THE SCHOTTENSTEIN EDITION

ספר תהלים
Tehillim

THE KOL MENACHEM TEHILLIM

With commentary and insights
anthologized from
classic Rabbinic texts and
the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Compiled and Adapted by
Rabbi Chaim Miller

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Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

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Foreword

If we begin to think of the most "used" texts in the Jewish tradition, after the *Chumash* (Torah) and *Siddur* (Prayer Book), *Tehillim* (Psalms) is the first book that springs to mind. Tens, if not hundreds of thousands of Jews read from it every day. Others turn to the Psalms to mark a sacred moment in their lives: childbirth, *bar-* or *bas-mitzvah*, or the High Holidays. Many turn to *Tehillim* in the face of sickness, misfortune or simply to practice gratitude.

Why is *Tehillim* so popular? Because these songs tell our own story; they validate the whole range of human emotions. We recognize our own struggles in the text: we succeed and we fail; we are afraid and we are joyous; we are content and we are anxious; we are betrayed and we find comfort. *"Whatever David says in his book,"* taught the Sages, *"relates to himself, to all the Jewish people and to all times."*[1] The Psalms give us hope as we gradually shift from hurt to healing, voicing our emotions and enabling us to pour our hearts out to God.

Our relationship with *Tehillim* is different from any other book in the *Tanach* (Jewish Bible), because saying *Tehillim* fosters a palpable sense of God's nearness.[2] In the *Chumash* and the *Nevi'im* (Prophets), we are sometimes sent the message that God is distant, though He does, from time to time, reach out to His people. In *Tehillim,* this emphasis is inverted: *we* make the effort to "encounter" God, to develop an intimate and intense bond with Him. We remind ourselves, time and time again, how God is reliable, how He listens to us, how He cares about the individual. Saying *Tehillim* puts us in touch with God[3] and brings us to happiness and inner peace.

1. *Midrash Tehillim* 18:1
2. Rabbi Eliyahu de Vidas (1518–1592) wrote: "Among the things that bring a person to *devekus* (intimate connection with God), are saying some verses from the songs of King David of blessed memory" (*Reshis Chochmah, Gate of Love,* ch. 1)
3. *Maharsha* (first chapter of *Avodah Zarah*) writes that reciting *Tehillim* leads a person to fear God.

In many strands of Jewish thought, *Tehillim* is not only considered to be an inspirational text, it is also looked upon as one endowed with theurgic power, *i.e.,* the ability to influence the heavens.[4] Jews say *Tehillim* when they are sick, or in need of salvation because they believe that there is a spiritual potency in the words that has the power to shatter negative decrees. "*One who is accustomed to reciting Tehillim,"* writes Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai (1724–1806), *"repels all kinds of calamities and several harmful diseases from him, his household, his family members, and his entire generation."*[5] Or, in the words of Rabbi Eliezer Papo (1785–1828): *"There is a tradition from holy, renowned men that one who confronts any hardship or distress, or who travels by road, at sea or upon a river, should read the entire Tehillim each day without interruption, with concentration and submission, and he will experience wonders. This has been verified and proven."*[6]

4. The *Talmud* already refers to Psalm 91 as *"the song which brings protection from misfortune"* (*Shavuos* 15b). In his *Mishneh Torah, Rambam* speaks of the general protective power of *Tehillim*: *"It is, however, permitted for a healthy person to read... chapters from Tehillim so that the merit of reading them will protect him and save him from difficulties and injury"* (*Laws of Idol Worship* 11:12). As early as the eleventh century C.E, Rav Hai Gaon composed *Shimush Tehillim* which indicates the use of particular chapters and verses from the Book of *Tehillim* for prophylactic or healing purposes.

   One of the most graphic descriptions of the spiritual power of *Tehillim* is from Kabbalist Rabbi Yosef Gikatilla (1248–1305), who, commenting on the "destructive plague" and other hazards mentioned in Psalm 91, writes: "*All these entities mentioned are gangs that dwell between heaven and earth. A person praying is just like someone travelling through perilous terrain—his prayer has to pass through these groups and then ascend to the heavens. If he is worthy, the robbers will not harm his prayers; but if he is not worthy, the destructive forces will be numerous and formidable. That is why King David, peace be with him, introduced the Psalms to clear the way so the prayers could ascend unimpeded, for all these forces are like a cloud which prevents the ascension of prayer. This is the meaning of the verse 'You have screened yourself off with a cloud, that no prayer may pass through'* (*Eichah* 3:44)*... The Psalms are called ZeMiRos* (*Tehillim* 119:54)*, from the root mZaMeR, as it is written, 'He will trim away the twigs with maZMeRoth (pruning hooks)'* (*Yeshayah* 18:5)*... meaning that it is those ZeMiRos, those Psalms, that scatter and cut the evil from those fearful places"* (*Sha'arei Orah*, *First Gate*).

   The power of *Tehillim* to annul negative decrees is enhanced (on weekdays) if it is accompanied by a donation to charity (*Sichas Chai Elul* 5745).

5. *Chida,* introduction to *Yosef Tehilos.*

6. *Pele Yoetz,* entry "*Tehillim."*

The Book of *Tehillim* (Psalms)

The Book of *Tehillim* is the first book in the third section of the *Tanach,* entitled *Kesuvim* (Sacred Writings), which includes various texts such as Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, Job, and the *Megillos*. Generally speaking, these books are not narratives of the Divine intervention in history, but teachings of religious wisdom and practice.

While *Tehillim* is divided into five separate books[7] and one hundred and fifty distinct compositions[8], or "chapters," there is little overt cohesiveness in the text. Each chapter stands as a discrete unit which may differ significantly from others in length, subject matter, style and mood. There is no single message in the Psalms and no single voice: we find Psalms of praise, Psalms of petition; Psalms that discuss sin and repentance; Psalms that recount national history; Psalms of sadness and Psalms of joy.

We do find, though, that the text categorizes the Psalms into various different forms of song—such as *mizmor*[9] ("song"), *lamnatzeach*[10] ("for the Leader") etc.[11]—usually at the opening of each chapter. The commentaries differ over the significance of these terms, but they clearly indicate the use of distinct genres of music and poetry.

The authorship of the book is generally attributed to King David—it is referred to as the "Psalms of David"—though the *Talmud*[12] already observed that he was not its exclusive author: "*David wrote the Book of Tehillim with ten elders*[13]*, namely Adam*[14]*,*

7. Corresponding to the Five Books of Moshe—*Midrash Tehillim* cited on p. 116.
8. An alternative division into 147 chapters is mentioned in the *Jerusalem Talmud, Shabbos* 16:1, *Tractate Sofrim* 16:11, and *Midrash Tehillim,* chap. 22. See *Likutei Sichos* vol. 10, p. 75; vol. 18, p. 75.
9. This term is found in 57 Psalms and is exclusive to the Book of *Tehillim*.
10. Found in 55 Psalms, and appears only once elsewhere (*Chabakuk* 3:19).
11. Other common terms include: *shir* (song), *shir ha-ma'alos* ("song of ascents," used in Psalms 120-134), *maskil* (in 13 Psalms), *neginos* (in 6 Psalms), and *michtam* (in 6 Psalms).
12. *Bava Basra* 14b-15a; see also *Pesachim* 117a and *Koheles Rabah* 7:19.4. Seventy-three of the one hundred and fifty Psalms begin with the phrase "by David."
13. David included material from authors that lived before him as well as some of his contemporaries, Asaph, Heiman and Yedusun (*Rashi* to *Bava Basra* ibid).
14. Who authored chapter 139 (according to *Rashi* ibid).

Malkitzedek[15]*, Avraham*[16]*, Moshe*[17]*, Heiman*[18]*, Yedusun*[19]*, Asaph*[20] *and the three sons of Korach*[21]*"* But it is David who is depicted as consistently chanting *Tehillim* with a "sweet voice,"[22] rising at midnight to sing lovingly to his Creator throughout the night hours.[23]

Were the Psalms composed with prophetic insight? The Sages drew a distinction between actual prophecy, and lower levels of the inspired mind, which are often referred to as *ruach ha-kodesh,*[24] with *Tehillim* falling into the latter category. *"Come and see,"* taught the *Zohar*, *"how these songs and praises that David recited contain secrets and sublime concepts involving hidden wisdom—because they were all recited with ruach ha-kodesh"*[25]

Commentaries to the Book of *Tehillim*

The predominant style of Rabbinic commentary during the Talmudic era, was that of *derash* (literally "investigation"). In contrast to *peshat*, a bare, literal rendering, *derash* seeks to creatively uncover new meanings and applications for the text. *Derash* emphasizes the belief that the words of scripture have multiple meanings and that there is tremendous significance to even the slightest detail in the text.

The Book of *Tehillim* has been the subject of enormous attention by the Rabbinic *midrashists*. Both the *Talmud* and *Midrashim* are replete with references to almost every verse of the *Tehillim*[26]*,* and

15. Author of chapter 110 (ibid).
16. Author of chapter 89 (ibid). The Psalm refers to him as "Eisan the Ezrachite." See *Bava Basra* 15a.
17. Author of chapter 90.
18. Author of chapter 88.
19. Author of chapters 39, 62, and 77.
20. Author of chapters 50, 75-83.
21. Chapters 42, 44–49, 84–85, 87–88.
22. II *Shmuel* 23:1; *Shir ha-Shirim Rabah* 4:4.
23. *Berachos* 3b, cited on p. 158.
24. See *Rambam, Principles of Faith, Principles 6-7 (Kol Menachem 2009),* Principle 6, lessons 17, 19. For sources on David's level of Divine inspiration see *Likutei Sichos* vol. 18, p. 275, note 31.
25. *Zohar* I 179a.
26. Collected in numerous anthologies, such as the recent: *Tehillim im Midrashei Chazal* (Rabbi Yitzchak Yehoshua Gavrielov, *ed.*), *Bnei Brak* 2005, 2 volumes.

the book was privileged to have its very own treatise, the *Midrash Tehillim* (also known as *Midrash Shocher Tov*), which contains extensive exegesis on nearly all of the 150 chapters. The *Midrashic* compendium *Yalkut Shimoni* also contains an extensive section on the *Tehillim,* and the *Zohar* cites *Tehillim* extensively.

During the period of the *rishonim* (11th to 15th centuries C.E.), the predominant mode of exegesis shifted to *peshat,* and we were blessed with many outstanding, systematic treatments of the *Tehillim,* including those of *Rashi*[27] (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, 1040–1104), Rabbi Ovadiah Sforno (1475–1550), *Radak* (Rabbi David Kimchi, 1160–1235), Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra[28] (1089–1164) and Rabbi Menachem Meiri (1249–c.1310).[29]

The subsequent period of the *acharonim* saw a veritable explosion in Rabbinic commentaries. Some of the more popular works on *Tehillim* during this period include those of: Rabbi Yosef Ya'avetz (d. 1507), Rabbi Moshe Alshich[30] (1508–1593), *Metzudos David* (Rabbis David and Yechiel Altschuler, 18th century), *Malbim* (Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel Wisser, 1809–1879), Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch[31] (1808-1888), *Yosef Tehilos* of Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai, and the popular anthology *Me'am Lo'ez*[32] (Rabbi Ya'akov Culi, d. 1732). The Chasidic masters also expounded extensively on *Tehillim,* though rarely in the form of a systematic commentary.[33]

27. English translation by Rabbi Yisrael Isser Zvi Herczeg (*Feldheim*, 2009).

28. Commentaries to Books One and Two of *Tehillim* have been translated into English by Rabbi H. Norman Strickman (*Academic Studies Press,* 2009).

