

**Hallel**

This section of the service is known as Hallel since all of the psalms employ either the word הלל (*hallel*), praise, or the concept of praise. The term הלל (*hallel*) always refers to praise of an ecstatic nature. In the Temple, such psalms were usually accompanied by musical instruments and dancing. They express great joy which spreads throughout the universe.

Partial Hallel

Originally the Hallel was not recited on Rosh Hodesh or the intermediate days of Pesah. It was confined to the three Festivals — Pesah, Shavuot, and Sukkot (days when there were special ceremonies performed in the Temple) — and Hanukkah (which was patterned after Sukkot). It was not recited on the intermediate and last days of Pesah because there were no unique ceremonies on those days, as there were on each of the days of Sukkot. Later, midrashic reasons were given for these practices such as: since the Egyptians drowned in the sea, our rejoicing could not be complete on Pesah. The Partial Hallel is a creation of the Jews of Babylonia, who added this to the liturgy of festive days when Hallel was not recited in the Temple (namely: Rosh Hodesh and the last six days of Pesah). In order to signify the difference between these days and the others, they eliminated the first half of two of the psalms, 115 and 116. (See Taanit 28b.)

הלל

HALLEL

Hallel is recited on Sukkot (including Høl Ha-mo'ed, the intermediate days), Sh'mini Atzeret, Simhat Torah, Pesah, Shavuot, Rosh Hodesh, Hanukkah, and Yom Ha-atzma'ut (Israel Independence Day), and also, in some congregations, on Yom Y'rushalayim.

On Sukkot, the lulav and etrog are held as Hallel is recited (except on Shabbat). During the chanting of "Hodu" (page 136), and "Ana" and "Hodu" (page 137), they are waved (forward, right, back, left, up, and down) — first by the Hazzan, then by the congregation.

On Rosh Hodesh and the last six days of Pesah, the opening sections of Psalms 115 and 116 are omitted. This is known as Hatzzi Hallel (Partial-Hallel). When Shabbat Hanukkah coincides with Rosh Hodesh, the full Hallel is recited.

It is likely that Psalms 113 to 118 have always formed a special unit, and were recited together on the Festivals in the ancient Temple in Jerusalem, even in biblical times.

The Hallel Psalms recall for us the celebration of Festivals in the Temple. Through them we express our gratitude and joy for divine providence. God's concern for us is reflected in our past redemption and deliverance, inspiring us to express our faith in the future.

Hallel begins on page 133.

The Feasts of Revelation

The three pilgrimage festivals, that of the deliverance from Egypt, that of the revelation of the Ten Commandments, and that of the Feast of Booths in the wilderness, feasts to which everyone in the land once journeyed to the common sanctuary, give an image of the people as the carrier of revelation. Creation and redemption, too, are revealed in revelation, creation because it was done for the sake of revelation; redemption because revelation bids us wait for it. And so, in the course of the destiny of the people chosen for revelation, the periods of the feasts in which this people grows aware of its vocation to be the recipient of revelation are grouped around the day and the moment on which revelation is actually received. The vocation is shown in three stages: the people are created into a people; this people is endowed with the words of revelation; and with the Torah it has received this people wanders through the wilderness of the world. The eight-day periods of the Passover and the Feast of Booths are grouped around the two-day Feast of Weeks. In these three festivals, the steps of eternal history pace the ground of the year with its cycle of Sabbaths, a ground which is as it were, eternal in nature.

Franz Rosenzweig

Hazzan, then Congregation:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מְלֶכֶּךָ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְקַרְא אֶת־הַהֲלֵל.

תהלים קי"ג

הַלְלוּיָהּ.

הַלְלוּ, עַבְדֵי יְהוָה, הַלְלוּ אֶת־שֵׁם יְהוָה.
יְהִי שֵׁם יְהוָה מְבָרָךְ מֵעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם.
מִמְזֶרְח־שֶׁמֶשׁ עַד מְבֹאוֹ מִהַלֵּל שֵׁם יְהוָה.
רָם עַל כָּל־גּוֹיִם יְהוָה, עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם כְּבוֹדוֹ.
מִי בִיהוּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, הַמְנַבְּיָהּ לְשִׁבְתָּהּ,
הַמְשִׁפִּילֵי לְרֵאוֹת בְּשָׁמַיִם וּבְאָרֶץ.
□ מְקִימֵי מַעֲפָר דָּל, מְאַשְׁפֵּת יְרִים אֶבְיוֹן,
לְהוֹשִׁיבֵי עַם נְדִיבִים, עִם נְדִיבֵי עַמּוֹ.
מוֹשִׁיבֵי עֶקְרַת הַבַּיִת, אִם הַבְּנִים שִׁמְחָה.
הַלְלוּיָהּ.

תהלים קי"ד

בְּצֵאת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם, בֵּית יַעֲקֹב מֵעַם לְעֹז.
הִיְתָה יְהוּדָה לְקִדְּשׁוֹ, יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמְשֻׁלּוֹתָיו.
הֵיִם רָאָה וַיְנַס, הִירְדֵן יֹסֵב לְאַחֹר.
הֶהָרִים רָקְדוּ כְּאֵילִים, גְּבַעוֹת כְּבְנֵי צֶאֱן.
□ מִדֶּ־לֶךְ הֵיִם כִּי תִנּוּס, הִירְדֵן תִּסֵּב לְאַחֹר.
הֶהָרִים תִּרְקְדוּ כְּאֵילִים, גְּבַעוֹת כְּבְנֵי־צֶאֱן.
מִלְפָּנֵי אֲדוֹן חוֹלֵי אֶרֶץ, מִלְפָּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב,
הַחֹפְכֵי הַצּוֹר אֲגָם מַיִם, חֲלָמִישׁ לְמַעֲיָנוּ־מַיִם.

