of total faith that God will grant salvation. In each section we first have an expression of the author's personal situation, followed by a declaration of faith in God's help in more general terms, especially for the Jewish people.

The most famous discussion concerning our poem is about the identification of the 'depths', MA'AMAKIM. It's been suggested that the literal meaning of 'depths' is the ocean's depths, and the author has a sense of drowning. Others suggest a prison or dungeon, like Yosef who is drawn up from a pit. But I think that it's Rebbe Nachman who expresses the most accepted position, IMKA D'LIBA, the depths of one's heart. The Psalmist is saying that even though I've sinned, in my innermost self I'm still loyal to You, O God.

Rebbe Nachman said that this opening expression of despondence is referred to in the beginning of the our Slichot prayers, which Ashkenazim begin reciting this coming Motza'ei Shabbat. Our EIDOT HaMIZRACH brethren have been intoning them since the day after Rosh Chodesh. The Breslover explained the expression 'As beggars and supplicants we knock on Your door' is based on our poem's 'cry from the depths'. But no matter how far we have fallen, we are confident that our pleas will be fulfilled. As the Slichot introduction continues: For upon Your compassion, we have faith, and upon Your grace we rely. So, the introduction of Slichot mirrors the message of our Psalm. No

matter how far we have fallen, we never lose confidence in the infinite forgiveness of God.

After begging God to pay attention to us, we acknowledge that our fate is totally dependent on God's forgiveness. Since we all sin, it's only God's pardon which allows us to go on with our lives. We are emphasizing the critical word in our Psalm: SLICHA, forgiveness, exoneration. This brings us verse 5, which declares that we are anticipating God's 'word' or 'thing', D'VARO. I'm pretty sure it's a word, and that word is SALACHTI, I have forgiven. This expectation is the inspiration behind the most famous SLICHA prayer recited KOL NIDRE evening.

It is this 'expectation' which is the focus of the second half of our Psalm. In my introductory paragraph I already described how much we anticipate this Divine clemency. Now I'd like to explain the dual nature of this expectation. Our Singer uses two terms to describe the anticipation: KIVITI and HOCHALTI. What's the difference between them?

The Malbim contrasts the two terms. KIVITI, 'await' or 'expect', he describes as what is happening in the soul of the individual who feels this hope. Our NESHMA is awaiting God's grace. On the other hand, YICHUL,

which can also be translated as an expectation or an anticipation, refers to the behavior and power of the object of our hope. In other words, these two terms express that our hope in God to save or forgive us is based on two factors. First our deep faith in God, and secondly in the awesome power of God to bestow salvation.

Beginning with verse 5, there is tremendous confidence that God will forgive. This is in contrast with the beginning of the Psalm when our Singer is begging for God's attention. Where does this newfound faith come from? Rav Soloveitchik addressed this exact issue in an essay on T'shuva, where he wrote that the difference between individual and communal confession is tremendous. 'When the individual confesses, he does so from a state of insecurity... For what assurance has he that he will be acquitted of his sin? ... In contrast, KNESSET YISRAEL confesses out of a sense of confidence and even rejoicing for it does so in the presence of a loyal ally, before its most Beloved One.'

The Psalm ends with the logical extension of this faith: God will redeem Israel from all its transgressions (verse 8). But with this exuberant admission comes a caveat.

The term used for 'redeem' is PODEH, not GO'EL. The difference (according to the Malbim) is crucial. PIDYON means that there is a price exacted for the redemption. We have never lost our total faith in the final and complete redemption, but our Singer also recognizes that our people have suffered greatly on this path.

This stirring testimony to our national faith is a fitting component of our Ten Days of Repentance liturgy. We must endeavor to carry its message of confident belief with us all year, as we climb from the depths of despair to the heights of hope. 🎵

Walk thru David HaMelech's T'hilim

with Rabbi David Walk

Perek 47

THE RISING

In our efforts to streamline Rosh HaShana services last year, one of the casualties was Psalm 47. It's the one we say 7 times before blowing the Shofar. There were years when I said to myself, 'Why are we doing this so many times?' So, of course, last year I missed not reciting it. I hope my minyan does chant it this year, but in any case, it's worth trying to fathom the meaning of this fascinating Psalm and its message for Rosh HaShana.