29. Selections from many of these commentaries have been adapted into English in *Mikraoth Gedoloth Psalms* (*Judaica Press,* 1991, 5 volumes), by Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg. For a more extensive and accessible running commentary on the Psalms in English adapted from traditional sources see Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, *Tehillim* (*Mesorah Publications* 1985, 2 volumes).

30. Adapted into English in *The Book of Psalms with Romemot E-l,* by Rabbi Eliyahu Munk (private publication, 1990, 2 volumes).

31. English translation by Gertrude Hirschuler (*Feldheim* 1960-66).

32. English translation (which regrettably does not include the extensive footnote references found in the Hebrew edition) by Dr. Zvi Fair (*Moznaim* 1991, 5 volumes).

33. Useful anthologies include Rabbi Yeshayah of Odessa, *Asifas Ma'amrim* (Warsaw, 1885), and Yishai Chasida, *Biurei Chasidus le-Nach* (*Mosad ha-Rav Kook*, 2000), pages 1-119.

    The only systematic *Chabad* commentary to *Tehillim* is by *Tzemach*

Tehillim in Jewish liturgy and custom

The *Tehillim* were originally composed as songs to be chanted by the Levites in the presence of the Holy Ark and in the Holy Temple.[34] The *Talmud* relates, for example, that the Levites chanted a different Psalm each morning.[35] According to Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon (882-942), different chapters of *Tehillim* were allocated to various groups of Levites at specific locations in the Temple. Due to their sacred nature, they were not permitted to be chanted outside Temple grounds.[36] Thus, in the Temple period, *Tehillim* were not yet part of the Jewish liturgy (save for the recitation of *Hallel* "Praise", Psalms 113-188, during festivals.[37])

When the *Siddur* was composed, much of the liturgy was drawn from *Tehillim,* including whole sections of Psalms such as the *Pesukei de-Zimra* (Psalms 145-50) in the morning service[38], and various other readings.[39] In the sixteenth century, the Sefad Kabbalists added Psalms 95-99 and 29 to the Friday Night service, to welcome the Shabbos, a practice which became universally accepted.

Different customs arose to divide the Book of *Tehillim:* seven daily portions, corresponding to the days of the week; and thirty

Tzedek (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, 1789–1866) entitled *Yahel Ohr* (Poltova, 1908). Additional insights of *Tzemach Tzedek* on *Tehillim* are found in *Ohr ha-Torah*, *Nevi'im u'Kesuvim* vol. 2, (*Kehos* 1976), pp. 911-1011 and vol. 3 (*Kehos* 1986), pp. 1277-1338.

34. See *Rashi* and *Radak* to II *Shmuel* 23:1.

35. *Rosh ha-Shanah* 31a. These were later included in the morning liturgy. The daily Psalm (*Shir Shel Yom*) for each day is: Sunday: Psalm 24. Monday: Psalm 48. Tuesday: Psalm 82. Wednesday: Psalm 94, and the first three verses of Psalm 95. Thursday: Psalm 81. Friday: Psalm 93. Sabbath: Psalm 92.

36. Rabbi Sa'adia Ga'on, *Commentary to Tehillim,* introduction. *Tehillim* therefore has the unique quality of being both a form of *prayer* and a form of *Torah,* since it is one of the 24 books of the *Tanach* (This point was stressed numerous times by the Rebbe. See *Sichas* 15th Tammuz 5745, and many other places).

37. See *Mishnah, Pesachim* 5:7; *Ta'anis* 28b; *Arachin* 10a.

38. To the Shabbos and festival services were added Psalms 19, 33, 34, 90, 91, 121-4, 135, 136, 92, 93, in this order, since on these days people, not having to go out to work, did not have to hurry from the synagogue.

39. Psalm 100 in the morning service. Psalm 104 on *Rosh Chodesh*. Psalm 27 during the month of *Elul*, until *Hoshanah Rabah*.

portions, corresponding to the days of the month[40].

The Jewish ethical literature is replete with encouragement to recite *Tehillim* as much as possible. Often cited are the words of Rabbi Yeshayah Hurwitz (1555-1621): "*One who longs to connect with God and His praises should connect with to the Book of Tehillim... We have nothing greater than the Book of Tehillim, which consists of every type of prayer."*[41]

Reciting *Tehillim* has often been associated with the unlearned Jew, who, unable to study advanced texts, would simply spend his spare moments saying *Tehillim*. Historically, such Jews would form groups and entire congregations centered around their recitation of *Tehillim,* known as the *Chevra Tehillim*. Despite its simplicity, Jewish leaders often praised the pure quality of such worship, untainted by the ego, which sometimes plagues scholars. *"When Mashiach comes,"* wrote Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch (1880-1950), *"the superior quality of sincere, egoless worship by those unlearned folk who pray and say Tehillim with pure sincerity will come to light."*[42]

In fact, our Sages taught that King David himself wished that even the simple recital of *Tehillim* should have immense spiritual import. He said, *"may they receive reward for them as if they had studied [the complicated tractates] Negaim and Ohalos."*[43]

The *Kol Menachem Tehillim*

Like the previous works in the *Kol Menachem* series[44], this volume is predominately based on the scholarly output of Rabbi

40. These readings are demarcated throughout this volume. For early sources relating the division of *Tehillim* into daily readings see: *Tzeida la-Derech* (Rabbi Menachem ibn Zarach, 1310-1385), *Ma'amar Revi'i, Klal Chamishi,* ch. 17; *Levush* (Rabbi Mordechai Yaffe, 1530-1612), *Orach Chaim* 1:9; *Magen Avraham* (Rabbi Avraham Gombiner, c. 1635–1682) 584:1; *Aimek ha-Melech* (Rabbi Naftali Hertz Bacharach, 17th century), *Introduction,* ch. 13. For a lengthy discussion see Rabbi Nochum Greenwald, *The Book of Tehillim and its Recital:* (Heb.) in *Kovetz Ohr Yisrael* (Monsey NY, issue 15, 1999), p. 152*ff.*

41. *Shnei Luchos Habris,* p. 257.

42. *Hayom Yom,* 24th Iyar.

43. *Midrash Tehillim,* ch. 1.

44. *Kol Menachem Chumash* (6 vols., 2002-6); *Kol Menachem Haggadah* (2008); *Kol Menachem Rambam: Thirteen Principles of Faith* (2 vols. 2007-9), *Kol Menachem Megillah* (2010).

Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994), the much loved seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe.[45] Most of the Rebbe's teachings were initially delivered at regular public gatherings (*farbrengens*) attended mainly by his own followers and disciples;[46] they were later published, often under the Rebbe's own editorial guidance.[47] At the *farbrengen* he would typically deliver a *Ma'amar* (a dense and highly esoteric Chasidic discourse), and a number of *Sichos* (sermons), which were sometimes very scholarly in their content and at other times more inspirational and instructional. One single *farbrengen* could last as long as eight or nine hours, during which time he would deliver a staggering amount of information. Autobiographical or personal comments were extremely rare; most of the attention was directed at Torah exegesis or at issues facing the Jewish community.

While the only classical [48] text which the Rebbe addressed formally and systematically is the Passover Haggadah[49], he did dedicate segments of his *farbrengens* to in-depth treatments of various

45. In 1952, *Kehos Publication Society* published a special edition of *Tehillim* in memory of the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, who passed away in 1950. The volume, entitled *Tehillim Ohel Yosef Yitzchak,* contained the Hebrew text of *Tehillim* (photo-reproduced from an edition of *Tehillim* available in America that resembled a format which the previous Rebbe had commonly used). An appendix containing an anthology of letters (*Kovetz Michtavim*) written by the previous Rebbe about saying *Tehillim* was added. The book was reprinted countless times and has become the standard *Chabad* Tehillim. (However, see notes 33 and 91, that the Rebbe himself usually made use of a different edition.)

46. For outside impressions of the *farbrengen* see: Ellen Koskoff, *Music in Lubavitcher Life* (University of Illinois Press, 2001), pp. 3-15; Jerome Mintz, *Hasidic People: A Place in the New World* (Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 48-50; Bonnie J. Morris, *Lubavitcher Women in America: Identity and Activism in the Postwar Era* (SUNY Press, 1998), pp. 58-60; Lis Harris, *Holy Days: The World of the Hasidic Family* (Touchstone, 1985), pp. 121-5; Edward Hoffman, *Despite All Odds: The Story of Lubavitch* (Simon and Schuster 1991), pp. 29-36.

47. For details, see *Kol Menachem Chumash*, pp. xvii-xix.

48. Rabbis Segal and Pevsner (see note 51) draw extensively from the *Ma'amarim*, and it probably forms the majority of their treatment. However, I have drawn minimally from these texts due to the difficulty of rendering the obscure content to those lacking a substantial background in Chabad thought.

49. *Haggadah Shel Pesach im Likutei Ta'amim u'Minhagim* (*Kehos* 1946). For details see Foreword to *Kol Menachem Haggadah* (2008).

texts. For example he spoke extensively on *Rashi's* Torah commentary[50], *Pirkei Avos, Rambam's Mishneh Torah,* the conclusion of *Talmudic* tractates, the *Zohar* (with his father's commentary), sections of the *Tanya* and other texts.

Tehillim, however, was not a topic which he gave much focussed attention. He repeatedly spoke about the virtues of *Tehillim* and the importance of saying it, but we lack a sustained, coordinated attempt to address the *Tehillim* at the *farbrengen*. Nevertheless, the Rebbe's talks and writings are so voluminous, and *Tehillim* is cited so ubiquitously, that it is possible, with much effort, to piece the fragments together into a substantial amount of commentary.[51]

While these commentaries could be in a variety of different contexts, there are some sources which recur frequently:

a.) *The Ma'amarim* (Chasidic discourses). At almost every farbrengen between 1951 and 1988 the Rebbe delivered a *Ma'amar*[52]. Predominantly based on the discourses of the Chabad Rebbeim that preceded him, these are highly complex and intricate journeys into Jewish mystical ideas, drawing heavily from Lurianic Kabbalah.[53] The *Ma'amarim* frequently include exegesis of verses from *Tehillim*, in a mystical vein.

b.) *Citations from Chazal*. The *farbrengens* are replete with commentaries on passages from the *Talmud* and *Midrash,* many of which quote *Tehillim*.

c.) *Comments on the daily Tehillim reading*. In order to encourage the daily recital of *Tehillim*, the Rebbe would sometimes com-

50. From 1964 until 1988. See Foreword to *Kol Menachem Chumash*.

51. This task has been lovingly undertaken by Rabbis Moshe Shmuel Shmelke Segal and Rabbi Avraham Pevsner (eds.) in *Sefer Tehillim Ohel Yosef Yitzchak im Perush Tehilos Menachem* (*Va'ad l'Hafotzas Sichos*, 2006-2012), 5 volumes (over 1000 pages!). According to the editors, this project initially had been encouraged by the Rebbe in his lifetime.

52. Subsequently published in: *Toras Menachem, Sefer ha-Ma'amarim* 5710-5729 (*Lahak Hanochos inc.,* 2003-12), 18 volumes; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim* 5730-5737 (*Va'ad Kisvei Kodesh* 1989-1994), 5 volumes; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim* 5738-5751 (*Va'ad Hanochos Hatmimim,* 2002), 8 volumes.

