

WHOSE LANGUAGE?

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THE PSALMS ARE CONSIDERED TO PROVIDE some of the most immediate and the most personal and effective vehicles of prayer in the entire Jewish canon of the Bible. Yet at the same time, they use – sometimes rampantly – a language that is not only frequently exclusive in its use of male metaphors for God and humanity, but also a language that would be considered today to be politically incorrect in other aspects.¹

Because the psalms have a special place in Jewish tradition and worship, both public and private, and because of their antiquity, any questions about the language of these sacred poems are often considered to be a challenge to the fundamental principles of Judaism. Many still see feminism and Judaism as representing two conflicting identities, and it has taken time for Jewish feminists themselves to reconcile these two aspects of their personalities.²

To what extent has a reconciliation been possible in a Jewish reading and liturgical use of the psalms? How have modern Jewish liturgies addressed the challenge of using gender-inclusive language in their translations? How have they addressed the problems inherent in the Hebrew text? This article will look briefly at the liturgical uses of the psalms in Jewish worship and at their crucial role in rabbinic midrash. The impact of the feminist critique upon Judaism, in particular the debate on the use of gender-inclusive language for God and humanity, will lead into an attempt to answer some of these questions by focusing on individual psalms which are recited or sung regularly in Jewish worship.

The Psalms in the Jewish liturgy

Although the Church has made the Psalms peculiarly her own – her use of them is greater than has ever been the case in the Jewish Church – and although she has, generally speaking, been more thorough in her recognition and appreciation of their unrivalled beauty, and of the intense religious feeling which permeates them, nevertheless the Psalms are the product of the Jewish Church.³

The religious Jew will be somewhat taken aback by the assumption that Jewish worship neglects the psalms. Here, they will argue, is a

complete misunderstanding and lack of knowledge about Jewish prayer. It is true that the psalms do not form the statutory prayers of daily, Sabbath or festival worship. These are provided by important sections of the liturgy known as the *Shema and her blessings* and the *Amidah* or *Tefillah* and others. The origins of certain blessings of the *Tefillah* may go back to pre-Hasmonean times, although they did not attain their final fixed form until several centuries later.⁴ However, the use of psalm quotations, series of psalms, individual psalms at various times and on various days, or in connection with important life-cycle observances, cannot be overlooked.

The opening prayer of the daily service is known as *Mah tovu*, from its opening words, taken from Numbers 24:5: 'How fair are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel!' It continues with a medley of psalm verses to be recited on first entering the synagogue. Thus Psalms 5:8, 26:8 and 95:6 form a musical prelude to the service, with Psalm 95:6 changing from the plural to the singular form for the purposes of the prayer. According to a Talmudic interpretation, the 'tents of Jacob' and 'encampments of Israel' are the synagogues and houses of study.⁵ The psalm verses begin with the word *va'ani* which means 'I', and suggests the personal and intimate nature of prayer at this point in the service.

An important psalm in daily, Sabbath and festival worship is Psalm 145, prefaced by Psalms 84:5 and 144:15 and concluding with Psalm 115:18, known as the *ashrey* from the opening word of Psalm 84:5 – 'Happy'. As an alphabetic acrostic, it was clearly easier to memorize before printed versions of the prayerbook appeared, but as a Psalm of David, those who recited it were fulfilling the Talmudic saying that 'whoever recites "A Psalm of David" three times a day is assured of belonging to the world to come'.⁶

Preceding the main elements of the morning service is a section known as the *Pesukey de'Zimra*, 'Morning Psalms'. The nucleus of this section comprises the six Psalms 145–150, with a benediction attached both at the beginning and at the conclusion of this part of the liturgy.

The *Amidah*, the central statutory prayer of any daily, Sabbath or festival service is prefaced by the verse from Psalm 51:17 (15 in NRSV): 'O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise', and concludes with a musical epilogue from Psalm 19:15 (14 in NRSV): 'Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer'.

A very ancient part of the Jewish liturgy is a section known as the *Hallel* (praise), which was recited already in the Temple.⁷ The *Hallel*

comprises Psalms 113—118, which are all hymns of praise to God and recited on certain festivals.