PSALM 113

תהלים קי"ג

Like many Halleluyah psalms, Psalm 113 is universal in nature and speaks of God's greatness and concern for all humanity, especially for the down-trodden. Even the phrase "you servants of Adonai" could refer to anyone who worships Adonai. Rabbinic tradition, however, has given this psalm a completely different interpretation, one which connects it with Psalm 114 (which follows) and makes it appropriate for recitation on the Festivals. It interprets it as the psalm recited in Egypt on the night of the plague of the firstborn. It was, said the Sages, the first instance since Creation in which anyone had praised God. Who did so? The long-enslaved Israelites praised God when they ceased being slaves to Pharaoh and became slaves (servants) of God (Midrash Psalms 113:2).

PSALM 114

תהלים קי"ד

This brief but powerful psalm is a poetic description of the significance and effect of the Exodus on the world. Rather than speak about the nations and their reaction to this event, the psalmist describes how nature reacted: prancing and dancing before the might of the God of Jacob.

The rhythmic stresses and emphases of the Hebrew convey the feeling of movement or dance.

לְקַרְא אֶת־הַהֲלֵל — **to recite Hallel.** This blessing indicates that the recitation of these specific psalms on these specific days is a *mitzvah*, just as the recitation of certain books of the Bible on special days is a *mitzvah*. The word לקרא (*likro*), to recite or read, is always used liturgically in reference to reading some portion of Scripture, which is known in Hebrew as מקרא (*mikra*), from the same Hebrew root.

הַלְלוּיָהּ — **Halleluyah.** A compound word: הללו (*hal'lu*), praise, and יה (*Yah*), a form of the name of God. The word itself begins and ends the psalm, while its root appears three more times in the psalm.

עַבְדֵי יְהוָה — **servants of Adonai.** Either all who worship God or specifically Israel. The midrash understands it the latter way, since it connects this psalm with the Exodus. עבד

(*eved*), servant, can also mean a slave. Israel is no longer enslaved and, therefore, is duty-bound to praise Adonai whose servants they are (Midrash Psalms 113:2).

מֵעַתָּה — **now.** The midrash takes this as referring to a specific time: the moment of Israel's freedom.

מִמְזֶרְח־שֶׁמֶשׁ — **From east.** Literally, "the rising of the sun." The implication may be both temporal and spatial.

עַל כָּל־גּוֹיִם — **above all nations.** Ibn Ezra: above the praise of nations. No matter how much they praise God, they can never capture all of God's greatness.

עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם כְּבוֹדוֹ — **God's glory extends beyond the heavens.** "Glory" refers to God's Presence, not merely praise. God is not confined to the heavens, high as they may be.



הַמְגִבִּיהִי לְשָׁבֵת — **enthroned on high**. This transcendent nature of God places God beyond the confines of space.

הַמְשַׁפִּילִי לְרֵאוֹת — **concerned with all**. Literally, “He comes down to see.” Even though enthroned on high, God is close to us, concerned with human life and with all that happens in the universe. As the Talmud put it: “Wherever you find God’s greatness, there do you find God’s humility” (Megillah 31a).

מְקִימֵי מַעֲפָר דָּל — **God lifts the poor out of the dust**. This and the following lines indicate God’s concern with helping those most in need.

בֵּית יַעֲקֹב — **House of Jacob**. Parallel to “Israel.” Either of these two names of Jacob can be used to refer to the people.

מֵעַם לֵצֵן — **alien people**. The Egyptians. The midrash twists the letters of *לֵצֵן* (*lo-etz*), alien, into *עֲלִיז* (*alitz*), meaning happy — “a happy people,” as we find in Psalm 105:38: “Egypt rejoiced in their leaving.” The midrash explains: “It is like a fat person riding an ass. When he gets off, who is happier? He or the animal? Thus Egypt was also glad to be finished with the plagues” (Midrash Psalms 114:1).

יְהוּדָה לְקֹדֶשׁוֹ — **Judah became God’s holy one**. Parallel to “Israel,” Judah also refers to Israel, which became God’s kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). The midrash, however, relates it to the tribe of Judah, whose representative vied with others to be the first to plunge into the Sea of Reeds, causing it to split (Midrash Psalms 114:8).

הַיָּם — **The sea**. The Sea of Reeds fled before the Israelites, allowing them to cross over dry land.

הַיַּרְדֵּן — **the Jordan**. Rashi, following the midrash, takes this to mean that at the time of the crossing, all the waters God had created reacted as did the Sea. Ibn Ezra understands it as a reference to the time when the Jordan heaped together as a wall to permit the Israelites to cross over into Canaan (Joshua 3:15–17).

הַהָרִים — **Mountains**. All of nature reacted in joy to the Exodus.

מֵהַיָּם לָךְ הַיָּם — **O sea, why did you flee?** A rhetorical question directed to these components of nature.

מִלִּפְנֵי אֲדֹנָי — **at Adonai’s presence**. Better: “before the Lord.” The Hebrew is not the Name of God, but the title אֲדֹנָי

Reader, then Congregation:

Praised are You Adonai our God, who rules the universe,
instilling in us the holiness of mitzvot
by commanding us to recite Hallel.

PSALM 113

Halleluyah! Praise Adonai.

Sing praises, you servants of Adonai.

Let Adonai be praised now and forever.

From east to west, praised is Adonai.

God is exalted above all nations;

God’s glory extends beyond the heavens.

Who is like Adonai our God, enthroned on high,

concerned with all below on earth and in the heavens?

God lifts the poor out of the dust,

raises the needy from the rubbish heap,

and seats them with the powerful,

with the powerful of His people.

God settles a barren woman in her home,

a mother happy with children. Halleluyah!

PSALM 114

When Israel left the land of Egypt,

when the House of Jacob left alien people,

Judah became God’s holy one; Israel, God’s domain.

The sea fled at the sight; the Jordan retreated.

Mountains leaped like rams; and hills, like lambs.

O sea, why did you flee? Jordan, why did you retreat?

