

Psalm 1 -- Temple Micah Psalms Study Group, 4/9/19

Some vocabulary of note with commentary, music (from V. Spatz, songeveryday@gmail.com)

(1:1) אֲשֶׁרִי הָאִישׁ -- happy [*ashrei*] is the man
אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָלַךְ, בְּעֵצַת רְשָׁעִים; -- who has not followed [*halakh*] the counsel of the wicked
וּבְדֶרֶךְ חַטָּאִים, לֹא עָמַד וּבְמוֹשֵׁב לְצִידִים, לֹא יֵשֵׁב or taken the path [*derekh*] of sinners

ashrei; happy. A few other uses of the common expression in the psalms:

84:5 -- אֲשֶׁרִי, יוֹשְׁבֵי בֵיתְךָ- עוֹד, יִהְלֹךְ סֵלָה.

Happy [*ashrei*] are they that dwell in Thy house, they are ever praising Thee. Selah

72:17 -- וַיִּתְבָּרְכוּ בּוֹ; כָּל-גּוֹיִם יְאֻשְׁרוּהוּ --

...may men also bless themselves by him; may all nations call him **happy** [*y'ashruhu*].

halakh; walk. derekh; the way. Commentary:

Walking on a way is a traditional metaphor for pursuing a set of moral choices in life. In this verse, the idea is turned into an elegant narrative sequence in the triadic line -- first walking, then standing, then sitting with the attachment to the company of evildoers becoming increasingly more habitual from one verset to the next.

Nahum Sarna raises the interesting possibility that the first word of the psalm, '*ashrei*, "happy," may pun on '*ashurim*, "steps," and hence reinforce the walking metaphor.

-- Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, NY: Norton, 2007

Bio note: Robert Alter (b. 1935), US professor of Hebrew literature at UC-Berkeley, completed in 2018 a Tanakh translation, incorporating his 2007 Psalms along with other older and some newer translations.

(1:3) כַּעֵץ, שְׂתוּל עַל-פְּלִיגֵי-מַיִם... Like a tree planted by the water...

shatul; planted. *Shatul* appears ten times in the Tanakh; Ps 92:14 is the only other usage in the Psalms.

92:14 - שְׂתוּלִים, בְּבֵית יְהוָה; בְּחִצְרוֹת אֱלֹהֵינוּ יִפְרִיחוּ -

Planted [*shatulim*] in the house of HASHEM, they shall flourish in the courts of our God.

Jer 17:8 -- וְהָיָה כַּעֵץ שְׂתוּל עַל-מַיִם...

For he shall be as a tree **planted** [*shatul*] by the waters,...

"Psalm 1 (The Way)" -- (c) 2014 The SHIYR Poets

Contented the one	Just like a tree	Not so the wicked
Who does not walk with the wicked	Planted by streams of water	They are like wind blown chaff
Or stand in the way	Yielding its fruit	Offenders and scoffers
Sinners and scoffers delight	In its appointed season	Will have no defense to stand
	In the heat of the day	
For the Lord's teaching is her desire	Its leaves won't wither	For the Lord embraces the way of
These are the words	In all that he does	the righteous
She's singing softly	He has more than enough	And the way of the wicked is lost
Day and night, Day and night	More than enough	For the Lord embraces the way of
	More than enough	the righteous
		And the way of the wicked is lost

The Netherland-based Shiyr Poets -- Brian Doerksen, Calum Rees, Teresa Trask and Brian Thiessen -- worked together for years to "render the Psalms as sung English poetry." They report using "all the translations available (including Robert Alter's more poetic translation) and seeking counsel from Hebrew scholars." They write:

Choosing not to censor the difficult verses of lament and anger, the SHIYR Poets render each psalm in its entirety, singing in solidarity with all who suffer...Taken as a whole, the Psalms are perhaps the most emotionally healthy comprehensive expression of spirituality ever written. These are songs of desire and desperation...songs that demand justice for the oppressed...songs that honour the innocent praise of children...songs about everyday things like sleep.

"I/We Shall Not Be Moved" --

This is really three songs from the same root: a Gospel and then blues song; a Labor song; and a Civil Rights song.

(1) The Gospel song is based on Jeremiah, rather than the psalm, according to music historians:

Blessed is he who trusts in the LORD, Whose trust is the LORD alone.
He shall be like a tree planted by waters, Sending forth its roots by a stream: It does not sense the coming of heat, Its leaves are ever fresh; It has no care in a year of drought, It does not cease to yield fruit. -- Jer 17:7-8

An old version began:

Like a tree planted by the water, my Savior planted me
All my fruit shall be in season, I shall live eternally
Though the tempest rage around me, thru the storm, my Lord I see
Pointing upward to that heaven, where my family waits for me

1929 recordings include Blind Roosevelt Graves' "on my way to heaven..." and "going to see my mother..." and Charles Patton's "on my way to glory..." as well as lines like "oh, brother, I shall not..." Other older lyrics: "glory hallelujah...", "anchored in the spirit....," and some Jesus-centered verses. Mississippi John Hurt's popular 1960s version had "On my way to heaven...", "Oh, preacher...", and "Sanctified and holy..."