53. On the Chabad system see: *Habad: The Hasidism of R. Shneur Zalman of Lyady* (University of Alabama Press, 1992) by Roman Foxbrunner; *Communicating the Infinite: The Emergence of the Habad School* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), by Naftali Loewenthal.

ment on part of the daily reading, often connecting the beginning of the reading with its end.[54]

d.) *"Sermons."* Parts of every *farbrengen* were always devoted to religious and spiritual edification, and *Tehillim* was often cited in this context.

e.) *Tehillim corresponding to the Rebbe's age.* There is a Chasidic custom to recite a chapter of *Tehillim* daily corresponding to one's age. In many instances the Rebbe would expound upon the chapter corresponding to his age, or that of his father-in-law, the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson (1880-1950).[55]

f.) *Letters.* The Rebbe maintained a staggering written correspondence with Jewish people from all walks of life. The 11,500 letters which have been published so far[56] represent approximately two-thirds of the letters penned in Hebrew until 1975.[57] A comparable volume of letters penned in English still awaits formal publication, though many letters have surfaced over the years, usually publicized by their recipients.[58] On a number of occasions during the year, the Rebbe also wrote a "pastoral letter" addressed "to the Sons and Daughters of our people Israel, everywhere."[59]

a.) How the commentaries in this book were prepared.

It has not been an easy task to compile a running commentary on the *Tehillim—Toras Menachem*—based on the Rebbe's sermons and discourses. When you are reading these insights, please bear the following in mind.

As with all books in the *Kol Menachem* series, the commentaries

54. This was a popular feature of the *farbrengen* during the 1980's.

55. See below, "Chabad Customs."

56. *Igros Kodesh* (*Kehos* 1987-2009), 30 volumes.

57. Approximately one-third of the material was not published as the contents were considered to be confidential. Correspondence from the years 1976-1992 awaits publication.

58. These have appeared, among other places, in the weekly periodical *L'Chaim* published by *Lubavitch Youth Organization*. Archives can be accessed at http://www.lchaimweekly.org/lchaim/

59. Collected in *Igros Melech* (*Kehos* 1992), 2 volumes. Pastoral letters from 1950-1979, from the first half of each year (*Tishrei-Adar*) in English translation were published in *Letters by the Lubavitcher Rebbe* (*Kehos* 1979).

are not direct translations of the Rebbe's original delivery. While I have not introduced any of my own ideas, the insights are rendered in my voice. This leap of adaptation has been necessary to bridge the considerable gap between the original audience, a Chasidic brotherhood with an advanced knowledge of Judaic texts, and the intended audience of this series: the modern, westernized, individualistic reader with no presumed Judaic knowledge. Considerable adaptation is also necessary due to the fact that these insights were originally delivered as lengthy, discursive sermons whereas I am attempting to render them into a concise, exegetical commentary.[60] Obviously, from the thousands of pages of the Rebbe's teachings on *Tehillim* from which I drew, only a fraction is presented here.

Chabad teachings relating to *Tehillim*

The Chabad Rebbeim persistently encouraged the saying of *Tehillim* and often spoke of its virtues.[61] The third Rebbe of Chabad, (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, 1789–1866), known by the title of his responsa *Tzemach Tzedek,* went so far as to say: *"If people would realize the power of the verses of Tehillim and its influence in the heavens, they would recite it continually. The chapters of Tehillim break through all barriers as they soar aloft, higher and higher, uninterrupted. They prostrate themselves before the Master of the Universe."*[62] *Tzemach Tzedek* also attributed his release from a twenty-two day house arrest in 1843 to the merit of his wife's *Tehillim.*[63]

60. For more details of these different source texts, see Foreword to *Kol Menachem Chumash*. They can all be viewed at www.hebrewbooks.org.

61. See *Kovetz Michtavim* from the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, English translation by Rabbi Zalman Posner, *On Saying Tehillim* (*Kehos* 1975). For an extensive anthology of Chabad teachings on the recital of *Tehillim* (in Hebrew) see Rabbi Ze'ev Ritterman (ed.), *Tehilos Yosef Yitzchak, be-Ma'alas Amiras Tehillim* (*Torah Or ,* 2012). For a collection of brief sayings on the virtues of *Tehillim* see Rabbi Alter Eliyahu Friedman (ed.), *Otzar Pisgamei Chabad*, vol. 1, pp. 71-4. See also Rabbi Michoel Seligson, *Sefer ha-Maftechos le-Sichos Kodesh* (2011), entry "*Tehillim*" (pp. 1119-21).

62. *Hayom Yom,* 24th *Shevat*.

63. See Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber Schneersohn, *Toras Shalom,* p. 18; *Sichos Kodesh* 5739, vol. 2, p. 458. For details of *Tzemach Tzedek's* communal work see Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (Rabbi Zalman Posner trans.), *The Tzemach Tzedek and the Haskala movement* (*Kehos* 1962).

Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber Schneersohn, the Rebbe *Rashab* (1860-1920) once commented, "I am certain that the angel Michoel counts all the *Tehillim* that a person says, and with it he creates a chandelier that lights up, above and below, for that person and for his children."[64]

The seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, repeatedly stressed the virtues of reciting *Tehillim* to bring heavenly merit in a vast range of different areas, such as: for general success[65], for concentration during prayer[66], to assist repentance[67], for salvation from difficulties[68], for recovery from illness[69], before an operation[70], for success in business[71], for safety during travel[72], to find a marriage partner[73], on a wedding day[74], to ease pregnancy[75] and childbirth[76], by a *bar-mitzvah*[77], on a birthday[78] on a *yahrtzeit*[79] and numerous other instances.

Since the beginning of the Chabad movement, it was the custom of each of the Rebbeim to recite a portion of *Tehillim* daily, as the book is divided into a monthly cycle. In times of particular difficulty, they would add an additional portion, corresponding to the

64. *Sefer ha-Sichos* 5709, p. 336.
65. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 21, p. 192.
66. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 17, p. 176.
67. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 14, p. 98.
68. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 18, p. 58.
69. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 11, p. 22; ibid, vol. 5, p. 175; ibid. p. 209 and many other places. Patients are also advised to memorize some *Tehillim* and recite them by heart or mentally—*Igros Kodesh* vol. 11, p. 48.
70. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 5, p. 180.
71. *Likutei Diburim* vol. 5, p. 1008; *Igros Kodesh* vol. 17., p. 289; vol. 8, p. 267 and many other places.
72. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 19, p. 268. The very act of carrying a *Tehillim* on a journey or in a vehicle is also considered to offer protection, *Igros Kodesh* vol. 5, p. 327; ibid. vol. 13, p. 394.
73. *Igros Kodesh meturgamos me-yiddish,* vol. 1, p. 354.
74. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 5, p. 87.
75. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 5, p. 105.
76. See *Sefer ha-Toldos Admor Maharash* p. 20, where these chapters are prescribed: 1, 2, 3, 4, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 33, 47, 72, 86, 90, 91, 104, 112, 113-150.
77. *Igros Kodesh* vol.9, p. 166.
78. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 7, p. 31.
79. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 4, p. 108.

weekly cycle.[80] After the arrest of the previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson in 1927, recital of the daily portion became widespread, as he noted in a talk some ten years later:

"*The custom of reciting Tehillim after the morning prayers has become accepted, thank God... It began when a 'sacrifice' for the community, was demanded from On High. This was Rosh Hashanah 5627 (1926). For various reasons[81], during the days of the imprisonment, many communities started saying Tehillim, and this positive practice was continued. Many souls have benefitted from this. I express my gratitude to those who made the effort for this to happen. Every person should make the effort to encourage this practice to be adopted wherever it is not yet done. I give them my blessings for children, health and a generous income."*[82]

In another letter, the previous Rebbe stressed that this was not something only of relevance to his own followers, but universally:

"The recitation of Tehillim is not connected with any particular Nusach.[83] There is no difference between Chabad synagogues and those who use Nusach Ashkenaz or the Polish siddur—may God bless all of them. Torah commands us to love our fellow Jew, and this is engraved in our hearts, our very souls... This is sufficient reason for us to make efforts for the genuine welfare of every individual Jew, particularly considering the great value of public Tehillim and the deeper purpose of this practice... We simply must make the greatest effort possible that every synagogue of every Nusach adopt daily Tehillim."[84]

80. Letter of the previous Rebbe 8th Teves 5696 (*On Saying Tehillim,* p. 22).

81. The previous Rebbe had, in fact, requested this practice at the beginning of the year. It appears, however, that the custom only became widespread after he was arrested and a note was found on his table requesting the recital of *Tehillim* daily (see memoir of Rabbi Elya Chaim Althaus, *On Saying Tehillim* pp. 45-47).

82. *Sichas Simchas Torah* 5695 (*On Saying Tehillim,* p. 1)

83. Textual variant of the prayers. Different Jewish communities follow slightly different traditions regarding the precise text and sequence of the prayers.

84. Letter to an emissary, Sivan 5793 (*On Saying Tehillim,* pp. 2-4). The previous Rebbe also encouraged the practice of studying daily a portion of *Chumash* and *Tanya*. The three daily readings, *Chumash, Tehillim* and *Tanya* are known by their acronym *Chitas* (see Ritterman, chapter 2). *Chitas* was vigorously encouraged by the seventh Rebbe and is widely practiced in Chabad today. It has become a hallmark of devotion.

Chabad customs

a.) *Daily Tehillim*

A portion of *Tehillim* is recited daily, as the book is divided according to the monthly cycle of thirty readings. This is preferably done straight after the morning prayer, with the congregation[85], followed by the recital of *kaddish*.[86] In a month of only 29 days, two portions are recited on the 29th day, that of the 29th and the 30th of the month.[87]

b.) *Shabbos Mevorachim*

On the Shabbos preceding *Rosh Chodesh*[88] (new lunar month), the entire Book of *Tehillim* is recited[89], preferably[90] with the congregation before prayer.[91] This is a sacred "vehicle" through which the blessings for the new month are delivered.[92]

85. With the Chazzan leading from his place. Originally the Previous Rebbe had suggested that *Tehillim* be led from a different location, so that it should not appear that the prayer service itself is being modified (*Sefer ha-Sichos* 5627, p. 116). However, this detail was not adopted in practice (for an explanation see *Sichas Vav Tishrei* 5730). For an in-depth analysis of this issue see article of Rabbi Baruch Oberlander in *Kovetz Oholei Torah*, issue 987 (2010).

86. *On Saying Tehillim* p. 2. It is also preferable to give charity (see note 4).

87. *Sefer ha-Minhagim Chabad* (Rabbis Menachem Zev Greeglass and Yehudah Leib Groner ed., *Kehos* 1966), p. 20.

88. This applies even on the *Shabbos* before *Rosh Hashanah* when, according to Jewish custom, the blessing for the new month is not recited (ibid. p. 30).

89. Like the custom of daily *Tehillim,* this was encouraged by the Previous Rebbe not only by his own followers, but among the broader Jewish community. See *Igros Kodesh Rayatz* vol. 3, p. 578.

90. Regarding the completion of *Tehillim* at other times during Shabbos, see personal recollections of the Rebbe's comments in private audience in: Rabbi Chaim Rapoport, *Likutei Dinei u'Minhagei Rosh Chodesh, Chabad* (*Kehos* 5750), page 7 (in footnote); Rabbi Mordechai Menasher Laufer (ed.), *Heichal Menachem* vol. 3 (*Heichal Menachem,* 1996), p. 266; *Kfar Chabad Magazine*, issue 986, p. 32; Rabbi Yosef Krasik, *Ha-Shabbos be-Kabbalah ve-Chasidus* (*Aishel-Kfar Chabad,* 2005), vol. 2, p. 758.