Even though the custom of reciting this Psalm before sounding the Shofar is quite new (there's no mention of it before the 1700s), the connection of this poem to Rosh HaShana goes back to Masechet Sofrim (probably 8th century). Today almost all Ashkenazim say it.

Our Psalm begins with the whole world applauding God: Clap hands all nations, cheer on God with jubilant cries (47:2). What's everybody so

exhilarated about? To me this sounds like a sporting event, and God just hit a grand slam. Sorry, but that's my reference point for applause. However, our case is much more profound, as the next verse explains: For the Lord Most High (ELYON) is awesome, great king over all the earth. The starting reference for our Psalm is that God is Creator and Ruler of the universe. This is very much a Rosh HaShana issue, for Rosh HaShana commemorates the sixth day of Creation when humanity was created. For the first time, there were creatures who could appreciate God's astounding achievement.

Then comes the next stage in the Creation process. We have six steps (days) in the Creation story, culminating with human beings. One might have thought that's it, but they'd be wrong. 'God subjects peoples to us, sets nations at our feet' (verse 4). We, the Jews, God's people, are the continuation of Creation, or evolution, if you will. The world at large will eventually take notice. They will heed the fact that: God chose our heritage for us, the glory of Yaakovb whom He loved. Selah (verse 5). This ends the first part of the poem. The Psalm continues with the answer to the unasked question, when will this universal recognition of Judaism

happen?

The answer: God ascends amidst the T'RU'A; the LORD, to the blasts of the horn. Sing, O sing to God; sing, O sing to our king; for God is king over all the earth; sing a MASKIL (verses 6-8). The world at large will comprehend the supremacy of God and the veracity of Torah when the Jews crown and enthrone our Creator as our Sovereign. The process of achieving this goal is our Rosh HaShana devotions. First, we emphasize that God is our King in the blessings 'the Holy King' (HAMELECH HAKDOSH) and then 'the King over the whole world', both of these appear in all our silent devotions (AMIDA) of Rosh HaShana.

Secondly, we blow the Shofar. Even though the ram's horn has much symbolism surrounding it (memorializing the Akeida, wake up to repent, and so on), the central role of the trumpet fanfare is for the annual coronation of God as our Monarch. The Shofar blasts have many messages, but the central point is God is our KING.

I believe strongly that the most important word in this middle section (verses 6-8) of our song is the last: MASKIL. Not so easy to translate this term. Metzudat David suggest that it means a well thought out song or

Psalm, because the root is SEICHEL, wise. According to Rebbe Nachman, this refers to the special melody of certain Rebbes (the TZADIK) who sing very intelligent songs which contribute wisdom to the world.

I think that our Singer is announcing that Jews inspire the world to the essence of wisdom and knowledge. This doesn't refer to Einstein, Penzias or, my neighbor, Prof Auman. It means that the Jews announce the reality and presence of God in our cosmos. We blow the Shofar and shout from the rooftops: Gott fiert die ganze welt!! God rules the whole world! There is no greater SEICHEL.

Which brings us to the end of our song. We clearly state the Jews great contribution to the world's knowledge base: God reigns over the nations; God is seated on His holy throne (verse 9). The Malbim claims that this verse is continuing the process of verse 6, the coronation of God. God's reign is universal and eternal. Cool, but I think that we are clearly stating that our effort to convince the world of God's sovereignty will ultimately succeed and be accepted.

What will move the world to eventually accede to our age-old efforts at coronating God? Well, verse 10, of course. 'The N'DIVIM of

the peoples are gathered together, the retinue of Avraham's God; for the guardians of the earth belong to God; He is greatly exalted.' The key term is N'DIVIM. This can be translated as noble or grand, however the essence of this term is generosity and philanthropy.

Avraham Avinu proclaimed God's existence, but the eventual success of his efforts to spread ethical monotheism is predicated upon his character. Ultimately, the message of Judaism is N'DIVUT. This means generosity and philanthropy, of course, but so much more. The essence of this trait is self-sacrifice. We give of ourselves for the great cause of our beloved Zeidie Avraham.

The Jewish nation proclaims the sovereignty of God, and aggrandize the Divine Presence. We do it by blowing the Shofar, which became such a potent symbol through the Akeida. Avraham Avinu remains our guide and this Psalm is the trail map.