Mountains, why leap like rams; and hills, like lambs?

Even the earth trembled at Adonai’s presence,

at the presence of Jacob’s God

who turns rock into pools of water; flint, into fountains.

(*adon*), Master or Lord, implying God’s mastery over the creation. This is often used in the liturgy as a way of referring to God, as in Adon Olam or in the Aleinu prayer where God is called “Master of all” (*Adon ha-kol*).

הַצּוּר — **rock**. Possibly a reference to Exodus 17:6, where Moses struck a rock and water emerged.

The following passage is omitted on חודש ראש חודש
and the last six days of פסח.

תהלים קט"ו: א-י"א
לֹא לָנוּ יְהוָה, לֹא-לָנוּ,
 כִּי לְשִׁמּוֹךְ תָּן כְּבוֹד עַל חֲסָדְךָ עַל אֲמַתְךָ.
לָמָּה יֹאמְרוּ הַגּוֹיִם אִי-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם.
וְאֵלֵהֵינוּ בְּשִׁמְיֵם, כֹּל אֲשֶׁר חָפֵץ עָשָׂה.
עֲצַבֵייהֶם כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב, מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי אָדָם.
פֶּה לָהֶם וְלֹא יִדְבְּרוּ, עֵינַיִם לָהֶם וְלֹא יִרְאוּ.
אֲזִנַיִם לָהֶם וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ, אֵף לָהֶם וְלֹא יִרְחִיחוּ.
יְדֵיהֶם וְלֹא יִמְיִשוּן, רַגְלֵיהֶם וְלֹא יִהְלְכוּ,
לֹא יִהְיוּ בְּגִרּוֹנִים.
כַּמּוֹהֵם יִהְיוּ עֲשִׂיהֶם, כֹּל אֲשֶׁר בָּטַח בָּהֶם.
 □ **יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּטַח בַּיהוָה, עֲזָרָם וּמַגְנָם הוּא.**
בַּיִת אֶהְרֹן בָּטְחוּ בַיהוָה, עֲזָרָם וּמַגְנָם הוּא.
יִרְאִי יְהוָה בָּטְחוּ בַיהוָה, עֲזָרָם וּמַגְנָם הוּא.

תהלים קט"ו: י"ב-י"ח
יְהוָה זָכְרָנוּ יְבָרֵךְ,
יְבָרֵךְ אֶת-בַּיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל,
יְבָרֵךְ אֶת-בַּיִת אֶהְרֹן.
יְבָרֵךְ יִרְאִי יְהוָה, הַקְּטַנִּים עִם הַגְּדֹלִים.
יִסֵּף יְהוָה עֲלֵיכֶם, עֲלֵיכֶם וְעַל בְּנֵיכֶם.
בְּרוּכִים אַתֶּם לַיהוָה, עֲשֵׂה שְׁמִים וְאַרְצֶךָ.
 □ **הַשְּׁמַיִם שְׁמִים לַיהוָה,**
וְהָאָרֶץ נָתַן לְבְנֵי אָדָם.
לֹא הַמֵּתִים יִהְלְלוּ יְהוָה
וְלֹא כָל-יִרְדֵי דוּמָה.
וְאַנְחָנוּ נְבָרֵךְ יְהוָה מֵעַתָּה וְעַד-עוֹלָם.
הַלְלוּיָהּ.

This psalm expresses the feelings of the people at a time of peril. Coming to the Temple, they beseech God to come to their aid. They receive assurance that they need not fear the nations since the gods of the nations do not exist, but Israel's God can and will help them. Accepting this reassurance, they come away from this ceremony with a feeling of renewed confidence and trust. The psalm was formulated as a liturgical dialogue — perhaps between the people and the Levites, or between different sections of the Levite choir.

לֹא לָנוּ — Not for us. Save us not for our sakes but in order to bring honor to Your name among the nations. The salvation of Israel in time of peril from enemies who worship pagan gods will result in the sanctification of God's name.

לָמָּה יֹאמְרוּ הַגּוֹיִם — Why should the nations say. If God does not help, the pagan nations will taunt Israel and will question the power and the very existence of Israel's God.

וְאֵלֵהֵינוּ בְּשִׁמְיֵם — Our God is in heaven. We believe that our God does indeed exist and can accomplish whatever God wills.

עֲצַבֵייהֶם כֶּסֶף — Their idols are silver. The people are assured that on the contrary, it is the idols of the nations

that are totally powerless. They are nothing but images created by human beings and have no powers or abilities to do anything.

פֶּה לָהֶם — They have a mouth. These verses, which appear again in Psalm 135:15–20, constitute almost an official, stereotypic description of fetishism, which is how ancient Israel understood idolatry. It is mocked as the worship of mere sticks and stones.

כַּמּוֹהֵם יִהְיוּ עֲשִׂיהֶם — Their makers . . . shall become like them. Israel has nothing to fear, since those who make such gods shall be as powerless as their fetishes.

בָּטְחָה בָּהֶם — **trust in them.** It is ironic that first they create them, and then they trust in that which is merely their own handiwork.

יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּטַח בַּיהוָה — **Let the House of Israel trust in Adonai.** The Hebrew is a powerful call to the people: *O Israel! Trust in Adonai!* The Levites turn to them, to the Priests, and to all who revere God to put their faith in the Almighty. They need not be afraid of the danger they face. All they need do is reestablish their trust in God, who will protect them.

יְהוָה זָכְרָנוּ — **Adonai remembers us.** *When the Partial Hallel is recited, the recitation of this psalm begins here. The tendency is to see this as a separate composition, but it is not. It is the continuation of the section above and the two sections must be understood as one unit.*

The people voice their renewed faith in God. Israel now feels reassured that God will “remember” — fulfill the divine promises and obligations to Israel — and bless them all, young and old alike.