Psalm 126 prefaces grace after meals on Sabbaths and other joyful occasions, not only because it refers to sowing and harvesting, but also because it looks forward to the restoration of 'the fortunes of Zion'. The sages saw this opening verse of the psalm as a reference to the end of the period of exile and the beginning of redemption. Conversely, on ordinary days Psalm 137 would be recited, reminding the Jews of their position as exiles from the land of their birth.⁸

Psalms play an important part in various life-cycle observances, such as weddings (Psalm 100 and excerpts from Psalm 118) and at funeral services (Psalms 23, 90, 91, 130). Some Jewish communities regard the recitation of the Book of Psalms as a special act of piety, and mourners, in particular, can often be seen by the graveside of a relative, reciting certain psalms.

These examples, not exhaustive by any means, serve to underline the importance of certain psalms in the Jewish liturgy. Psalms are used extensively in those parts of the service that prepare the worshipper for public or communal prayer; the careful selection of certain psalms for joyful or sad occasions reflects the sensitivity of liturgists whose aim was to make the prayer of the individual consonant with his or her state of mind. Far from seeing their use of the psalms as sidelined compared with Christian usage, Jews have maintained a crucial link with their past through the use of the psalms.

The use of the Psalms in rabbinic midrash

The psalms were considered to be of great importance by the rabbis of the tannaitic and amoraic periods, as illustrated by this statement from the Babylonian Talmud: 'A harp was hanging above David's bed. As soon as midnight arrived, a North wind came and blew upon it and it played of itself. He arose immediately and studied the Torah till the break of dawn.'⁹ In another passage, given in the name of R. Simlai, the six hundred and thirteen commandments are compressed into eleven principles derived from Psalm 15.¹⁰ The most extensive use of the psalms, and in particular individual verses, is found in the homilies and preaching of the rabbis (*midrashim*), where there is scarcely a single verse which is not expounded in the Talmud and midrash. Ben Azzai is said to have 'strung together [as a row of pearls] the words of the Pentateuch with those of the prophets, and of the prophets with the Hagiographa, and the words of Torah rejoiced as on the day they were given at Sinai'.¹¹ Although it refers to the *Ketuvim* (writings) in

general, there is no doubt that the rabbis used individual psalm verses to introduce the text of their sermons, and 'strung them together' with the verses from the Pentateuch that were under discussion.

Why gender-inclusive language?

How should we speak of God? How should we address God in our prayers? Hebrew, like all Semitic languages, recognizes two genders in the noun – masculine and feminine. Inanimate objects and abstract ideas are also regarded as either masculine and feminine. The masculine form of nouns has no special indication in the Hebrew, while the feminine are usually, though not always, denoted by the letters *ah* at the end of the word.¹² The biblical names for God are mostly masculine: *Elohim*, *El*, *Adonai*. Metaphors for God are drawn from male images: king, shepherd, archer, warrior. The pronouns used to refer to God are all masculine and are traditionally translated as such. The tetragrammaton – *YHWH* – is read as *Adonai*, which means 'Lord'. Yet the root of the Hebrew has nothing to do with a feudal hierarchy, but more to do with 'being' or 'existence'. The overarching image of God projected from the Hebrew Psalter is, therefore, a masculine one.

We know that God is not male, just as we understand that God is not female. Yet male imagery has persisted, and the introduction of feminine imagery or pronouns to describe God is often looked upon with amusement or contempt. Masculine imagery is preponderant because it reflects a male-dominated society more accurately than it reflects the nature of God. What the masculine images in the psalms tell us is not what God does, but what 'man' does. He goes into battle, he fights, he rules and judges, he mocks his enemies, 'he whets his sword; he bends and strings his bow; he prepares his deadly weapons, making his arrows' fiery shafts'.¹³ And we learn also the sphere of women's activities, when the Psalmist employs feminine images, of midwife (Psalm 18:17), of a woman in labour (Psalm 48:7) or a woman as musician and dancer (Psalm 68:26).

In the psalms, God's maleness is equated with God's power, which is absolute and dominant. Judith Plaskow, drawing on Gordon Kaufman, has pointed out 'that the relation between God and human beings is profoundly asymmetrical . . . Such images of God's dominance give rise to the terrible irony that the symbols Jews have used to talk about God as ultimate good have helped generate and justify the evils from which we hope God will save us'.

