

Psalm 92: Some thought and sources, May 14, Temple Micah Psalms Group,
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Verse 15 -- "Saging and Aging" chant and teaching from Rabbi Shefa Gold
v'rananim -- וְרַעְנָנִים

וְרַעְנָנִים -- luxuriant or fresh, green

Od y'nuvun b'sayva
D'shaynim v'rananim y'hi'yu

עוֹד יְנוּבוּן בְּשֵׁיבָה דְשֵׁנִים וְרַעְנָנִים יְהִי

They will be fruitful, even in old age
They will be juicy and luxuriant. (Psalm 92:15)

Rabbi Shefa Gold writes -- <http://www.rabbishefagold.com/aging-saging/>

I wrote his chant in honor of Reb Zalman Shachter-Shalomi z"l in honor of his 80th birthday. The intention that I bring to this double round chant is to get in touch with the kind of fruitfulness, luxuriance and juiciness that emerges from my depths after many years of experience. This is a fruitfulness of wisdom and subtlety and it's not always obvious if you're only attuned to the surface of things. Even as our outer skin dries and wrinkles, there is an inner softness that can be cultivated from years of rubbing up against the Mystery. Even as outer sight dims and hearing falters, there are inner senses that can become fine-tuned as we age.

As I chant these words, I bless the elders who have been models of aging and saging for me as they continue to blossom, burgeon and flourish in full-hearted glory.

QUESTIONS:

Responses to verse's language and images, in light of Shefa's teaching or another view?

Thoughts about verses 13-15 in the face of early death or diminishment?

When I leading services, especially when I know people present experienced the loss of children or others who died at an early age, I suggest thinking about the ways in which a person's fruit continues to blossom even if they are not present with us.

Verse 3 -- Morning and Night: Light and Dark, Kindness and Faithfulness

To proclaim Your steadfast love at daybreak, Your faithfulness each night
לְהַגִּיד בְּבֹקֶר חֶסֶדְךָ וְאַמּוֹנַתְךָ בְּלֵילוֹת:

QUESTIONS:

Why different approaches to (praise at) daybreak and night?

Might this also refer, metaphorically, to what we need when feeling bright or dark?

History of Jewish Prayer Language: Citing this verse, the Talmud (Berakhot 12a) requires different prayers words, morning and evening, with a focus on God's kindness in the morning and God's faithfulness at night.

Subsequent commentaries often note different attitudes in prayer, morning and night, based on fears relating to dark (esp. when night meant dark and vulnerable, not artificially-lit extensions of day), as well as psychological differences between prayer when the day is hopeful and fresh compared with prayer after a day of challenges.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810), who suffered depression, often teaches about not succumbing to the dark. But he also talks positively about dark, based on this psalm:

Faithfulness and Kindness, from *Likutei Moharan*, Part II 8:9:2

For the gathering of the kindnesses—by means of which the world will be renewed, as in “For I said: ‘The world will be built on lovingkindness’”—comes about through faith, as in “To proclaim Your kindness in the morning and Your faithfulness in the nights” ([Psalms 92:3](#)). “Your faithfulness in the nights” alludes to faith, which is dependent upon the imaginative faculty, which itself corresponds to night, the concept of a nighttime dream produced by the imagination. And by virtue of this, “To proclaim Your kindness in the morning”—this alludes to the aforementioned concept of lovingkindness, through which the world will be renewed in the Future.

"Reserve of Light" Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook ("Rav Kook," pre-State Palestine, 1865 – 1935) often speaks of our duty to refine our own characters as well as the need for the People as a whole to seek spiritual improvement and intellectual enlightenment. In this commentary, he references Maimonides (1135-1204, Egypt), who is read both as the ultimate Aristotelian rationalist and as a mystic.

Night is a time of preparation. We sleep at night to regain strength for our daytime activities. The value of night is in its preparatory nature; the actual goal is the activities of the day.

Like the night, faith serves to prepare us. The final goal, spiritual perfection, lies in clear awareness of the nature of God. But without faith, one would not perform mitzvot nor refine character traits, both of which ultimately lead to true enlightenment. Faith serves as a necessary prerequisite for intellectual insight.