(2) Joe Glazer (*Labor's Troubadour*) dates the song's plural version to a 1931 West Virginia coal miner's strike. Labor lyrics included "the union is behind us" and "we're not afraid of gun thugs." Woody Guthrie (*Bound for Glory*) wrote about using the song to help prevent 1941 lynching of Japanese Americans. Pete Seeger sang a labor version, adding other verses for decades, including lines like "Black and White together..." and, much later, "gay and straight..."

(3) Civil rights verses included time-specific -- like "all the state troupers..." and "Tell Governor Wallace..." -- and timeless, like "Black and White together..." The Freedom Singers opened their medley at the 1963 March on Washington with the song. Mavis Staples recorded an adapted version in her 2007 album of movement songs.

Here's one version of **Civil Rights lyrics**:

CHORUS: We shall not, we shall not be moved	We shall all be free (and)
We shall not, we shall not be moved	We shall not be moved
Just like a tree that's planted by the water,	We shall all be free (and)
We shall not be moved.	We shall not be moved
We're fighting for our rights (and)	Just like a tree that's planted by the water,
We shall not be moved	We shall not be moved -- CHORUS
We're fighting for our rights (and)	God is on our side (and)
We shall not be moved	We shall not be moved.... -- CHORUS
Just like a tree that's planted by the water,	Black and White together
We shall not be moved. -- CHORUS	We shall not be moved.... -- CHORUS

hatta'im; sinners, purposeless, offenders, wayward

עַל־כֵּן | לֹא־יִקְמוּ רְשָׁעִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט וְחַטָּאִים בַּעֲדַת צְדִיקִים: (1:5)

Therefore the wicked will not survive judgment,
nor will **sinners**, in the assembly of the righteous.
-- 1985 JPS

The wrongful will not stand in light of justice, nor the
purposeless in gathered testimony of the true heart
-- Greenberg (2010)

Therefore the wicked will not stand up in judgment,
nor **offenders** in the band of the righteous
-- Alter (2007)

Therefore the wicked cannot stand justice, nor do the
wayward feel at home when the just ones gather to
bear witness. --Schachter-Shalomi (2014)

Related Commentary:

A famous Talmud passages speaks about "*hatta'im*," which appears in Ps. 104:35, 26:9, and 25:8, as well as in Ps 1:5:

There were once some highwaymen [or: hooligans] the neighbourhood of R. Meir who caused him a great deal of trouble. R. Meir accordingly prayed that they should die. His wife Beruria said to him: How do you make out [that such a prayer should be permitted]? Because it is written: Let *hatta'im* cease? [1] Is it written *hot'im*? [2] It is written *hatta'im*! [3], Further, look at the end of the verse: and let the wicked men be no more. Since the sins will cease, there will be no more wicked men! Rather pray for them that they should repent, and there will be no more wicked. He did pray for them, and they repented. -- Soncino translation, Babylonian Berakhot 10a

1: Ps 104:35: יִתְמוּ חַטָּאִים | מִן־הָאָרֶץ וְרְשָׁעִים | עוֹד אֵינָם בְּרַכֵּי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־יְהוָה הַלְלוּ־יָהּ:

May **sinners** disappear from the earth, and the wicked be no more. Bless the LORD, O my soul. Hallelujah.

2: Present participle of the verb to sin, חוֹטְאִים (with a vav), instead of חַטָּאִים -- as it appears in four psalms.

3: Side note in the Koren/Steinsaltz translation of this passage: "Beruriah's interpretation of the term *hatta'im* is not literal. It is an interpretation based upon an allusion. The literal meaning of the word is, indeed, sinners. Some explain that the very fact that the verse opted to use the word *hatta'im*, which is open to various interpretation, as opposed to the unambiguous word *hotim*, opens the door to a more compassionate interpretation of the verse."

Beruriah and Meir were of the 4th Mishnah Generation (139-163 CE). Beruriah is one of the very few women who speak in the Talmud and the only one whose word is quoted as law at any point. Her father, R. Haninah ben Teradion, considered an exemplar of care in charitable giving, is one of the ten famously martyred by the Romans for continuing to teach Torah. Meir and Beruriah also appear in stories about Rabbi Elisha ben Abuya AKA *Acher* ["the other"], known as a heretic as well as Meir's teacher and friend.