Unlike images of God as male, which may on the surface appear innocuous, images of God as dominating Other more often evoke a

troubled response. In depicting God's power as domination, the tradition draws on symbols of political authority that are not only foreign to citizens in a democracy but also normally repugnant. Metaphors of sovereignty, lordship, kingship, and judicial and military power evoke images of arbitrary and autocratic rule that have been rejected in the human political sphere at the same time as they live on in religious language.¹⁴

Without considering what meaning they hold for us today, we carry on using imagery that is drawn from a feudal, oppressive and tyrannical world. That is why the editors of an increasing number of Jewish prayerbooks are beginning to question the exclusively male imagery used of God. In the Introduction to its prayerbook *V'taher libbenu*, the Congregation Beth El of the Sudbury River Valley, Massachusetts, offers a clear reason why such language should not be used exclusively:

We have come to believe that the exclusive use of masculine imagery to describe God invites idolatry, that the imagery too easily becomes the reality. Yet we are limited both by human language and by human experience.¹⁵

The prayerbook offers a number of ways in dealing with the question of how to address God:

We have dealt with these limitations in two ways. By addressing the Holy One as both He and She, we hope to broaden and enrich our concept of God while learning to pray neither to Him nor to Her but to the Holy One, Creator of all. In most cases, however, we have chosen to address the Holy One as You rather than He or She. Not only does this avoid the need for either masculine or feminine pronouns, but it encourages a more personal bond between us and our God who is immanent as well as transcendent. We hope it will help us to achieve the kind of 'I-Thou' relationship imagined by Martin Buber.¹⁶

In Psalm 23, 'The Lord is my shepherd' becomes 'You are my shepherd', a much more immediate address to God, but avoiding a translation of the tetragrammaton altogether. I prefer the more restrained translation of *Siddur Lev Chadash*: 'Eternal God, You are my Shepherd'.¹⁷ The problem with this kind of translation is not a religious one, but a literary one. The Hebrew, *Adonai ro'i*, sets a distance between God and the speaker: 'The Eternal God is my Shepherd'. The use of the third person continues throughout verses 2

and 3. Only when the going becomes difficult, 'Even though I walk through the darkest valley', does the poet dare to address God in the second person, 'for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me'. In the last verse, the poet reverts to the third person when speaking of God and it becomes clear that the Hebrew is partly chiasmic in structure.¹⁸ The name of God is mentioned only twice, once in verse 1 and once in the final verse. There is a verbal echo in the use of the two verbs *yarbitzeni* ('God makes me lie down') and *yir'de'funi* ('shall follow me') again in the first and last verse of the psalm; and another echo in the use of *mey* ('waters') and *y'mey* ('days'). The pivotal verse of the psalm is verse 4, where the poet's life seems threatened and the address to God becomes immediately more personal and intimate. The structure of the psalm properly reflects the view that it is not always possible to be profoundly connected to God in the way that the poet is, out of desperation and fear, in the middle of the psalm.

But literary comments aside, I would want to draw a distinction between an analysis of the psalm as a literary structure on the one hand, and as a vehicle for private or public prayer on the other. Any translation from the Hebrew is already an interpretation. However skilful, however lyrical, it rarely captures the puns, the chiasmic structures, the forceful echoes that emerge from a reading of the Hebrew. Therefore, because it is already one step removed from the language in which it was composed, it needs to meet the worshippers' requirements to address God in a way that is consonant with our own experience and needs.

The Sabbath Psalm 96 refers to God using both masculine and feminine language in *V'tahev libbenu*:

Bless Him
 Proclaim His salvation
 Declare Her glory
 And laud Her wondrous works
 Among all the peoples. (vv 2–3)

Honour and majesty are before Him,
 Strength and beauty are in Her sanctuary. (v 6)¹⁹

Siddur Lev Chadash, in the same psalm, prefers to use 'Eternal One' or to repeat 'God' instead of using the personal pronoun:

Sing to the Eternal One, praise God's name,
 proclaim God's salvation from day to day.

Declare God's glory among the nations,
 God's wonders among all the peoples.