יְבָרֵךְ — **God will bless.** God’s remembrance of Israel will be fulfilled through the increase of the people. The three groups who were advised to trust in God are now described as being thus blessed by God. “Trust” was mentioned four times. “Blessing” is now mentioned four times. Trust leads to blessing.

יִסַּף יְהוָה — **May Adonai increase.** The Levites invoke God’s blessings upon the people. In the Temple, where this psalm was recited, the *Kohanim* pronounced God’s blessing upon the people. This verse may allude to that blessing (Numbers 6:24–26).

עֹשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ — **Maker of heaven and earth.** The designation of God as Creator of heaven and earth goes back to the time of Abraham (Genesis 14:19, 22), and is in complete contrast to the gods of the heathens mentioned above, who were themselves created by humans.

הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁמַיִם לַיהוָה — **The heavens belong to Adonai.** In anticipation of God’s help and blessing, the people affirm that God is indeed the Creator of all. They thank God for giving us the earth for our own possession.

לֹא הַמֵּתִים יְהַלְלוּ — **The dead cannot praise.** The Bible pictured the realm of the dead as a place of shadows and

The following passage is omitted on Rosh Hodesh and the last six days of Pesah.

PSALM 115:1-11

Not for us, Adonai, not for us, but for Yourself win praise through Your love and faithfulness.

Why should the nations say: “Where is their God?” Our God is in heaven, doing whatever He wills.

Their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands. They have a mouth and cannot speak, eyes and cannot see.

They have ears and cannot hear, a nose and cannot smell. They have hands and cannot feel, feet and cannot walk.

They cannot make a sound in their throat. Their makers, all who trust in them, shall become like them.

Let the House of Israel trust in Adonai; God is their help and their shield.

Let the House of Aaron trust in Adonai; God is their help and their shield.

Let those who revere God trust in Adonai; God is their help and their shield.

PSALM 115:12-18

Adonai remembers us with blessing; God will bless the House of Israel.

God will bless the House of Aaron, and all those who revere Adonai, young and old alike.

May Adonai increase your blessings, yours and your children’s. May you be blessed by Adonai, Maker of heaven and earth.

The heavens belong to Adonai; the earth God has entrusted to mortals.

The dead cannot praise Adonai, nor can those who go down into silence.

But we shall praise Adonai now and forever. Halleluyah!

darkness separated from God. To praise is to say “Halleluyah,” as we do at the end of the psalm.

וְאֵנֵינוּ — **But we.** We who are alive, who are convinced that we shall be saved from peril, bless and praise God. Those who came to the Temple with feelings of fear and trepidation conclude with confidence and trust, proclaiming “Halleluyah!”

The following passage is omitted on חודש ראש and the last six days of פסח.

תהלים קט"ז: א-י"א
אֶהְבֵּתִי כִּי יִשְׁמַע יְהוָה אֶת-קוֹלִי תַחֲנוּנָי.
 כִּי הִטָּה אָזְנוֹ לִי וּבִימֵי אֶקְרָא.
 אֶפְפוּנֵי חֶבְלֵי-מָוֶת
 וּמִצָּרֵי שְׂאוּל מִצָּאוּנִי,
 צָרָה וַיִּגּוֹן אֲמַצָּא.
 וּבִשְׁם יְהוָה אֶקְרָא,
 אֲנִי יְהוָה מִלְטָה נַפְשִׁי.
 חַנוּן יְהוָה וְצַדִּיק, וְאֱלֹהֵינוּ מֵרַחֵם.
 שֹׁמֵר פִּתְאִים יְהוָה, דְּלוֹתַי וְלִי יְהוֹשִׁיעַ.
 שׁוּבֵי נַפְשִׁי לְמִנוּחַיִכִּי, כִּי יְהוָה גָּמַל עָלַיִכִּי.
כִּי חִלַּצְתָּ נַפְשִׁי מִמָּוֶת, אֶת-עֵינַי מִן דְּמִעָה,
 אֶת-רַגְלִי מִדְּחַי.
 □ אֶתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה בְּאַרְצוֹת הַחַיִּים.
 הָאֲמִנְתִּי כִּי אֲדַבֵּר, אֲנִי עֲנִיתִי מְאֹד.
 אֲנִי אֲמַרְתִּי בְחַפְזִי, כֹּל-הָאָדָם כֹּזֵב.

תהלים קט"ז: י"ב-י"ט
מָה אָשִׁיב לַיהוָה כֹּל-תַגְמוּלוֹהֵי עָלַי.
 כּוֹס יְשׁוּעוֹת אֲשָׂא, וּבִשְׁם יְהוָה אֶקְרָא.
 נִדְרֵי לַיהוָה אֲשַׁלֵּם נִגְדָה נָא לְכֹל-עֲמוֹ.
 יִקָּר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה הַמְּוֹתָה לְחַסְדֵּיךָ.
 אֲנִי יְהוָה כִּי אֲנִי עֲבָדְךָ
 אֲנִי עֲבָדְךָ בְּיָן-אֲמַתְךָ,
 פִּתְחָתָה לְמוֹסְרֵי.
 □ לָךְ אֲזַבַּח זֶבַח תּוֹדָה וּבִשְׁם יְהוָה אֶקְרָא.
 נִדְרֵי לַיהוָה אֲשַׁלֵּם נִגְדָה-נָא לְכֹל-עֲמוֹ.
 בְּחִצְרוֹת בַּיִת יְהוָה בְּתוֹכְכִי יְרוּשָׁלַיִם.
 הִלְלוּיָהּ.

An expression of gratitude by someone who has come to the Temple to bring an offering of thanks. The psalmist describes how, at time of trouble, he called upon God and was saved. In thankfulness, he came to the Temple, proclaiming God's greatness and offering sacrifice. The phrase ה' אקרא "I proclaim the Name of Adonai," is repeated three times as a refrain. This psalm may have been composed for use by individuals who came to pay their vows and publicly voice their thanksgiving to God, similar to the recitation of the Gmel blessing today by someone who has been spared from a perilous situation. (See page 142.) The psalm is written in the first person singular, but the mid-rash views it as referring to the collective Israel. Rashi, however, interprets it as a psalm recited by David when Saul died and David became king; therefore all the references are to Saul's unsuccessful attempts to kill David.