91. Letter of the Previous Rebbe 15th *Menachem Av*, 5695, (*On Saying Tehillim,* p. 5-9); *Likutei Sichos* vol. 11, p. 317. In the Rebbe's synagogue, *Tehillim* began at 8.30 a.m. The Rebbe used to recite *Tehillim* from *Yahel Ohr* (see note 33)— *Hiskashrus* (*Chabad Youth Organization of Israel*), issue 211, p. 18.

92. *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Chayei Sarah* 5715, par. 4. See *Sichas Shabbos Bereishis* 5721, par 6, where the Rebbe criticized those who do not come to say *Tehillim* with the congregation, preferring private study.

If a congregant who is saying *kaddish* for a departed one is present, he recites *Yehi Ratzon* (p. 429), followed by *kaddish,* after each of the five books of *Tehillim* is completed. Otherwise, a single *kaddish* is recited at the end of reading all five books.[93]

Regarding the daily and *Shabbos Mevorachim Tehillim* recital, the Rebbe wrote, *"Be scrupulous about this. It is of consequence for you, your children and your children's children."*[94] *"We cannot adequately describe the great merit of those who participate in the sacred worship of saying Tehillim with a congregation, and the great pleasure this worship causes On High"*[95]

c.) *Psalm corresponding to a person's age*

According to a custom dating back to Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), in the name of the *Ba'al Shem Tov* (Rabbi Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov, 1698-1760), every person should recite the chapter of *Tehillim* corresponding to his or her age, each day.[96] (For example, a person aged 13 recites Psalm 14). Children ought to be encouraged to do this from a young age.[97] One should also recite the Psalm corresponding to the age of each of one's children.[98] Many Chasidim also recite the Psalm corresponding to the age of their Rebbe.[99] When reciting the chapter for a person who has passed away, one follows their present "age" (i.e. time since birth) and not their age at passing.[100]

93. *Sefer ha-Minhagim* p. 30.

94. *Hayom Yom,* 25th *Shevat*. This statement also refers to the daily study of Chumash.

95. Ibid. 29th *Cheshvan*. This is done after the daily portion of the monthly cycle (*Igros Kodesh* vol. 15, p. 234).

    At the end of *Tanya*, the *Alter Rebbe* speaks of the custom of reciting Psalm 119 every Shabbos. This is not practiced commonly in Chabad, though the Rebbe noted that it is observed in "a number of communities," and that his father (Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson 1878-1944) followed the custom, reciting Psalm 119 after the afternoon service (*Likutei Sichos vol.* 29, p. 189, note 19).

96. *On Saying Tehillim* p. 48.

97. *Hisvaduyos* 5749, vol. 3, p. 399. Children should also own their own Book of *Tehillim*, to be placed in their bedroom (*Hisvaduyos* 5747, vol. 2, p. 648).

98. *Igros Rayatz* vol. 1, p. 31. One hopes that, in this merit, one's children will not stray on undesirable paths (ibid.)

99. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 3, p. 350

100. Since the soul in heaven continues to learn fresh Torah insights and "grows"

On *Rosh Chodesh,* a section of the Psalm corresponding to one's age is studied, with the commentary of *Rashi* (other commentaries may be added too), such that throughout the year, study of the entire Psalm is completed.[101]

d.) Psalm 20

Psalm 20 is usually recited as part of the morning prayer service, but on days when *tachanun* (penitential prayers) are not recited, the Psalm is omitted from the morning prayer. In such instances, it should be said after the morning prayers, as part of the daily *Tehillim* reading.[102]

e.) "Purification" of the air

"Purification of the air is the task of every person familiar with Torah and Torah-literature, and is effected through the letters of Torah. When reciting words of Torah while in the store or walking in the street or riding the subway[103], one cleans the air. Everyone knowledgeable in Torah must have some Torah memorized—Chumash, Tehillim, Mishnah, Tanya, etc., so that at all times and in all places he will be able to think and utter the holy letters of Torah."[104]

each year (Letter of the Rebbe dated 7th *Mar-Cheshvan* 5712, in *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim* 5680, pp. 356-7). See ibid. for an explanation why this poses no contradiction to the notion that "the Torah is not in heaven."

101. *On Saying Tehillim,* p. 48. If the chapter has less than twelve verses (or thirteen, in a leap year), then some verses will be repeated. For chapters with more than twelve verses, two or more verses are studied every *Rosh Chodesh* (ibid.)

    The Previous Rebbe also mentioned that he would study his Psalm with Chassidic interpretations throughout the year (*Igros Rayatz* vol. 1, letter 16).

102. *Sefer ha-Sichos* 5704, p. 157.

103. While some authorities argue that *Tehillim* falls under the Talmudic prohibition of "scriptures that may not be recited by heart" (*Temurah* 14b, see *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 1:6; *Chikrei Lev, Orach Chaim* par 13), others permit *Tehillim* to be recited by heart (*Responsa Chavos Ya'ir* 175; *Mishnah Berurah* 49:4; *Mateh Efraim* 419:23; *Ketsos ha-Shulchan* 14:2). In another entry in *Hayom Yom* the author perhaps implies that *Tehillim* needs to be read from a text: "*When someone walks the street and thinks words of Mishnah or Tanya, or* ***sits in his store*** *with a Chumash or Tehillim...*" (*Hayom Yom* 9th *Adar I,* emphasis added).

104. *Hayom Yom* 11th *Teves*. The following explanation of this custom given (ibid.): *"Man's life is dependent on the air around him. Without air he cannot live and the quality of life is dependent on the quality of air. In an atmosphere of Torah*

f.) *Psalms at night*

Tehillim is not read at night[105], from the appearance of the stars[106] until after midnight.[107]

g.) *Special Times of the Year.*

1.) *Elul and Tishrei*

From the second day of *Rosh Chodesh Elul* until the eve of *Yom Kippur*, in addition to the regular daily reading, three additional chapters of *Tehillim* are said daily (see back page of this book).

and mitzvos there is healthy life. In a Godless environment life is diseased, and one is constantly threatened with the possibility of being stricken with contagious maladies. The first general step in healing is to purify the atmosphere."

105. In *Be'er Haitiv* (*Orach Chaim* 238:2), Rabbi Zechariah Mendel of Cracow (18th century) prohibits the reading of all scriptures at night, based on a directive of *Arizal* (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, 1534–1572): "*because scripture is in the [lowest] world of Asiyah (formation) and the night itself is at the level of Asiyah and this is all judgment energy, and we do not wish to arouse judgment"* (*Sha'ar ha-Mitzvos*, *Parshas Va'eschanan*). According to Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (1838–1933), the saintly "Chafetz Chaim," this idea follows the *Midrashic* account (in *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* ch. 46) of God's instruction to Moshe on Mount Sinai, where Moshe was taught scripture during the day and *Mishnah* at night (*Mishnah Berurah* ch. 238, *Sha'ar ha-Tziyon* note 1).

106. *Sefer ha-Minhagim* p. 20. However see *Igros Kodesh* vol. 15, p. 234 where it is recommended not to say *Tehillim* from "sunset."

These restrictions do not apply on *Rosh HaShanah,* the Days of Penitence, *Yom Kippur* and *Hoshanah Rabah* (*Sefer ha-Minhagim* ibid.).

107. *Arizal* did not specify any cut-off point during the night, leading some authorities to discourage the saying of *Tehillim* throughout the entire night. See: *Chida, Yosef Ometz, responsum* no. 54; *Chaim Sha'al*, *vol. 2, responsum* 25, citing Rabbi Shalom Sharabi, 1720–1777). However, many authorities ruled that, even according to *Arizal, Tehillim* may be recited after midnight: Rabbi Meir Paparish d. 1662, *Ohr Tzadikim*, *Amud ha-Tefilah* 1:11; Rabbi Ovadia Hedaya, 1889–1969, *Yaskil Avdi*, vol. 4, *Kuntres Acharon*, *Orach Chaim* no 2; Rabbi Ya'akov Chaim Sofer, 1870–1939, *Kaf ha-Chaim* 237:9; Rabbi Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg, 1915–2006, *Tzitz Eliezer* vol 8, no. 2.

Among the arguments offered for midnight *Tehillim* reading are *Midrashic* sources indicating that King David himself said *Tehillim* at midnight (*Brachos* 3a, cited below on p. 158), as did our Patriarch Ya'akov (*Bereishis Rabah* 68:11, cited on p. 53).

According to Chabad custom, the daily portion of *Chumash* with *Rashi may* be studied at night, even before midnight (*Sefer ha-Minghagim* ibid.). Presumably, this follows authorities which rule that scripture may be recited at night if it is accompanied by commentaries (see Rabbi Menachem Mendel Panet 1817-1884, *Avnei Tzedek*, *Yoreh De'ah responsum* 102)

2.) *Rosh Hashanah*

Throughout both days of *Rosh Hashanah,* from an hour before the afternoon prayer on the eve of *Rosh Hashanah* until the evening prayer at its conclusion, a great effort is made to read *Tehillim* at every moment possible, night and day.[108]

3.) *Yom Kippur*

Concluding the cycle of *Tehillim* begun on *Rosh Chodesh Elul,* we read on *Yom Kippur*: chapters 115-123, before *Kol Nidrei*; chapters 124-132, before retiring to bed; chapters 133-141, after *Mussaf*; and chapters 142-150, after *Neilah* before Maariv.[109] In 5711 the Rebbe began the custom of reciting the entire *Tehillim* with the congregation after the evening service on the night of *Yom Kippur.*[110]

4.) *Hoshanah Rabah*

After midnight on *Hoshanah Rabah*, the entire book of *Tehillim* is read with the congregation. (Married men wear a *gartel*). It was not customary in Lubavitch to prolong the saying of *Tehillim* on this night.[111] At the completion of each of the five books, one reads the *yehi ratzon* (page 430) and the prayer "after the moon has appeared" (page 435).

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108. *Sefer ha-Minhagim,* p. 56.

109. *Sefer ha-Minhagim,* p. 54. This custom was received by the *Ba'al Shem Tov* from his spiritual mentor, Ahiya of Shiloh (*On Saying Tehillim,* p. 38).

110. This practice was praised by *Shaloh*, *Maseches Yoma, Amud Teshuvah*.

111. *Sefer ha-Minhagim* p. 68. The *yehi ratzon* for festivals (p. 428) is not said (ibid), and Kaddish is not recited at the completion of each of the five books (see Rabbi Yissachar Shloma Bistritzky (ed.), *Otzar Minhagim ve-Hora'os* (*Heichal Menachem,* 2006), pp. 340-1).

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It is my great honor to dedicate the *Kol Menachem Tehillim, Schottenstein Edition,* to two Schottenstein families whose dedication to Torah is legendary. With a vision to transform the study and recital of *Tehillim*, **Mr. Tovia Schottenstein** and his wife **Leah** commissioned this project in 2011 in memory of their Uncle Saul Schottenstein. They are joined by **David and Eda Schottenstein**, who dedicate the book in memory of the holy and precious soul of Alta Shula Swerdlov and in memory of their beloved grandparents Mordechai and Rivka Sirota and Tzvi Hirsch and Necha Zobin; and by **Aryeh and Raizy Schottenstein** in memory of their beloved grandparents Berel and Miriam Weiss. All three families are joining to dedicate the *sefer* in memory of their beloved parents and grandparents Leon and Jean Schottenstein, Meir Avner Levy, and in honor of their grandmother Flory Levy.