Honour and majesty are in God's presence,
 strength and beauty in God's sanctuary.²⁰

Another variation is found in the Reconstructionist Prayerbook, *Kol Ha-Neshamah* (1994), where the name of God is translated using a variety of different epithets, even though the Hebrew might be the same. Psalm 93 is shown here as an example of the way the translators in this prayerbook have sought to find descriptions of God that match the language and meaning of the immediate context surrounding the name of each mention of God:

The Eternal reigns, is clothed in majesty,
 The Invisible is clothed, is girded up with might.
 The world is now established.
 It cannot give way.
 Your throne was long ago secured,
 beyond eternity are you.
 The rivers raise, O Mighty One,
 the rivers raise a roaring sound,
 the floods raise up torrential waves,
 but louder than the sound of mighty waters,
 more exalted than the breakers of the sea,
 raised up on high are you, The Source.
 Your precepts have retained their truth,
 and holiness befits your house,
 The Eternal One, forever and a day.²¹

Both the different names for God and the use of the masculine and feminine pronouns are very powerful. We are no longer confined to either a masculine or feminine image of God; the neutrality of words such as 'source' or 'invisible' invites us to create our own relationship with a Being that defies description. But God here is also an impersonal God; it is more difficult to engage in the 'I-Thou' relationship when the distance is emphasized more than the proximity. The alternation of a masculine and feminine pronoun is immensely evocative. We are no longer tied to the image of God portrayed through the language of one gender alone, but oscillate between what the masculine and feminine conjure up for us individually. Just as God can be for us both transcendent and immanent, so also can God be spoken of in either feminine or masculine terms. In a liturgical context, I prefer the more

personal use of the second-person-singular address to God, or the enriching use of both masculine and feminine images and pronouns, rather than the neutrality exemplified by the Reconstructionist Prayerbook, which I find less natural, and rather awkward in the rhythms of its translations.

Moving from the individual names for God, let us look at one psalm now which presents a different kind of challenge.

Psalm 29

Psalm 29 is an important psalm in the Jewish liturgy. It is recited on various occasions, but has particular prominence on the Sabbath as the psalm which we sing as we accompany the scroll back to the ark after it has been read. How precisely this ritual developed and when the psalm was chosen to be sung at that point in the service is rather a mystery. In the ninth century, the celebrated Babylonian Rabbi, Rav Amram, whose prayerbook is the first systematic collection for ordinary days, Sabbaths and festivals, says at this point in the service: 'They return the Torah to its place'. He reports that it is accompanied by Psalm 148: 13-14: 'Let them praise the name of the Eternal One whose name alone is exalted . . . '.

The language of Psalm 29 is magnificent as a celebration of God's might and power. Some would say that it belongs to a genre of nature poetry. The whole of creation shudders with God's power and glory; God's 'voice' thunders over the majesty of nature; it resounds above the waters, shatters the cedars of Lebanon and breaks up the mountains of Lebanon, swirling the sands of the desert, stripping the forests bare and inducing the birth of young wild deer. But it is an extraordinary choice for this moment in the service. The Torah has just been read and explained, a reading from the Prophets has been given and this part of the service concludes with prayers for the community. One suggestion for its presence here lies in the *midrash* to the psalm which asks: 'How do we know how many prayers we are to offer up to God?' And the rabbis give this answer: note that the name God occurs eighteen times in this psalm. Now the number eighteen corresponds to the original number of blessings found in the daily *Amidah*, and very cleverly the *midrash* goes on to associate each phrase in which the name of God is mentioned with one of the eighteen blessings of the *Amidah*.²² However ingenious the interpretations of the psalm, however dramatic the poetry, with its repetition of the Hebrew word for 'voice' or 'sound' seven times, suggesting the seven blessings of the Sabbath *Amidah*, theologically it is a notoriously difficult psalm. What kind of projection

of God are we dealing with? Noise is one of the curses of modern life. The images of nature are destructive – God seems to trample over nature, breaking the trees, startling the animals. Even in God’s temple, all cry ‘Glory!’

This image of God, immensely powerful and noisy, is alienating for those who have already begun to ‘reimage the unimaginable’, to take Judith Plaskow’s expression. We would prefer Elijah’s ‘still small voice’ over this victorious war hero, who is probably related (albeit on a literary level) to the ancient Canaanite god Baal, or the Babylonian god Marduk coming home from war victorious.²³ Translations, however neutral in their language about God, still cannot escape from the sheer power and terror exerted by the great warrior stampeding over creation. And of course, the Hebrew stands with all its literary echoes of Ugaritic mythology.