In his introduction to the *“Guide for the Perplexed,”* Maimonides used the metaphor of lightning to describe divine enlightenment. It is not a constant phenomenon, but rather it shines its brilliant truth in pulses. The frequency of these lightning bolts of truth is a function of one’s spiritual level. For a great prophet like Moses, the lightning flashes are so rapid that they appear to be a single continuous light. For others, the light appears and vanishes, like *“the flame of the rotating sword”* (Gen. 3:24).

Here lies the second role of faith. When the intellect is well illuminated, we can recognize the truth of the Torah by its light. But faith is needed for those times when the light of the intellect does not shine, during the hours of night when spiritual darkness reigns.

The verse mentions day before night to indicate this second aspect of faith. After the light of day, which intermittently enlightens the intellect, faith serves as a reserve source of illumination during periods of darkness. -- (adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. I, p. 65, on *Berachot* 12)
-- found at <http://www.ravkooktorah.org/PSALM92.htm>

Verse 6 -- beyond duality, plus grammar note

Ma-Gadlu Ma'asecha Yah, m'od amku mach'sh'votecha

מה־גָּדְלוֹ מַעֲשֵׂיֶיךָ יְהוָה מֵאֵד עֲמָקוֹ מַחֲשַׁבְתֶּיךָ

How great is your work, oh God, how very deep are your thoughts! (Psalm 92:6)

Grammar/vocabulary note: "gadlu" and "amku" are interesting in that we treat them as adjectives in English: "great" and "deep," or something similar, respectively. But they're verbs suggesting God's thoughts "enlarged" or "became more important" and "deepened" or "became more profound"

Rabbi Shefa Gold teaches -- <http://www.rabbishefagold.com/daily-psalms/> -- scroll down to Shabbat

On Shabbat we step outside of the ordinary stream of time; we leave behind the structures of Duality in order to drink from the extraordinary river of Delight that flows directly from the Source. We set aside our struggles and worries in order to simply appreciate and celebrate Life. Shabbat consciousness requires us to embrace a profound paradox. On the one hand we see the amazing beauty of God's Creation, and in that same vision we encounter the unfathomable suffering and mystery of our world. On Shabbat we let go of our struggle to understand, explain, make excuses or figure it out. We embrace and accept it all and celebrate existence itself.

Verse 11 -- historical, vocabulary note

קַרְנִי -- karni

וּתְרָם כְּרָאִים קַרְנֵי בַּלְתֵּי בְשֵׁמוֹ רַעְנָן:

You raise my horn high like that of a wild ox; I am soaked in freshening oil.

קרן --

1. feminine noun
2. horn
 1. horn
 2. of strength (fig)
 3. flask (container for oil)
 4. horn (as musical instrument)
 5. horn (of horn-like projections on the altar)
 6. of rays of light
 7. hill



Image of having one's horn raised is pretty old and obscure but not meaningless
Odd reading of this word resulted in images like the one above at Kenyon College (OH) chapel

Two vocabulary notes:

1) Verse 16 -- rocks and bonds. צוּרֵי -- tzuri

צור -- "rock" is also "tied up" as in Yizkor, praying loved ones be bound up in the bonds of life

2) Verse 4 -- instruments, voices; meditations, utterances

הַגִּיּוֹן -- **higayon**. Here, "*higayon*" is translated as "voice"

עַל־עֲשׂוֹר וְעַל־נָבֶל עָלִי הַגִּיּוֹן בְּכַנּוֹר

With a ten-stringed harp, with voice and lyre together.

Related word in Ps 1 -- where *yeh'geh* means "meditation, utterance" (Ps. 1:2 -- see below)

Note: relationship in psalms between voice, utterance and meditation.

NOTE:

from Psalm 1 (April)

(1:2) וּבִתְוֹרַת יְהוָה יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם 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 וְהַגִּיּוֹן 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 תְהַגֶּה צְדָקָךְ כָּל־הַיּוֹם תְּהַלְתֶּךָ

while my tongue shall **recite** [*teh'geh*] Your beneficent acts, Your praises all day long.

115:5 -- יְדֵיהֶם | וְלֹא יִמְשֹׁוּן רַגְלֵיהֶם וְלֹא יִהְלְכוּ לֹא־יִהְיוּ בְּגִרּוֹנָם:

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 הַגִּה -- ***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.

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).