Their partners in this momentous project have been **Jay and Jeanie Schottenstein**, together with their children **Joseph Aaron** and **Lindsay Brooke, Jonathan Richard,** and **Jeffrey Adam**. They dedicate this volume in the honor of their dear parents and grandparents Jerome ז"ל and Geraldine Schottenstein תיחי', and Leonard and Heddy Rabe תיחי'. Thanks to their sponsorship of a veritable library of the highest quality Jewish books, the Schottensteins have become a household name in the Jewish world, and it is a magnificent honor to have them involved in this work.

I extend my heartfelt wishes to the backbone of our organization, Rabbi Meyer Gutnick, who had the courage to invest in an unknown author, and since then has been an unfailing source of material support and moral encouragement. Motivated by a great love for the Rebbe, and recognizing the urgency of spreading his Torah teachings, Rabbi Gutnick has chosen to invest his own natural talent at "getting things done" into a very worthy cause. In the merit of this, and all his many other impressive philanthropic efforts, may God bless him, together with his dear wife Shaindy, and all their wonderful children and grandchildren, with *chasidishe nachas* and only revealed and open goodness.

It would also like to extend my thanks to David and Lara Slager whose outstanding friendship and support has help build *Kol Menachem* to where it is today. I wish David, Lara, and their precious children Hannah and Sara Malka, all the abundant blessings that they deserve.

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Rabbi Chaim Miller, *Lag B'Omer* 5773

THE SCHOTTENSTEIN EDITION

ספר תהלים
Tehillim

THE KOL MENACHEM TEHILLIM

יהי רצון קודם תהלים בחול

Prayer before Tehillim on a Weekday

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, הַבּוֹחֵר
בְּדָוִד עַבְדּוֹ וּבְזַרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו, וְהַבּוֹחֵר בְּשִׁירוֹת וְתִשְׁבָּחוֹת,
שֶׁתִּפֶּן בְּרַחֲמִים אֶל קְרִיאַת מִזְמוֹרֵי תְהִלִּים שֶׁאָקְרָא,
כְּאִלּוּ אֲמָרָם דָּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ עָלָיו הַשָּׁלוֹם בְּעַצְמוֹ, זְכוּתוֹ יָגֵן
עָלֵינוּ, וְיַעֲמֹד לָנוּ זְכוּת פְּסוּקֵי תְהִלִּים וּזְכוּת תֵּבוֹתֵיהֶם
וְאוֹתִיּוֹתֵיהֶם וּנְקֻדּוֹתֵיהֶם וְטַעֲמֵיהֶם, וְהַשֵּׁמוֹת הַיּוֹצְאִים
מֵהֶם מֵרָאשֵׁי תֵּבוֹת וּמִסּוֹפֵי תֵּבוֹת, לְכַפֵּר פְּשָׁעֵינוּ
וַעֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ וְחַטֹּאתֵינוּ, וּלְזַמֵּר עָרִיצִים וּלְהַכְרִית כָּל
הַחוֹחִים וְהַקּוֹצִים הַסּוֹבְבִים אֶת הַשּׁוֹשַׁנָּה הָעֶלְיוֹנָה,
וּלְחַבֵּר אֱשֶׁת נְעוּרִים עִם דּוֹדָהּ בְּאַהֲבָה וְאַחֲוָה וְרֵעוּת.
וּמִשָּׁם יִמָּשֵׁךְ לָנוּ שֶׁפַע לְנֶפֶשׁ רוּחַ וּנְשָׁמָה לְטַהֲרֵנוּ
מֵעֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ וְלִסְלוֹחַ חַטֹּאתֵינוּ וּלְכַפֵּר פְּשָׁעֵינוּ, כְּמוֹ
שֶׁסָּלַחְתָּ לְדָוִד שֶׁאָמַר מִזְמוֹרִים אֵלּוּ לְפָנֶיךָ, כְּמוֹ
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: גַּם יְיָ הֶעֱבִיר חַטָּאתְךָ לֹא תָמוּת. וְאַל תְּקָחֵנוּ
מֵהָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה קֹדֶם זְמַנֵּנוּ, עַד מְלֹאת שְׁנוֹתֵינוּ בָּהֶם

יהי רצון קודם תהלים בחול

Prayer before Tehillim on a Weekday

May it be Your Will, God, our God, and the God of our fathers, who chooses His servant David and his seed after him, and who chooses songs and praises—that You turn in compassion to my reading of the songs of *Tehillim*, as if they had been said by King David of blessed memory, may his merit protect us. May the merit the *Tehillim* verses and the merit of their words, letters, vowels, and notes, as well as the Divine Names spelled by their first and last letters, stand us in good stead to atone for our transgressions, iniquities, and sins; to cut down insolent forces and cut off all the thorns and prickles that surround the Celestial Rose; to unite the Bride of Youth with her Beloved, with love, kinship, and friendship. From that union may bounty be drawn to our *nefesh*, *ruach* and *neshamah*, to purify us of our iniquities, forgive our sins, and atone for our transgressions, just as You forgave David who said these Psalms before You, as the verse states, *"God has also removed your sin; you will not die"* (II *Shmuel* 12:13). May You not take us from this world before our time, before we complete, *"the span of our life is seventy years"* (*Tehillim*

שִׂבְעִים שָׁנָה, בְּאֹפֶן שֶׁנּוּכַל לְתַקֵּן אֵת אֲשֶׁר שִׁחַתְנוּ.
וּזְכוּת דָּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ עָלָיו הַשָּׁלוֹם יָגֵן עָלֵינוּ וּבַעֲדֵנוּ
שֶׁתַּאֲרִיךְ אַפְּךָ עַד שׁוּבֵנוּ אֵלֶיךָ בִּתְשׁוּבָה שְׁלֵמָה לְפָנֶיךָ.
וּמֵאוֹצַר מַתְּנַת חִנָּם חָנֵנוּ כְּדִכְתִיב: וְחַנֹּתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר אָחֹן
וְרִחַמְתִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר אֲרַחֵם. וּכְשֵׁם שֶׁאָנוּ אוֹמְרִים לְפָנֶיךָ
שִׁירָה בָּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, כַּךְ נִזְכֶּה לוֹמַר לְפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ שִׁיר
וּשְׁבָחָה לָעוֹלָם הַבָּא. וְעַל יְדֵי אֲמִירַת תְּהִלִּים תִּתְעוֹרֵר
חֲבַצֶּלֶת הַשָּׁרוֹן, וְלָשִׁיר בְּקוֹל נָעִים בְּגִילַת וְרַנֵּן, כְּבוֹד
הַלְּבָנוֹן נִתַּן לָהּ, הוֹד וְהָדָר בְּבֵית אֱלֹהֵינוּ, בִּמְהֵרָה
בְיָמֵינוּ, אָמֵן סֶלָה:

➤ Before Saying Tehillim it is customary to say these Three Verses

**לְכוּ נְרַנְּנָה לַייָ, נָרִיעָה לְצוּר יִשְׁעֵנוּ:
נְקַדְּמָה פָנָיו בְּתוֹדָה, בִּזְמִרוֹת נָרִיעַ
לוֹ: כִּי אֵל גָּדוֹל יְיָ, וּמֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל עַל כָּל
אֱלֹהִים:**

90:10), so that we can fix what we have corrupted. May the merit of King David, of blessed memory, shield over us and for us, that You will be patient with us until we return towards You in complete repentance before You. And may You favor us from Your treasury of undeserved grace, as the verse states, *"I shall grant grace to whom I grant grace, and I shall have compassion for whom I have compassion"* (*Shemos* 33:19). Just as we sing praise before You in this world, so may we merit to sing songs and praises before You, God our God, in the World to Come. May the recitation of *Tehillim* arouse the "Tulip of Sharon" (*Shir ha-Shirim* 2:1), to sing with a sweet voice, with happiness and with joy and may she be given the glory of the Levanon. May majesty and splendor be found in the House of our God, speedily in our days. Amen, *Selah*.

➤ Before Saying Tehillim it is customary to say these Three Verses

Come let us sing to God,
let us acclaim the Rock, our savior.
Let us welcome Him with thanksgiving,
let us acclaim Him with songs of praise.
For God is the great God,
the great King over all powers.

(Tehillim 95:1–3)

ליום ראשון יום א'

א אַשְׁרֵי־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָלַךְ בַּעֲצַת רְשָׁעִים,
וּבְדֶרֶךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמָד, וּבְמוֹשַׁב לֵצִים לֹא
יָשָׁב: ב כִּי אִם־בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה חֶפְצוֹ, וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יֶהְגֶּה יוֹמָם
וָלָיְלָה: ג וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שָׁתוּל עַל־פַּלְגֵי־מָיִם, אֲשֶׁר פִּרְיוֹ יִתֵּן
בְּעִתּוֹ וְעָלֵהוּ לֹא יִבּוֹל, וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה יַצְלִיחַ: ד לֹא־כֵן
הָרְשָׁעִים, כִּי אִם־כַּמֹּץ אֲשֶׁר־תִּדְּפֶנּוּ רוּחַ: ה עַל־כֵּן לֹא־

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

Who wrote the *Tehillim*? (v. 1)

Rashi: The Book of *Tehillim* employs ten different terms to refer to "song": 1) conducting (*nitzuach*), 2) melody (*nigun*), 3) musical accompaniment (*mizmor*), 4) song (*shir*), 5) praise (*hallel*), 6) prayer (*tefilah*), 7) blessing (*brachah*), 8) thanksgiving (*hoda'ah*), 9) praises (*ashrei*), and 10) "Praise God" (*hallelukah*). These ten different terms reflect the ten individuals who composed these Psalms: 1) Adam, 2) Malkizedek, 3) Avraham, 4) Moshe, 5) David, 6) Shlomo, 7) Asaph, and, 8-10) the three sons of Korach.

Midrash Tehillim: Despite its many authors, the book is known as the "Psalms of David," since his poetic voice was the sweetest of all: *"David ben Yishai... the sweet singer of the Psalms of Israel"* (II *Shmuel* 23:1).

Why is the Torah scholar "like a tree"? (v. 2-3)

Zohar: A tree contains, 1) roots, 2) bark, 3) a core, 4) branches, 5) leaves, 6) flowers and 7) fruit.

So too, words of Torah contain seven layers of meaning: 1) *peshat* (literal), 2) *derash* (homiletics), *remez* (allusions) that hint to 3) *chochmah* (wisdom) and 4) *gematria* (numerical values)—hidden secrets and closed secrets, piled on each other; 5) *pasul ve-kasher* (laws of the invalid and the acceptable), 6) *tamei ve-tahor* (laws of the ritually impure and pure), and 7) *issur ve-heter* (laws of the forbidden and the permissible).

If a scholar does not possess all these "branches" of the Torah, he cannot be called a man of wisdom (*Zohar* III 202a).

TORAS MENACHEM

אַשְׁרֵי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָלַךְ בַּעֲצַת רְשָׁעִים וּבְדֶרֶךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמָד — *Happy is the man that has not walked in the counsel of the wicked, and has not stood in the path of sinners* [1:1].