Clearly uncomfortable, the editors of *V’taher libbenu* leave the Hebrew, but produce an abbreviated and rather anaemic translation, cutting out anything that is deemed unpalatable. Most gender-inclusive translations, however, preserve the power of the psalm, ensuring that the names of God are consistent with their translations throughout the book and that no masculine pronouns are used. The problem with the psalm, as a vehicle for our own worship, is that there appears to be nothing to counter the image of God as a powerful, dominant war-hero. One solution is to compose our own psalms with a plurality of images and metaphors, drawn from the Jewish mystical tradition, or even from biblical and rabbinic sources hitherto undiscovered.

Not to write the psalm off completely, it has a remarkable redeeming feature to it. The last verse ends with an invocation to God – the first time in the psalm that there is some engagement between the worshipper and God: ‘Eternal God: grant strength to Your people; Eternal God: bless Your people with peace’. We note, initially, that the Psalmist asks only for *oz* (‘strength’), which is precisely the theme of the psalm as stated at the beginning: ‘Praise, you hosts of heaven, praise the Eternal God’s glory and strength’ (*oz*). Has nothing emerged from this display of power? This is what the Psalmist wishes us to think, that what we seek most of all in God’s world is strength. Yet the psalm concludes most remarkably, by going further. It is not brute force and strength that is needed, but peace: ‘Eternal God: bless Your people with peace’. The function of this invocation is not to increase our sense of God’s power, but to understand it differently. As the *midrash* to this verse explains: ‘Let God give us the goodly strength of the Torah, as it is said: “Behold: a good doctrine has been given to you: do not forsake

it”’,²⁴ It is as though the poet is saying: true, God’s voice is earth-shattering, God’s power beyond our imagination, but the only way that we can engage with God is when we perceive God’s protective, rather than victorious power, and when we ourselves are ready to open ourselves to that protection and peace.

There is clearly a tension that exists between the desire to retain certain traditional psalms in the Jewish liturgy, like Psalm 29, and the discomfort that many feel with the language, the implications that God must, therefore, be exclusively powerful, transcendent, mighty. Many new progressive Jewish prayerbooks are discovering that it is possible to include the traditional material, but also to add a balance to the liturgy by introducing new religious poetry and prayers. Thus, we have seen an enrichment of the liturgy, rather than a diminishment, which is the fear that many have when subjecting the liturgy to a feminist critique. At the radical end of the spectrum, there are those who have added to or changed the traditional liturgy, for example by changing the gender we use to address God, by adding in references to the matriarchs where previously there were only references to the patriarchs. I have not seen changes made to biblical texts in the Hebrew. Perhaps that will be left to future generations. But I think it is possible to reinterpret psalms by bringing to bear our own experience and discovering new midrashic material, both of which can help us understand ancient poetry in a new way. The very presence of the psalms in our liturgy is also challenging. If it helps us to deepen our spirituality and our faith, if it helps us to talk about God and to discover new ways of addressing God, then we add to the plurality of images and terms we can use. It is one thing to address God from the pages of a prayerbook or Bible, invoking the time-honoured or even new expressions of invocation. It is quite another to summon the strength and courage to talk to God alone. Then our language must reflect not perhaps the communal language of faith but the personal, inarticulate sounds of incomprehension and pain, the uncertainty of faith and the fragility of human life:

A bond unseen holds me
 To my congregation.
 Their voices one with mine
 Have sung Your praises
 In prayer and in psalm.
 Now comes the time
 When I speak to You alone.
 The bond is momentarily broken.

I have been one of many . . .
 Now I seek You alone.
 Now I alone try to address You.
 Shall I sing or shout?
 Shall I be silent?
 Hush . . .
 Will my heart speak in silence.²⁵

NOTES

¹ See for example Psalm 38:14–15 in which the Psalmist compares himself to ‘the deaf’ (*cheresh*) and ‘the mute’ (*ilem*) or the more obvious verses in Isaiah 42:18–19. Another problematic verse is Psalm 113:9: ‘He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children’, which has been eliminated from certain liberal Jewish liturgies because it is considered to be offensive to women who find themselves unable to conceive or have children.