Berakhot is the first tractate of the Talmud. Soncino translation is from 1952 and available on-line. Koren Publishers is producing new volumes, still being translated by R. Adin Steinsaltz (b.1937); Berakhot came out in 2012.

Related comment on earlier verses:

The middle section (verses 3-4) describes the contrast between the righteous and the wicked by means of a simile contrasting a tree with chaff. One interpretation of this simile is that its purpose is to describe the reward of the righteous as opposed to the punishment of the wicked. Another interpretation is that the simile contrasts the way of life of the righteous with that of the wicked, and this is the approach we have adopted in this commentary.

-- Amos Hakham, *The Jerusalem Commentary to the Psalms*

Bio note: Amos Hakham (1921-2012) was an Israeli biblical scholar; these volumes are part of an extensive bible commentary, (in Hebrew: *Da'at Mikra*) combining modern scholarship and orthodox outlook.

(1:2) וּבְתוֹרַת יְהוָה יִזְמַם וְלַיְלָה ...and on His Law/Torah meditates day and night

yeh'geh; meditation, utterance. Occurs 25 times in the Tanakh, with ten of those in Psalms. Related to the word, *hagig*, which appears in Ps. 5:2 and 39:4, and is translated as "murmurings," "words," or "prayer."

19:15 -- יְהִי לְרָצוֹן | אִמְרֵי־לִי וְהִגִּיוֹן לִבִּי לְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה צוּרִי וְגֹאֲלִי:
Let the words of my mouth and the **meditation** [*v'hegyon*] of my heart be acceptable before Thee, HASHEM, my Rock, and my Redeemer.

35:28 -- וְלִשׁוֹנִי תְהַנֶּה צְדָקָךְ כָּל־הַיּוֹם תְּהַלְתֵּךְ
while my tongue shall **recite** [*teh'geh*] Your beneficent acts, Your praises all day long.

115:5 -- יְדֵיהֶם | וְלֹא יִמְשֹׁן רַגְלֵיהֶם וְלֹא יִהְלְכוּ לֹא־יִהְיוּ בְגֵרוֹנִם:
they have hands, but do not feel,
legs, but do not walk.

No **utterance of wisdom** [*yeh'gu*] comes from their throat
-- P. Greenberg translation; JPS: "...they can make no sound in their throats."

Ziony Zevit hypothesizes, in "From Judaism to Biblical Religion and Back Again," about "self-organized groups from the biblical period who met regularly in public places for non-temple prayer services," (p.180). His hypothesis includes the verb הִגָּה -- *h-g-h* (to meditate):

Additionally, such groups may have engaged in another type of devotional act referred to in the Bible by the verbs *h-g-h* (to meditate) and *s-y-ch* (to converse, discuss, express orally). They are mentioned in Ps **1:2; 19:15; 63:7; 77:13; 119:15, 23, 27, 78, 97,99 148; 143:5; 145:5.*** These two activities involved considering and evaluating God's teachings, works, mighty deed, actions, and laws.

-- p.181, *The Hebrew Bible: New Insights and Scholarship*. (Bold added for **citations to h-g-h**; Ps 143:5 uses both)

Bio note: Ziony Zevit (b. 1942) is a U.S. professor of biblical literature at American Jewish University.

References

Alter, Robert. *The Book of Psalms*, NY: Norton, 2007 (note: this translation is identical in the new Tanakh publication)

Greenberg, Pamela. *The Complete Psalms: The Book of Prayer Songs in a New Translation*. (forward by Susannah Heschel). NY: Bloomsbury, 2010. Greenberg is a poet, writer, and former rabbinical student with an M.A. in Jewish Studies. There is a reading guide and a video interview with the author on the Bloomsbury site.

Hakham, Amos. *The Jerusalem Commentary to the Psalms* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 2003)

Schachter-Shalomi, Zalman. *Psalms in a Translation for Praying*. ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, 2014. Reb Zalman was instrumental in launching what became "Jewish Renewal" and in founding ALEPH. Much of this book is available on-line through Amazon's "look inside." There is a related video on the ALEPH website.

Zevit, Ziony. "From Judaism to Biblical Religion and Back Again," IN *The Hebrew Bible: New Insights and Scholarship*. (F. Greenspahn, ed. NY: NYU Press 2008).

Music links

The Shiyr Poets Psalm 1 (The Way) -- http://bit.ly/Shiyr_Ps1

Mississippi John Hurt's "I Shall Not Be Moved" -- http://bit.ly/MissJHurt_Moved

Brief historical clip of the March on Washington with the (so young!) Freedom Singers -- http://bit.ly/MOW_Freedom

Mavis Staples recording on 2007 album of Movement songs, "We'll Never Turn Back" -- http://bit.ly/Staples_WSNM