When Partial Hallel is recited, the first half of this psalm is omitted.

אֶהְבֵּתִי כִּי יִשְׁמַע — I love knowing. Or: "I would love Adonai to hear." Some suggest it should be: "I love [Adonai] for He hears" (JPS). The psalmist begins with the statement of his contentment at the fact that God listened to his plea for help and saved him from his distress.

וּבִשְׁם יְהוָה אֶקְרָא — I called on Adonai. The midrash (Sifre Deuteronomy 32) reminds us that we should call upon God — i.e., bless God's Name — both at times of good tidings and at times of sorrow. At the latter, we recite the blessing האמת דיין (barukh dayan ha-emet), Blessed be the true Judge.

אֲנִי יְהוָה — I prayed. Literally, "Please — Adonai!" These lines are the words of supplication spoken by the individual when he was in anguish.

כִּי חִלַּצְתָּ נַפְשִׁי מִמָּוֶת — God has delivered me from death. Literally, "For *You* have delivered my soul from death." After speaking to his soul (his being) and assuring it that God has saved it, the psalmist then turns directly to God, thanking God for delivering him.

בְּאַרְצוֹת הַחַיִּים — in the land of the living. In this world and not the netherworld (Ibn Ezra). Rashi, who reads this as David's psalm, understands it as the Land of Israel from which David had been driven and to which he can now return.

מָה אֲשׁוּב — **How can I repay.** When the Partial Hallel is recited, the recitation of this psalm begins here. This section, however, is merely a continuation of the psalm which began above, not a psalm in its own right.

Having described God's graciousness to him, the psalmist rhetorically asks how he can repay God.

כָּל־תְּגִמוֹלוֹהֵי עָלַי — **all His gifts to me.** The Hebrew root is גמל (*g-m-l*), which was translated above "has dealt kindly with me." It means to recompense or benefit. This psalm is being recited because of the recompense that the individual has received from God.

כּוֹס יְשׁוּעוֹת — **I will raise the cup.** This verse is included in the Havdalah, where it is taken literally and recited before lifting the cup of wine. (See page 299.) The cup is a frequently used symbol of both sorrow and joy. The most famous example of joy is "my cup runs over" in Psalm 23:5. To symbolize sorrow, see Isaiah 51:17: "Arise, O Jerusalem, You who from Adonai's hand have drunk the cup of His wrath."

אֶקְרָא — **and invoke.** I will proclaim my debt and thanksgiving to God. This is the second time this phrase has been used. The first was in time of distress. Now it is recited in a time of deliverance.

נְדָרַי — **my vows.** Vows are taken very seriously. Rabbi Yehudah taught that it was best not to vow at all, but Rabbi Meir disagreed saying that one should vow but must be certain to fulfill (Midrash Psalms 116:4). The recitation of Kol Nidrei, All Vows, on Yom Kippur is a reflection of our concern with unfulfilled vows.

135 HALLEL

The following passage is omitted on Rosh Hodesh and the last six days of Pesah.

PSALM 116:1-11

I love knowing that Adonai listens to my cry of supplication. Because God does hear me, I will call on God in days of need.

*The cords of death encompassed me;
the grave held me in its grip.
I found myself in distress and despair.*

I called on Adonai;
I prayed that God would save me.

*Gracious is Adonai, and kind.
Our God is compassionate.*

Adonai protects the simple;
I was brought low and God saved me.

*Be at ease once again, my soul,
for Adonai has dealt kindly with you.*

God has delivered me from death,
my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.
I shall walk before Adonai **in the land of the living.**

*I kept my faith even when greatly afflicted,
even when, in anguish, I cried out: Mortals cannot be trusted!*

PSALM 116:12-19

How can I repay Adonai for all His gifts to me?

*I will raise the cup of deliverance,
and invoke Adonai by name.
I will honor my vows to Adonai
in the presence of all His people.*

Grievous in Adonai's sight
is the death of the faithful.

*I am Your servant, born of Your maidservant;
You have released me from bondage.
To You will I bring an offering, and invoke Adonai by name.*

I will honor my vows to Adonai
in the presence of all His people,

*in the courts of the House of Adonai,
in the midst of Jerusalem. Halleluyah!*

קָרָה — **Grievous.** God cares very much for those faithful to Him, and therefore saves them from death. The word has the connotation of "heavy" or "difficult." The midrash applies this to a series of righteous people, each of whom had done important deeds for the honor of God: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, etc. Therefore, it was grievous for God to tell them they must die, but God said, "They must depart to make way for others" (Midrash Psalms 116:6). Death comes not as a punishment, but as a normal part of the pattern of life. Without it, no new life would be possible.

בְּרִיָּאֲמִתָּךְ — **born of Your maidservant.** Rashi applies this to Ruth, David's ancestress, the righteous convert who chose to become God's servant.

לְךָ אֹזְבָה — **To You will I bring an offering.** Literally, "an offering of thanksgiving." In this way the psalmist "repays" God for God's goodness to him.

PSALM 117

This brief psalm calls upon all the nations of the world to praise God for God's mercy and faithfulness, חסד (*hesed*). It serves here as an introduction to the following psalm, in which Israel praises God for divine acts of salvation.