² The most powerful book on Jewish feminist theology to date is still Judith Plaskow’s *Standing again at Sinai: Judaism from a feminist perspective* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1990). Plaskow confronts the dichotomy between feminism and Judaism from a personal perspective: ‘In the main, however, the process of coming to write this book has been for me a gradual process of refusing the split between a Jewish and a feminist self. I am not a Jew in the synagogue and a feminist in the world. I am a Jewish feminist and a feminist Jew in every moment of my life. I have increasingly come to realize that in setting up Judaism and feminism as conflicting ideologies and communities, I was handing over to a supposedly Jewish tradition the power and the right to define Judaism for the past and for the future . . . If we are Jews not despite being feminists but *as feminists*, then Judaism will have to change – we will have to work to change it – to make a whole identity possible. This change, moreover, may lead to new life for us and for the tradition’ (pp xi–xii).

³ Oesterley, *The Psalms in the Jewish Church* (London, 1910), p 152. Oesterley’s contention is that the *piyyutin* (the later liturgical poems) overweighted the service and ‘pushed the psalms into a subordinate position’.

⁴ For a full analysis of Jewish liturgical development as well as the structure and content of Jewish worship, see Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish liturgy*, translated by Raymond P. Scheindlin (Jewish Publication Society, 1993), pp 25–27.

⁵ B. *Sanhedrin* 105b.

⁶ B. *Berakhot* 4b.

⁷ Mishnah, *Pesachim* 5:7. It is traditionally recited in the morning service on all the days of Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot and Chanukkah. A slightly shorter version is recited on Rosh Chodesh (New Moon) and on the last six days of Pesach.

⁸ For a commentary on Psalms 126 and 137, see Amos Chacham, *Sefer Tehillim* (Jerusalem, 1984), pp 463–466 and 520–525 (Hebrew).

⁹ B. *Berakhot* 3b. According to R. Ashi that ‘Torah’ comprises ‘songs and praises’. The statement also suggests that the Psalms were inspired and that music helped to bring about that inspiration.

¹⁰ B. *Makkot* 24b.

¹¹ *Leviticus Rabbah* 16.4.

¹² See the comment in *Gesenius’ Hebrew grammar* (Oxford, 1963), para 80b: ‘The masculine, as being the more common and important gender, has no special indication’.

¹³ Psalm 7: 12–13.

¹⁴ Plaskow, *Standing again at Sinai*, pp 130–132, 257 n 22 and 258 n 28. For a full discussion on the issues surrounding the use of gender-inclusive language see Rachel Montagu, ‘Inclusive

language in the liturgy' in Sybil Sheridan (ed), *Hear our voice* (SCM, 1994), pp 161–169; Plaskow, *Standing again at Sinai*, pp 121–169; and Rita M. Gross, 'Female God language in a Jewish context' in Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (eds), *Womanspirit rising: a feminist reader in religion* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

¹⁵ *V'tahev libbenu* (Sudbury, Massachusetts, 1980), p 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Siddur Lev Chadash* (Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, London, 1995), p 609.

¹⁸ The term 'chiastic' in this context indicates a pattern in the text that might be coded as ABCBA. In other words, the second half of a text mirrors in reverse the first half. Exodus 3 is a good example of a chiastic structure, in which the words 'I am who I am' (3,14) stand at the centre, while significant phrases or words are repeated in a certain order either side of this spiritual nerve centre.

¹⁹ *V'tahev libbenu*, p 23.

²⁰ *Siddur Lev Chadash*, p 71.

²¹ *Kol Ha-Neshamah* (Reconstructionist Press, 1994).

²² William G. Braude (trans), *The Midrash on Psalms* (Yale University Press, 1959), pp 381ff. See also *Yalkut Me'Am Lo'ez*, 'Psalms' pp 176ff, and B. *Berakhot* 28b: 'Rabban Gamaliel says: Every day a person should say eighteen benedictions . . . To what do these eighteen benedictions correspond? R. Hillel the son of Samuel b. Nahmani said: To the eighteen times that David mentioned the Divine Name in Psalm 29.'

²³ On the mythological background to Psalm 29, see for example, Dahood, *The Anchor Bible Psalms I* (New York, 1965); Peter Craigie, *Word biblical commentary Psalms 1—50* (Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1983); and T. H. Gaster, 'Psalm 29' in *Jewish Quarterly Review* 37 (1946–47), pp 55–65.

²⁴ *Midrash Tehillim*, Psalm 29, and see also *Yalkut Me'Am Lo'ez*, p 179.

²⁵ *V'tahev libbenu*, Meditation on the Tefillah, p 40.