The opening of the first printed collection of the *Ba'al Shem Tov's* teachings states the following:

"Each person ought to worship God with all his energy, because everything has a Divine intent. God desires to be worshipped in every conceivable manner. Sometimes you are unable to study because you are walking around, talking with people, but even then you must be conscious of God and mentally connect what you are doing with a higher reality. Similarly, when you're on the road and can't pray or study as well as usual, you need to worship God in other ways."

"Don't be disturbed by this. For God wishes to be worshipped in every conceivable way, sometimes with one approach and sometimes with another. That's why it turned out that you had to go on a journey or have a conversation—so that you'd be able to worship Him in that alternative way" (*Tzava'as ha-Ribash* par. 3).

There is a remarkable similarity here with the opening of the *Tehillim*. The *Besht* is teaching us that when we leave the synagogue and study hall and engage in non-sacred activities, it's important to maintain an awareness of God. Or, as King David puts it: *"Happy is the man that has not walked in the counsel of the wicked, and has not stood in the path of sinners, and has not sat in the seat of scoffers."*

(Based on *Sichas Shavu'os* 5742, par. 19-22)

SUNDAY DAY 1

1

Study Torah and avoid sin and you will be successful

1 Happy is the man that has not walked in the counsel of the wicked,
and has not stood in the path of sinners,
and has not sat in the seat of scoffers;
2 But in God's Torah is his delight,
and in his Torah he meditates day and night.
3 He will be like a tree replanted by streams of water,
who will bring forth its fruit in its season,
and whose leaves will not wither,
and whatever he does will succeed.
4 Not so the wicked,
but they are as the chaff that the wind drives away.
5 Therefore, the wicked will not stand in judgment,

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

● Why is a student like a "replanted tree"? (v. 3)

TALMUD: Why does the verse state, "a tree replanted," and not "a tree planted"? To teach you that whoever learns Torah from one master alone will never achieve great success. (However, this only applies to lessons in logical reasoning (*sevarah*); but with oral traditions it is better to learn from one master only) (*Avodah Zarah* 19a).

● What are the scholar's "leaves"? (v. 3)

RASHI: Even the inferior parts of the tree such as the leaves are of value. This is like the casual conversations of Torah scholars which also need to be studied for their immense wisdom.

● Why are the wicked compared to chaff? (v. 4)

METZUDOS: Because they can never find inner peace. Their lack of integrity leads them to inner turmoil; they blow in the wind, like chaff.

● Why does the Psalmist say *"Not so..."* (*lo chein*)? (v. 4-5)

MIDRASH TEHILLIM: God said to the wicked, "I created the world with the phrase, *'It was so'* (*vayehi chein*) (*Bereishis* 1:11), but you say it was not so created. By your lives, not so? On account of the word "so" the wicked will not stand in judgment" (*Midrash Tehillim* 1:21).

TORAS MENACHEM

בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה חֶפְצוֹ וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יֶהְגֶּה יוֹמָם וָלָיְלָה — *In God's Torah is his delight, and in his Torah he meditates day and night* [1:2].

Note the allusion here to two levels of Torah: there is "God's Torah"—the heavenly wisdom as it exists in the "mind" of God; and "his Torah"—that same wisdom as it is understood by man's limited brain. Which is higher?

You would, of course, imagine that "God's Torah" is the superior of the two, but, surprisingly, Chasidic thought teaches that the opposite is the case. When God gave us the Torah He effectively put the infinite in finite packaging; Divine concepts in human language. *To encapsulate the infinite in the finite is a more impressive feat than infinitude alone.* It draws on God's absolute oneness, the "space" where He transcends even the dichotomy of finitude and infinitude, where He is neither limited or unlimited.

So, ironically, the Torah which we study down here ("his Torah") actually possesses a spiritual intensity which even the heavenly Torah ("God's Torah") does not have. Remember that next time you are studying!

(Based on *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Melukat* vol. 6, p. 103*ff.*)

וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שָׁתוּל עַל פַּלְגֵי מָיִם ... וְעָלֵהוּ לֹא יִבּוֹל — *He will be like a tree replanted by streams of water... whose leaves will not wither* [1:3].

While the Animal Kingdom surpasses the Plant Kingdom in so many ways, plants retain the superior quality of *connectedness*. They are always rooted to the ground (*"like a tree replanted by streams of water"*). To navigate the challenges of life we need to maintain a strong faith in God, and not suffer from

יָקֻמוּ רְשָׁעִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט, וְחַטָּאִים בַּעֲדַת צַדִּיקִים: ו כִּי־
יוֹדֵעַ יְהוָה דֶּרֶךְ צַדִּיקִים, וְדֶרֶךְ רְשָׁעִים תֹּאבֵד:

ב א לָמָּה רָגְשׁוּ גוֹיִם, וּלְאֻמִּים יֶהְגּוּ־רִיק: ב יִתְיַצְּבוּ
מַלְכֵי־אֶרֶץ וְרוֹזְנִים נוֹסְדוּ־יָחַד, עַל־יְהוָה וְעַל־
מְשִׁיחוֹ: ג נְנַתְּקָה אֶת־מוֹסְרוֹתֵימוֹ, וְנַשְׁלִיכָה מִמֶּנּוּ
עֲבֹתֵימוֹ: ד יוֹשֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׂחָק, אֲדֹנָי יִלְעַג־לָמוֹ: ה אָז
יְדַבֵּר אֵלֵימוֹ בְאַפּוֹ, וּבַחֲרוֹנוֹ יְבַהֲלֵמוֹ: ו וַאֲנִי נָסַכְתִּי מַלְכִּי,
עַל־צִיּוֹן הַר־קָדְשִׁי: ז אֲסַפְּרָה אֶל־חֹק, יְהוָה אָמַר אֵלַי
בְּנִי אַתָּה, אֲנִי הַיּוֹם יְלִדְתִּיךָ: ח שְׁאַל מִמֶּנִּי וְאֶתְּנָה גוֹיִם

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

● How is Psalm 2 connected with Psalm 1?

Talmud: This chapter of the Psalms combined with the previous one should really be considered as one single chapter. Every chapter that was particularly dear to David he commenced with "Happy" and ended with "Happy." He began with "Happy," as the verse states, *"Happy is the man"* (1:1), and he ended with "Happy," as the verse states, *"happy are all who take refuge in Him."* (2:12; *Brachos* 9b).

● When will God laugh? And why? (v. 2-4)

Talmud: Rabbi Yosi said: *"In the Future Era idol-worshippers will come and convert to Judaism."*

But will they be accepted? Has it not been taught, "In the days of Mashiach, converts will not be accepted; neither were they accepted in the days of David or Shlomo"?

Actually, they will be *self-made* converts. On their own, they will choose to place *tefillin* on their heads

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emotional fragmentation. King David here employs the image of a planted tree whose leaves do not wither to teach us that success in life depends, to a great extent, on our degree of connectedness.

(Based on *Sichas Motzoie Shabbos Parshas Va'eira* 5739, par. 19-21)

יוֹשֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׂחָק אֲדֹנָי יִלְעַג־לָמוֹ — *He who sits in heaven will laugh, God will ridicule them* [2:4].

If David considered these two Psalms as one (see *Classic Questions*), why do we find in all our printed texts that they are considered as two?

Psalm 1 teaches us about the virtue of those who observe God's commandments: *"Happy is the man that has not walked in the counsel of the wicked ... in his Torah he meditates day and night"* (1:1-2). As a result, *"whatever he does will succeed"* (ibid. 3).

Psalm 2 continues this same theme, explaining that when we observe God's will, He will confound our enemies: *"He who sits in heaven will laugh, God will ridicule them"* (2:4), and consequently, *"I will bestow nations as your inheritance, and as your possession, the ends of the earth"* (ibid. 8). We are thus left with a question, "*Why are nations in an uproar?"* Why do they bother to plot against us, when their plans are doomed from the start?

But there is an important clause here: *The promise of protection of Psalm 2 is contingent on compliance with the commandments, in Psalm 1.*

nor sinners in the company of the righteous.
6 For God knows the way of the righteous,
and the way of the wicked will perish.

2

Do not try to outwit the ways of God

1 Why are nations in an uproar, and peoples muttering in vain?
2 The kings of the earth will stand up,
and rulers conspire together,
against God and against His anointed:
3 "Let us break apart their bands and cast away from us their cords."
4 He who sits in heaven will laugh, God will ridicule them.
5 Then He will speak to them in His wrath,
and in His fury, He will confound them:
6 "And it is I that established My king upon Zion, My holy mountain."
7 I will relate the decree that God spoke to me:
"You are My son. Today, I gave birth to you.
8 Ask of Me, and I will bestow nations as your inheritance,
and as your possession, the ends of the earth.

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

and on their arms, *tzitztis* on their clothes, and a *mezuzah* on their doorposts. But when Gog and Magog will come to battle *"against God and against His anointed"* (v. 2), then each of the converts will cast away his *mitzvos* and go on his own way—as the verse states, *"Let us break apart their bands* (i.e. *tefillin*), *and cast away from us their cords* (*i.e. tzitzis*). Then, God will sit and laugh, as the verse states: *"He who sits in heaven will laugh"* (*Avodah Zarah* 3b).

● Who is considered a "son" of God? (v. 7)

RASHI: God said to David, "You are the head over Israel, who are called *'My firstborn son.'* (*Shemos* 4:22)."

● What happened "today"? (v. 7)

RADAK: On that day, the Divine spirit was "born" within David. The subsequent Psalms he wrote from that day on were composed with Divine inspiration.

ZOHAR: When David was thirteen he wrote this. Why? Because before this, he was not His son: his supernal soul had not settled on him (*Zohar* II 98a).

● To whom did God say, *"Ask of Me"*? (v. 8)

MIDRASH TEHILLIM: God said "Ask of Me" to three men: to Sholomo, to Achaz, and to Mashiach. What did Mashiach ask for? He asked that Israel should live for ever and ever.

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In David's times, most of the Jewish people were observant, so David considered this as one single chapter. But the sins of exile have left Psalm 1 to be (manifestly) true of only fraction of the Jews, which means that God's protection in Psalm 2 cannot be guaranteed. Only—as *Rashi* writes on this verse—when Mashiach comes, will we read this as one single chapter again.

(Based on *Likutei Sichos* vol. 10, pp. 77-8)

נְנַתְּקָה אֶת־מוֹסְרוֹתֵימוֹ — *Let us break apart their bands* [2:3].

Jewish ethical teachings are often referred to with the Hebrew term *musar* (מוּסַר), from Proverbs 1:2, meaning "discipline." A person who practices *musar* constantly controls and subdues his animalistic urges. In this verse of Tehillim we see another insight into the *musar* idea: "*Let us break apart their*

נַחֲלָתֶךָ, וַאֲחֻזָּתְךָ אַפְסֵי־אָרֶץ: ט תְּרֹעֵם בְּשֵׁבֶט בַּרְזֶל, כִּכְלִי
יוֹצֵר תְּנַפְּצֵם: י וְעַתָּה מְלָכִים הַשְׂכִּילוּ, הִוָּסְרוּ שֹׁפְטֵי
אָרֶץ: יא עִבְדוּ אֶת־יְהוָה בְּיִרְאָה, וְגִילוּ בִרְעָדָה: יב נַשְּׁקוּ־
בַר פֶּן־יֶאֱנַף וְתֹאבְדוּ דֶּרֶךְ כִּי־יִבְעַר כִּמְעַט אַפּוֹ, אַשְׁרֵי
כָּל־חוֹסֵי בוֹ:

ג

א מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד, בְּבָרְחוֹ מִפְּנֵי אַבְשָׁלוֹם בְּנוֹ: ב יְהוָה,
מָה־רַבּוּ צָרָי, רַבִּים קָמִים עָלָי: ג רַבִּים אֹמְרִים לְנַפְשִׁי,
אֵין יְשׁוּעָתָה לּוֹ בֵּאלֹהִים סֶלָה: ד וְאַתָּה יְהוָה מָגֵן בַּעֲדִי,
כְּבוֹדִי וּמֵרִים רֹאשִׁי: ה קוֹלִי אֶל־יְהוָה אֶקְרָא, וַיַּעֲנֵנִי מֵהַר
קָדְשׁוֹ סֶלָה: ו אֲנִי שָׁכַבְתִּי וָאִישָׁנָה, הֱקִיצוֹתִי כִּי יְהוָה יִסְמְכֵנִי:

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

● **What is the prophet's concern for the non-Jew? (2:10)**

Rashi: The Jewish prophets are merciful people. They reprove even wicked nations to turn away from their evil, for God extends His hand to the wicked and to the righteous.