PSALM 118

Another liturgical psalm, this contains an entire brief but majestic service of thanksgiving and acknowledgment of God's merciful actions. It begins and ends with a call to the people of Israel to proclaim thanksgiving to God. It describes the circumstances of distress in which the individual or the nation had fallen, tells of God's salvation, and describes the act of thanksgiving that is now being performed. Some have seen this as a prayer offered by a sovereign saved from distress (Dahood). More likely it is a song sung by Israel, patterned after the Song of the Sea — which it actually quotes — in which the first person singular is used to represent the people Israel. It accompanies a ceremony of הודו (*hodu*), thanksgiving, which is accomplished by uttering the words חסד לעולם כי לעולם חסדו (*ki l'olam hasdo*), God's steadfast love is eternal. See Psalm 136 (page 92), where this formula is repeated twenty-six times.

תהלים קי"ז

הִלְלוּ אֶת־יְהוָה כָּל־גּוֹיִם, שִׁבְחוּהוּ כָּל־הָאֲמִיּוֹת.
בִּי גִבֹר עֲלֵינוּ חֲסִדוֹ, וְנֶאֱמַת יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם. הִלְלוּ־יְהוָה.

תהלים קי"ח: א'-כ'

הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה בִּי טוֹב, בִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסִדוֹ.
לֵאמֹר נָא יִשְׂרָאֵל, בִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסִדוֹ.
לֵאמְרוּ נָא בֵּית אֱהֲרֹן, בִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסִדוֹ.
לֵאמְרוּ נָא יְרֵאֵי יְהוָה, בִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסִדוֹ.

מִן הַמִּצַּר קָרָאתִי יְהוָה, עֲנֵנִי בַמִּרְחָב יְהוָה.
יְהוָה לִי, לֹא אֵירָא, מִה יַעֲשֶׂה לִי אָדָם.
יְהוָה לִי בַעֲזָרִי, וְאֲנִי אֲרָאָה בְשִׁנְאֵי.
טוֹב לַחֲסוֹת בַּיהוָה מִבְּטָח בְּאָדָם.
טוֹב לַחֲסוֹת בַּיהוָה מִבְּטָח בַּנְּדִיבִים.
כָּל־גּוֹיִם סָבְבוּנִי, בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה בִּי אֲמִילָם.
סָבְבוּנִי גַם סָבְבוּנִי, בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה בִּי אֲמִילָם.
סָבְבוּנִי כְּדָבָרִים, הֲלַעֲבוּ כֹאֵשׁ קוֹצִים,
בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה בִּי אֲמִילָם.
דָּחָה דְחִיתַנִּי לְנַפְל, וַיְהוָה עֲזָרְנִי.
עָזַי וְזַמְרַת יְהוָה, וַיְהִי־לִי לִישׁוּעָה.
קוֹל רִנָּה וּישׁוּעָה בְּאֶהְלִי צְדִיקִים,
יְמִין יְהוָה עֲשֶׂה חֵיל.
יְמִין יְהוָה רֹמְמָה, יְמִין יְהוָה עֲשֶׂה חֵיל.
לֹא־אָמוֹת בִּי־אֲחִידָה, וְאֶסְפָּר מַעֲשֵׂי יְהוָה.
יִסֹר יִסְרֹנִי יְהוָה, וְלִמּוֹת לֹא נִתְנַנְּנִי.
□ פִּתְחוּ־לִי שַׁעֲרֵי־צֶדֶק, אֲבֹא־בָם, אוֹדֶה יְהוָה.
זֶה הַשַּׁעַר לַיהוָה, צְדִיקִים יִבְאוּ בוֹ.

כָּל־גּוֹיִם — **all nations**. Because of its belief in the existence of one God and one God only, Israel could and did turn to all the nations and peoples of the world exhorting them to praise this God. Noting the repetition of the word כל (*kol*), all, the midrash pondered the question: When is it that *all* nations and *all* peoples praise God at the same time? Their answer: When there has been a drought and then rain falls, "all the world rejoices and praises God" (Midrash Psalms 117:1). An appreciation of the wonders of the world can unite all faiths and creeds.

עֲלֵינוּ חֲסִדוֹ — **God's love has overwhelmed us**. Although the nations are called upon to praise God, the reason seems to be connected to the people of Israel. God has shown true faithfulness to "us."

The four lines following הללויה (*halleluyah*) are recited first by the leader of the service and then by the congregation. On Sukkot, when reciting the first two of these four lines, we take the lulav in the right hand and the etrog in the left, pitam (tip) facing upward, and wave them six times in the following order: forward, to the right, backward, to the left, upward, downward. This symbolizes the presence of God throughout the universe. When the Name of God is pronounced, we hold them straight and do not point in any specific direction, since that would imply that God is only in that spot.

הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה בִּי טוֹב — **Praise Adonai, for God is good**. Or: "thankfully acknowledge Adonai." A technical term acknowledging and thanking God for God's goodness, the acts that saved the petitioner from disaster.

בִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסֵדוֹ — **God's love endures forever.** This is the phrase used to express thanksgiving, a proclamation of God's graciousness. חסד (*hesed*), love, means faithfulness. God faithfully guards and saves Israel.

לֵאמֹר נָא יִשְׂרָאֵל — **Let the House of Israel declare.** In this opening section, the people in the Temple are called upon to utter this formula of thanksgiving. Similarly, the Priests and Levites (House of Aaron) must make this declaration, as must "those who revere Adonai" — perhaps a reference to those non-Israelite dwellers in the Land who have accepted the worship of Adonai.

מִן הַמִּצָּר — **In distress.** In this central section of the psalm, the reason for this ceremony of thanksgiving is described. Israel, personified, describes an experience of distress followed by triumph. We have no way of identifying the historical incident that might have precipitated this. Two contrasting words are used: מצר (*meitzar*), distress, and מרחב (*merhav*), relief. Both are physical descriptions: a narrow place and a broad place. The petitioner called upon Yah (God) when he felt hemmed in. God's response was to break the confines so that he was "in the broad place of Yah." Whenever we are delivered from a stressful situation, we feel as if vast horizons suddenly open up.

מָה יַעֲשֶׂה לִּי אָדָם — **what can mortals do to me?** In these verses, the might and righteousness of God are contrasted with the limitations and unfaithfulness of human beings.