● **How do you *"rejoice with trembling"*? (2:11)**

Ibn Ezra: Fear God even when you rejoice.

Zohar: This verse speaks of Jews in the Diaspora. When you are in the Holy Land, then you can *"serve God with joy"* (*Tehillim* 100:2; *Zohar* III 118a).

Orchos Tzadikim: Just as man loves his wife, but fears to disobey her, so that he will not lose her love.

● **Fifty-seven psalms are titled a *mizmor*. What does this term mean? (3:1)**

Radak: *Mizmor* was not a title attached to these Psalms when they were composed. It refers specifically to those Psalms that were later chanted in the Holy Temple.

● **Why did David compose a *mizmor* (joyous song) about something negative? (3:1)**

Talmud: It's like paying a large debt: Before paying it you feel sad; after paying it you're joyous. When God told David, *"I will raise evil against you from your own house"* (II *Shmuel* 12:11), David was dejected. He feared that the rebel would be a merciless member of his staff or an illegitimate child. When he discovered that the

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bands (mosrosamo)"—to tie or "band" your desires, a.) so that they do not run out of control; and, b.) so that they are consistent with the desires of your loftier aspirations, the yearnings of your Godly soul.

(*Ma'amar* of *Shabbos Chanukah* 5722)

עִבְדוּ אֶת ה' בְּיִרְאָה וְגִילוּ בִרְעָדָה — *Serve God with fear, and rejoice with trembling* [2:11].

Simply, this means that when you are in a joyous mood you should never allow your elation to get out

9 You will break them with an iron rod;
like a potter's vessel, you will shatter them."
10 And now, kings, be wise;
be admonished, judges of the earth.
11 Serve God with fear, and rejoice with trembling.
12 Worship in purity, lest He become angry
and you are lost in the way,
because His anger ignites in an instant.
Happy are all who take refuge in Him.

3

Don't be upset when you are punished by God

1 A psalm by David, when he fled from Avshalom, his son.
2 God, how many have my adversaries become!
Many are they that rise up against me.
3 Many are they that say of my soul,
"There is no salvation for him in God"—*selah*.
4 But You, God, are a shield around me,
My glory, and He who lifts my head.
5 With my voice, I call unto God,
and He answers me from His holy mountain—*selah*.
6 I lay down and I slept; I awoke, for God sustains me.

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

rebel was his own son, who would not be so cruel to him, David was joyous (*Brachos* 7b).

● ***"Many are they* etc." (3:3-4). Who are "they"?**

PESIKTA DE-RAV KAHANA: *"They"* are the nations who say of the Jewish people: A people who heard on Mount Sinai, *"Do not have any other gods before Me"* (*Shemos* 20:4), and then, forty days later, said to a calf, *"This is your God, O Israel"* (ibid 32:4)—can such a nation expect God's help? *"There is no salvation for him in God"* (v. 3).

Israel replied, "*But You, God, are a shield around me*" (v. 4). It is only because of the merit of my fathers that You encompassed us with a shield and saved us. And because of, "*My glory,*" when You caused Your presence to dwell among Israel in the Tabernacle (2:1).

● **What historical events do David's sleeping and awakening allude to? (3:6)**

MIDRASH TEHILLIM: *"I lay down"*—prophecy departed from Israel; *"and I slept"*—Divine inspiration (*ruach hakodesh*) departed from Israel. *"I awoke"*—Eliyahu the prophet announces the Redemption; *"for God sustains me"*—through Mashiach.

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of hand, since this could degenerate into undesirable behavior patterns. Always make sure that your joy is tempered with a feeling of humility ("trembling.")

On a deeper level, we might suggest that, not only should joy be *alongside* humility, joy could actually *arise* from a sense of humility. According to Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, humility is not the denial of your talents; it comes from the awareness that your talents are a gift from God that you did nothing to earn. And that brings you to both humility and joy: humility because you realize that your achievements are not to your own credit; and joy because they are nevertheless yours, as a benevolent gift from God.

(*Ma'amar* of *Shabbos Parshas Chayei Sarah* 5748)

ז לֹא־אִירָא מֵרִבְבוֹת עָם, אֲשֶׁר סָבִיב שָׁתוּ עָלָי: ח קוּמָה
יְהוָה הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי אֱלֹהַי כִּי־הִכִּיתָ אֶת־כָּל־אֹיְבַי לֶחִי, שִׁנֵּי
רְשָׁעִים שִׁבַּרְתָּ: ט לַיהוָה הַיְשׁוּעָה, עַל־עַמְּךָ בִרְכָתֶךָ סֶלָה:

ד א לַמְנַצֵּחַ בִּנְגִינוֹת מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד: ב בְּקָרְאִי עֲנֵנִי
אֱלֹהֵי צִדְקִי בַּצָּר הִרְחַבְתָּ לִי, חָנֵּנִי וּשְׁמַע תְּפִלָּתִי:
ג בְּנֵי־אִישׁ עַד־מָה כְּבוֹדִי לִכְלִמָּה תֶּאֱהָבוּן רִיק, תְּבַקְשׁוּ
כָזָב סֶלָה: ד וּדְעוּ כִּי־הִפְלָה יְהוָה חָסִיד לוֹ, יְהוָה יִשְׁמַע
בְּקָרְאִי אֵלָיו: ה רִגְזוּ וְאַל־תֶּחֱטָאוּ, אִמְרוּ בִלְבַבְכֶם עַל־
מִשְׁכַּבְכֶם וְדֹמּוּ סֶלָה: ו זִבְחוּ זִבְחֵי־צֶדֶק, וּבִטְחוּ אֶל־יְהוָה:

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

How is salvation "God's"? (3:9)

Rashi: The power of salvation is in God's hands.

Zohar: Happy are Israel, for wherever they were exiled, the *Shechinah* (Divine presence) went into exile with them. But when Israel will come out of exile, whose salvation will it be: Israel's or Gods? ... Here we read *"salvation is God's"* (*Zohar* III 90b).

When did David compose Psalm 4?

Malbim: It was when cynics suggested that the three year famine which David's kingdom was experiencing had resulted from David's sin. God subsequently informed David that the famine was actually a response to Shaul's brutal murder of the Gibeonites. Later, when the Gibeonites were appeased, rain began to fall.

Was David only praying for himself? (4:2)

Midrash Tehillim: When David said, *"When I call, answer me,"* what he meant was: "Master of the Universe! Even if a wicked Jew prays to You, answer him at once so that the other nations will not say, 'all gods are the same.'"

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לַיהוָה הַיְשׁוּעָה עַל־עַמְּךָ בִרְכָתֶךָ סֶלָה — *Salvation is God's; Your blessing is upon Your people, selah* [3:9].

In contrast to the literal interpretation offered by ***Rashi***, that the power of salvation belongs to God, the ***Zohar*** interprets this verse as referring to the salvation *of* God, so to speak, when the *Shechinah* (Divine presence) is redeemed from exile (see *Classic Questions*).

The *Talmud*, in tractate *Megillah*, cites a similar teaching to the *Zohar:*

"Come and see how beloved are the Jewish people in the eyes of God! To every place to which they were exiled, the Shechinah went with them... and when they will be redeemed in the future, the Shechinah will be with them" (*Megillah* 29b).

A close reading of these two texts, however, yields a very different understanding of why the *Shechinah* went into exile. According to the *Talmud*, the *Shechinah* joins the Jewish people in exile out of her great love for them; Exile is a plight suffered by the Jewish people and the *Shechinah* is merely an accompaniment and a support. The *Zohar*, on the

7 I do not fear the myriads of people,
who have set themselves upon me all around.
8 Arise, God; save me, my God;
For You struck all my enemies on the cheek;
the teeth of the wicked You smashed.
9 Salvation is God's; Your blessing is upon Your people, *selah*.

4

1 For the Leader, with stringed instruments; a psalm by David.
2 When I call, answer me, God of my righteousness,
You who freed me when I was in distress;
be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.

Do not shame your fellow or listen to gossip

3 Sons of men, how long will my glory be shamed,
in that you love vanity, and seek falsehood, *selah*.
4 But know that God has set apart the pious for Himself;
God will hear when I call unto Him.
5 Tremble, and do not sin;
Speak in your hearts upon your beds, and be still, *selah*.
6 Offer the sacrifices of righteousness; and trust in God.

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

God replied: "By your life! Even before the wicked man calls Me I will answer him. But his prayer needs to be a sincere one."

● **What advice does verse 5 give us in order to avoid sin? (4:5)**

TALMUD: A person should always incite (*yargiz*) the good inclination against the evil inclination, as the verse states, *"Tremble (rigzu), and do not sin."* If that works, well and good. If not, let him study the Torah, as the verse states, *"speak in your hearts."* If that works, well and good. If not, let him recite the *Shema*, as the verse states, *"upon your beds."* If that works, well and good. If not, let him remind himself of the day he will die, as the verse states, *"And be still, selah"* (*Brachos* 5a according to text of *Ein Ya'akov*).

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other hand, understands the phenomenon of exile as something suffered directly by the *Shechinah* Herself, and not merely a consequence of the exile of Israel. And the source for this mystical notion of the alienation of the *Shechinah*, is right here in *Tehillim*: *"Salvation is God's"*—God's presence, too needs to be redeemed from exile, so to speak.

(Based on *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Emor* 5737, par. 32)

רִגְזוּ וְאַל־תֶּחֱטָאוּ — *Tremble, and do not sin* [4:5].

From this verse the *Talmud* derives a variety of different tactics for combatting the "evil inclination" (see *Classic Questions*).

The *Talmud's* repetition of the phrase, *"If that works, well and good. If not...,"* is unusual. Why didn't it simply state each time, *"If that doesn't work... If that doesn't work..."?* And why do we have to progress through a variety of different remedies before the most powerful, "*let him remind himself of the day he will die"?* If a person fails to "*incite the good inclination against the evil inclination*, wouldn't it be more effective to remind himself of his mortality straight away?