כָּל-גּוֹיִם — **all nations.** Israel was surrounded by enemy nations.

בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה בִּי אֲמַלְּמָם — **in Adonai's name I overcame them.** Through God's help I triumphed. This phrase is repeated three times. The midrash sees this as a prediction of the future apocalyptic war of Gog and Magog (Ezekiel 38–39) in which Israel will finally triumph for all time over all the forces of wickedness in the world and God will reign supreme (Midrash Psalms 118:13).

עֲזֵי יְהוָה חֲסֵדוֹ — **Adonai is my strength.** A quotation from the Song of the Sea, Exodus 15:2: "Yah is my strength and might." That song has always been considered the supreme expression of thanksgiving for salvation. By quoting it, the psalmist ties this song to that one, and this event to that primal event of salvation, the splitting of the Sea.

יְמִין יְהוָה — **The might of Adonai.** Literally, "the right hand of Adonai" — another reference to the Song of the Sea, where the right hand of God is described as destroying the enemy (Exodus 15:6).

פֶּתַח-לִי — **Open for me.** After describing their salvation, the people, standing at the gate of the Temple, now ask per-

PSALM 117

Praise Adonai, all nations; laud God, all peoples.
God's love has overwhelmed us;
God's faithfulness endures forever. Halleluyah!

PSALM 118:1-20

Hodu l'adonai ki tov, ki l'olam hasdo.

Praise Adonai, for God is good; God's love endures forever.
Let the House of Israel declare: God's love endures forever.
Let the House of Aaron declare: God's love endures forever.
Let those who revere Adonai declare: God's love endures forever.

In distress I called to Adonai who answered by setting me free.
Adonai is with me, I shall not fear; what can mortals do to me?

*With Adonai at my side, best help of all,
I will yet see the fall of my foes.*

Better to depend on Adonai than to trust in mortals.
Better to depend on Adonai than to trust in the powerful.

*Though all nations surrounded me,
in Adonai's name I overcame them.*

Though they surrounded and encircled me,
in Adonai's name I overcame them.

*Though they surrounded me like bees,
like burning stingers they were smothered.
In Adonai's name I overcame them.*

Hard pressed was I and tottering, but Adonai stood by me.

Adonai is my strength, my might, my deliverance.

*The homes of the righteous echo with songs of deliverance:
"The might of Adonai is triumphant.
The might of Adonai is supreme;
the might of Adonai is triumphant."*

I shall not die, but live to recount the deeds of Adonai.
Adonai severely chastened me,
but did not condemn me to death.

*Open for me the gates of triumph,
that I may enter to praise Adonai.*

This is the gateway of Adonai.
The righteous shall enter therein.

mission to enter so that they may proclaim their acknowledgment of God's role in their triumph.

שַׁעַר-צִדִּיקִים — **the gates of triumph.** Or: "victory." Because the word also means "righteousness," and is used in the next line to refer to צדדיקים (*tzadikim*), the righteous, the midrash applies this passage to the world to come. There, each person will be asked what he or she did in *this* world. If one says, "I fed the hungry," "I clothed the naked," or "I performed deeds of lovingkindness," that person will be told: "This is the gateway of Adonai; the righteous shall enter therein" (Midrash Psalms 118:17).

Each of the following four verses is recited twice.

תהלים קי"ח: ב"א-כ"ט
אוֹדְךָ בִּי עֲנִיתָנִי וַתְּהִי לִי לִישׁוּעָה.
אָבֵן מֵאֶסוּ הַבּוֹנִים הִיְתָה לְרֹאשׁ פְּנֵה.
מֵאֵת יְהוָה הִיְתָה זֹאת, הִיא נִפְלְאֹת בְּעֵינֵינוּ.
זֶה הַיּוֹם עָשָׂה יְהוָה, נִגְיְלָה וְנִשְׁמְחָה בּוֹ.

The Hazzan chants each phrase, which is then repeated by the congregation.

אָנָּא יְהוָה הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא. אָנָּא יְהוָה הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא.
אָנָּא יְהוָה הַצְּלִיחָה נָּא. אָנָּא יְהוָה הַצְּלִיחָה נָּא.

Each of the following four verses is recited twice.

בְּרוּךְ הִבָּא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה, בְּרַכְנוּכֶם מִבֵּית יְהוָה.
אֵל יְהוָה וַיֵּאָר לָנוּ,
אֶסְרִי־חַג בְּעֵבְתִים עַד קַרְנוֹת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ.
אֵלֵי אֲתָהּ וְאוֹדְךָ, אֱלֹהֵי אֲרוֹמְמֶךָ.
הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה כִּי טוֹב, כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֶסֶדוֹ.

יְהַלְלוּךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂיךָ, וְחִסְדֵיךָ, צְדִיקִים
עוֹשֵׂי רְצוֹנְךָ, וְכָל־עֲמֻךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּרָנָה יוֹדוּ וַיְבָרְכוּ,
וַיִּשְׁבְּחוּ וַיִּפְאָרוּ וַיְרַמְּמוּ וַיַּעֲרִיצוּ, וַיִּקְהֵי־שׁוּ וַיִּמְלִיכוּ
אֶת־שִׁמְךָ מִלְּכָנוּ. □ כִּי לָךְ טוֹב לְהוֹדוֹת וּלְשַׁמְּךָ נָאֵה
לְזִמְרָה, כִּי מֵעוֹלָם עַד עוֹלָם אֲתָהּ אֵל. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה,
מֶלֶךְ מְהֻלָּל בַּתְּשַׁבְּחוֹת.

On Sukkot, congregations that include *הרשענות* here continue on page 200.