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi suggests that the four tactics offered by the *Talmud* to combat the Evil Inclination are, in fact, addressed to four different types of worshipper. The pious *tzadik*, who never

ז רַבִּים אֹמְרִים מִי־יַרְאֵנוּ טוֹב, נְסֵה־עָלֵינוּ אוֹר פָּנֶיךָ יְהוָה:
ח נָתַתָּה שִׂמְחָה בְלִבִּי, מֵעֵת דְּגָנָם וְתִירוֹשָׁם רָבּוּ: ט בְּשָׁלוֹם
יַחְדָּו אֶשְׁכְּבָה וְאִישָׁן, כִּי־אַתָּה יְהוָה לְבָדָד לָבֶטַח תּוֹשִׁיבֵנִי:

ה א לַמְנַצֵּחַ אֶל־הַנְּחִילוֹת מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד: ב אֲמָרַי
הַאֲזִינָה | יְהוָה, בִּינָה הֲגִיגִי: ג הַקְשִׁיבָה לְקוֹל שַׁוְעִי
מַלְכִּי וֵאלֹהָי, כִּי־אֵלֶיךָ אֶתְפַּלָּל: ד יְהוָה בֹּקֶר תִּשְׁמַע קוֹלִי,
בֹּקֶר אֶעֱרָךְ־לְךָ וַאֲצַפֶּה: ה כִּי לֹא אֵל חָפֵץ רֶשַׁע | אָתָּה,
לֹא יְגָרְךָ רָע: ו לֹא־יִתְיַצְּבוּ הוֹלְלִים לְנֶגֶד עֵינֶיךָ, שָׂנֵאתָ
כָּל־פֹּעֲלֵי אָוֶן: ז תְּאַבֵּד דֹּבְרֵי כָזָב, אִישׁ־דָּמִים וּמִרְמָה

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

● **How did David achieve happiness? (4:7-8)**

Metzudos David: There are many who are always looking for more, saying, *"Who would show us good?"* But, You God, *"placed gladness in my heart,"* that I was satisfied with whatever I had—*"more than when their corn and wine abounded."*

● **What is the *nechilos*? (5:1)**

Rashi: Menachem interpreted all of these terms: *nechilos, alamos, gittis, yeduson*—that they are all names of musical instruments, and the melody of the psalm was according to the melody appropriate for that instrument. However, in the *Midrash, nechilos* is interpreted as an expression of "inheritance" (*nachalah*), but that is not the actual meaning of the word.

Yalkut Shimoni: This refers to the two inheritances (*nachalos*) which King David received, in this world and in the World to Come, as the verse states, *"I also will appoint him first-born,"* (*Tehillim* 89:28). Now was David the firstborn? Wasn't David the smallest child,

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allows his evil inclination to conquer him, is told, *always incite (yargiz) the good inclination against the evil inclination*—keep your guard! The evil inclination could catch you at any moment.

The intellectuals are warned to study Torah constantly; the masters of emotion to meditate on the *Shema*. And the simple worshipper, who is motivated by a fear of the Afterlife, is warned, "*let him remind himself of the day he will die.*"

The trouble is most people don't know what level of worship is really within their reach. So the *Talmud* advises: Try the highest level and, "*if that works, well and good. If not,*" then move down to the next one. You will find out what level of worshipper you really are when you see which type of tactic succeeds with your *yetzer hara*.

(Based on notes of the Rebbe to *Likutei Diburim, likut* 30)

לַמְנַצֵּחַ אֶל־הַנְּחִילוֹת — *For the Leader, [to be played] on the nechilos* [5:1].

David's excitement at receiving both this world and the World to Come (see *Classic Questions*) is hard to fathom: Isn't *every Jew* promised the World to Come? Why should this be a particular source of inspiration for David, driving him to dedicate a special Psalm to

7 Many are they that say, "Who would show us good?"
Raise upon us the light of Your countenance, O God.
8 You placed gladness in my heart,
more than when their corn and wine abounded.
9 In peace, I will both lie down and sleep,
Because You, God, alone, settle me in safety.

5

1 For the Leader, [to be played] on the *nechilos*; a psalm by David.
2 Hearken to my speech, O God; fathom my meditation.
3 Listen to the sound of my crying out,
my King and my God, for to You I pray.
4 O God, in the morning You will hear my voice;
in the morning I will prepare it before You, and hope.
5 For You are not a god who desires wickedness;
evil does not reside with You.
6 The senseless will not stand before Your eyes;
You hate all doers of wrong.
7 You will destroy those who speak falsehood;
God despises a man of blood and deceit.

May the wicked suffer for their evil, and the righteous rejoice in their good

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

as the verse states, *"David was the small one"* (I *Shmuel* 17:14)? So why is he called the first-born?

Because just as a first-born inherits a double portion, David, too, inherited two worlds: this world, and the World to Come. David said: *"I will chant about both: For the Leader, on the nechilos"* (*Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim* 629).

● **Which gods desire wickedness? (5:5)**

MALBIM: The idol-worshipping nations attribute the desire to do evil to their gods, along with all sorts of negative traits, because they seek to find a direct spiritual source for everything in nature. So they end up with competing gods, some desiring good, and some evil, such as in Greek thought.

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the idea? And why would *this world* elicit a spiritual high from David?

David's uniqueness was his ability to straddle both worlds, to see a glimmer of the World to Come in this world. The *Zohar* teaches that before ascending to the next world, the soul must pass through a river of fire to forget everything it has seen in this world (*Zohar* I 201a). Only in the Messianic Era are we promised, *"All flesh will see together that the mouth of God is speaking"* (*Yeshayah* 40:5), that even the material world ("all flesh") will be transparent to God. Before that time, however, such revelations are virtually impossible. So when David experienced it in his lifetime, he wrote Psalm 5 in gratitude.

What does all this have to do with us? While we cannot claim to approach the lofty spirituality of David, every Jewish soul is "a piece of God above" (*Tanya* ch. 2), and if we follow in David's ways, we too, can begin to discern God's presence in this world. We just need to emulate the fact that *"David was the small one,"* and make ourselves "small," humble and self-effacing.

(Based on *Sichah* of 2nd day of *Shavuos* 5719)

לֹא יְגָרְךָ רָע — *Evil does not reside with You* [5:5].

At the literal level this refers, of course, to God. It is only we human beings who suffer from assaults from

יְתָעֵב | יְהוָה: ח וַאֲנִי בְּרֹב חַסְדְּךָ אָבוֹא בֵיתֶךָ, אֶשְׁתַּחֲוֶה
אֶל־הֵיכַל קָדְשְׁךָ בְּיִרְאָתֶךָ: ט יְהוָה נְחֵנִי בְצִדְקָתֶךָ לְמַעַן
שׁוֹרְרָי, הַיְשַׁר לְפָנַי דַּרְכֶּךָ: י כִּי אֵין בְּפִיהוּ נְכוֹנָה קִרְבָּם
הַוּוֹת, קֶבֶר־פָּתוּחַ גְּרוֹנָם, לְשׁוֹנָם יַחֲלִיקוּן: יא הַאֲשִׁימֵם |
אֱלֹהִים יִפְּלוּ מִמֹּעֲצוֹתֵיהֶם, בְּרֹב פִּשְׁעֵיהֶם הַדִּיחֵמוֹ, כִּי
מָרוּ בָךְ: יב וְיִשְׂמְחוּ כָל־חוֹסֵי בָךְ לְעוֹלָם יְרַנֵּנוּ וְתָסֵךְ
עָלֵימוֹ, וְיַעְלְזוּ בְךָ אֹהֲבֵי שְׁמֶךָ: יג כִּי־אַתָּה תְּבָרֵךְ צַדִּיק,
יְהוָה כַּצִּנָּה רָצוֹן תַּעְטְרֶנּוּ:

ד

א לַמְנַצֵּחַ בִּנְגִינוֹת עַל־הַשְּׁמִינִית מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד:
ב יְהוָה אַל־בְּאַפְּךָ תוֹכִיחֵנִי, וְאַל־בַּחֲמָתְךָ תְיַסְּרֵנִי:
ג חָנֵּנִי יְהוָה כִּי אֻמְלַל־אָנִי, רְפָאֵנִי יְהוָה כִּי נִבְהֲלוּ עֲצָמָי:

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

● What should be our motivation to come and worship God? (5:8)

Malbim: A person who worships a foreign god, does so out of fear and he wishes to appease the god not to harm him. This fear motivates him to come to temple.

But David says, *"I—in Your great kindness, I will enter Your house."* I come to Your house not out of fear, but because of Your kindness to the entire world, the kindness that I see You show to every being.

● Why is God's blessing compared to a shield? (5:13)

Midrash Tehillim: If a man gives one hundred weight in gold to his friend and robbers come upon his friend and take it away from him, what good is the giving?

But the Blessed Holy One does not only give, *"You bless the righteous,"* You also make a shield for them, *"like a shield You surround them, O God, with favor."*

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our darker side, what Chasidic thought refers to as the "animal soul."

Perhaps, though, it could even be said of humans, "Evil does not reside with you"—*at the instant we observe a mitzvah*. As the *Tanya* states, *"at the moment the hand distributes funds to charity.... it is literally a vehicle of the supernal will"* (ch. 23).

(Based on *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Vayeishev* 5718)

וַאֲנִי בְּרֹב חַסְדְּךָ אָבוֹא בֵיתֶךָ אֶשְׁתַּחֲוֶה אֶל־הֵיכַל קָדְשְׁךָ בְּיִרְאָתֶךָ — *And I—in Your great kindness, I will enter Your house; I will bow toward Your holy sanctuary in awe of You* [5:8].

Why do we recite this verse every morning, at the opening of the morning prayers?

To stand before God in prayer you need to be "an empty vessel," devoid of any trace of pretension or

8 And I—in Your great kindness, I will enter Your house;
I will bow toward Your holy sanctuary in awe of You.
9 O God, lead me in Your righteousness,
because of those who watch for my downfall.
Make Your path straight before me.
10 Because there is nothing sincere in their mouths;
Their insides are a gaping void, their throat—an open grave;
They smooth their tongues with guile.
11 Find them guilty, O God; may they fall from their counsel.
In their many sins, cast them down,
because they defied You.
12 And all who seek refuge in You will rejoice;
Forever will they sing, and You will shelter them,
and they will exult in You – those who love Your name.
13 Because You bless the righteous;
like a shield You surround them, O God, with favor.

6

May God heal the sick

1 For the Leader, with stringed instruments, on the *sheminis*,
a psalm by David.
2 God, do not rebuke me in Your anger,
and do not chastise me in Your wrath.
3 Be gracious to me, O God, for I am faint.
Heal me, O God, for my bones are frightened,

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

● **How does God exercise His anger at us? (6:2)**

MIDRASH TEHILLIM: God could be compared to a king who became angry at his son, and seeing at that moment a large stone before him, swore that he would throw it at his son. But then the king said: "If I throw it at my son, then his life will go." What did the king do? He ordered the stone be broken up into small stones and that the pieces be thrown, one by one, at his son. That way, the king spared his son and still kept his royal oath.

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arrogance. How is such a feat possible? Are we not all entrapped by the ego, and we are taught, *"a prisoner is not able to release himself"* (*Brachos* 5b)?

To help release ourselves from the ego, we mention the unique light which each of the Patriarchs brought into the world: Avraham, who brought the light of kindness: "*And I—in Your great kindness, I will enter Your house."* Yitzchak, who brought the light of discipline, "*I will bow toward Your holy sanctuary in awe of You."* Then we mention another verse, alluding to the light of Ya'akov, the light of truth: *"As for me, may my prayer come to You, God, at a favorable time, God, with Your abundant kindness; answer me with Your reliable help"* (*Tehillim* 69:14).

All these lights shine within you, through the merit of the Patriarchs. Through reciting these verses, you help these energies to surface and wash away the ego.

(Based on *Ma'amar* of *Shabbos Parshas Nitzavim* 5718)