The four lines beginning with **אָנָּא אֲדוֹנָי (ana Adonai)** are recited first by the leader of the service and then by the congregation. On Sukkot, when reciting the first two of these lines, we take the lulav in the right hand and the etrog in the left, pitam (tip) facing upward, and wave them six times in the following order: forward, to the right, backward, to the left, upward, downward. This symbolizes the presence of God throughout the universe. When the Name of God is pronounced, we hold them straight and do not point in any specific direction, since that would imply that God is only in that spot. This is also done when reciting **הוֹדוּ (hodu)** further on.

אוֹדְךָ — I praise You. The continuation of Psalm 118, which began on the previous page. Here it reaches a new phase. The people have entered the Sanctuary and now formally acknowledge God's goodness. The Hebrew word *אוֹדְךָ (od'kha)*, I praise You, comes from the same root as the first word of the psalm, *הוֹדוּ (hodu)*, praise. For the first time God is addressed directly: I praise *You*. Previously the people were relating the story of their trouble and triumph; now they turn to God to acknowledge and thank the Almighty.

מֵאֵת יְהוָה הִיְתָה זֹאת — This is the doing of Adonai. Their salvation was due to the acts of God. The midrash characteristically applies this to specific incidents in history. It was said by Israel when the Egyptians marveled at their transformation from slaves to a redeemed people. Israel replied, "You are amazed? So are we!" To which the Holy Spirit replied: "This is the doing of Adonai!" Or, it was said by David, who one moment was a shepherd and the next a king. Everyone marveled at it, and so did David. The Holy Spirit announced: "This is the doing of Adonai!" (Midrash Psalms 118:21). A similar reaction occurred in 1967 after the Six Day War, when everyone marveled at what had happened and the most appropriate reaction seemed to be: *This is the doing of Adonai! It is marvelous in our sight.* Indeed, this entire psalm seems particularly appropriate to that event.

הִיא נִפְלְאֹת בְּעֵינֵינוּ — it is marvelous in our sight. The psalm now uses the first person plural, as all the people join in this act of thanksgiving and acknowledgment.

זֶה הַיּוֹם — This is the day. In the Bible, the same idea is often repeated in different words. This phrase is parallel to "This is the doing of Adonai." The midrash, however, assumes that there is a special emphasis to the word "this" and interprets it as referring to the final triumph in the future. "After every redemption, enslavement followed. But *now* there will be no more enslavement!" (Midrash Psalms 118:22).

אָנָּא יְהוָה — we implore You. Having experienced God's salvation, Israel pleads that God may continue to deliver them and help them succeed in all their efforts, now and in the future.

בְּרוּךְ הִבָּא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה — Blessed are all who come in the name of Adonai. The officiants in the Temple respond to the people by announcing that they are the recipients of God's blessing. The Priestly Blessing was recited in the Temple at the conclusion of sacrificial services.

וַיֵּאֲרֶה לָנוּ — **has given us light.** A reference to the phrase in the Priestly Blessing, “May Adonai make His face give light unto you” (Numbers 6:25).

אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי אֲנִי — **You are my God.** The ceremony comes to an end with this proclamation that Adonai is our God, repeated twice. It is another echo of the Song of the Sea: “This is my God and I will glorify Him, my father’s God and I will extol Him” (Exodus 15:2).

וְאֲדַבֵּר — **and I praise You.** Another use of the root meaning “to acknowledge thankfully.” It is followed by the words of acknowledgment with which the psalm began: הודו לה' (*hodu Ladoḥai*), Acclaim Adonai, i.e., Acknowledge God; His steadfast love is eternal.

יְהַלְלוּךָ — **May all creation praise You.** The concluding blessing to the recitation of Hallel. Following the recitation of these psalms, we summarize them and characterize them. The prayer echoes many of the words used in the psalms that have just been recited.

לְהוֹדוֹת — **to chant praise.** Or: “to acknowledge thankfully.” It is the same word used so often in the last psalm of the Hallel, Psalm 118.

אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי אֲנִי — **You are God.** As proclaimed in Psalm 118: “You are my God.”

PSALM 118:21-29

I praise You for having answered me;
You have become my deliverance.

*The stone rejected by the builders
has become the cornerstone.*

This is the doing of Adonai;
it is marvelous in our sight.

This is the day Adonai has made;
let us exult and rejoice in it.

*The Reader recites each of the next two lines,
which is then repeated by the congregation.*

Deliver us, Adonai, **we implore You.**
Prosper us, Adonai, **we implore You.**

Ana Adonai hoshi'ah na. Ana Adonai hatzliḥah na.

Blessed are all who come in the name of Adonai;
we bless you from the House of Adonai.

Adonai is God who has given us light;
wreath the festive procession with myrtle
as it proceeds to the corners of the altar.

You are my God, and I praise You;
You are my God, and I exalt You.

Acclaim Adonai, for God is good;
God's love endures forever.

May all creation praise You, Adonai our God. May the pious, the righteous who do Your will, and all Your people, the House of Israel, join in acclaiming You with joyous song. May they praise, revere, adore, extol, exalt and sanctify Your glory, our Sovereign. To You it is good **to chant praise;** to Your glory it is fitting to sing. **You are God,** from age to age, everlastingly. Praised are You Adonai, Sovereign acclaimed with songs of praise.

*On Sukkot, Congregations that include Hoshanot here
continue on page 200.*

Reciting these psalms of praise on these festive occasions, we feel ourselves part of the ancient ceremonies performed in the Temple in Jerusalem, where thousands upon thousands of Jews gathered on each Festival in the days of the Second Temple. They came from all over the Diaspora, from Egypt, from Spain, from Rome, and from Babylonia, to participate as one people in these joyous times. They recited ancient words, words which had originated during the First Temple period (before 586 B.C.E.) to accompany days when the people gathered together to express their hopes, their prayers, their needs, and, most of all, their thankfulness to God. By adding their recitation on Yom Ha-atzma'ut and Yom Yerushalayim, we express gratitude for the miracles of modern Jewish history and our hopes for Israel's future.