

## Psalm Notes

### Psalm 1

**Blessed/אַשְׁרֵי:** The word that inaugurates the psalm and the book of psalms has sometimes been translated as ‘praises,’ a noun form, though this would be an unusual rendering--not to mention the fact that many of the psalms are, in fact, more complaints than praises. More likely it should be read adjectivally, meaning praised or blessed. The medieval Jewish commentator Malbim sees it as particularly referring to contentment in the spiritual realm, an understanding that I share. The idea of longevity of spiritual contentment is a connotation that I was unable to easily represent in translation, but which I attempt to convey through this word.

**who/אֲשֶׁר:** A word that means "which" or "that." It is pronounced *asher*. Note the play on *ashrei* above. Word play and resonance is common throughout the psalms. Here the assonance of the two words suggests an almost causal equation: A person who does what follows will for that reason be happy.

**did not long dwell/לֹא יָשָׁב:** The word *yashav* means both to sit and dwell. Here I take it to mean to linger. We can all find ourselves from time to time in dangerous company, but the question is whether we stay too long in situations opposed to our spiritual growth.

**wrongful/רְשָׁעִים:** This word is almost always translated as “wicked,” but this reading misunderstands the concept of ‘sin’ in the Hebrew Bible. The predominant word for sin is *chet*, missing the mark. Sin, then, is a way we distance ourselves from God through mistaken actions. Likewise, the idea that people can be wicked or sinners runs contrary to the emphasis on repentance that we find in prophetic and post-Biblical writings. I have therefore chosen to translate the word to reflect wrongful actions rather than permanently blighted character.

**and whose leaves never cease to produce/וְעֵלְהוּ לֹא יָבֹל:** Literally, "its leaves never grow dry." *Yibol* is related to the word *yevulah*, produce, as in the crop of a field. Note the motif of growth and vegetation in this psalm and its association with the righteous.

**They are like chaff carried by changes in wind/כִּי אִם-כַּמֶּץ אֲשֶׁר-תִּדְפֶנּוּ רוּחַ:** The wrongful, here, are seen as lacking substance, staying power and direction. Without a moral ballast they become like leaves pushed by wind.

**The wrongful will not stand in the light of justice/לֹא-יִקְמוּ רְשָׁעִים בְּמִשְׁפָּט:** The line expresses a conviction that the wrongful will not be upheld in final justice, that unrepentant wrongdoers are unable to stand in the place of the righteous.

**gathered testimony/בְּעֵדוּת:** The word *adah* means congregation, but the related word *eyd* means witness, a meaning that I play on here.

**covered with weeds/תִּאבְדוּ:** Its literal translation is that they will be destroyed or lost. Radak explains it as follows, "For in their death there will be no revival and they will walk toward [their own] ultimate perdition." In other words, their destruction correlates with their own

acts and is not result of divine retribution. I have translated this word in keeping with the motif of vegetation and growth which permeates the psalm.

## Psalm 2

**Why do nations rush around restless/למה רגשו גוים:** This psalm evokes a rebellion against worldly power and emphasizes that the only true and legitimate rulership is that of God. It has been suggested by numerous commentators that the psalm is related to the Philistines launching a war against David after his coronation. Commentators who simply see the psalm as a justification for Davidic kingship miss the point, The psalm is, in effect, a critique of all kingships or governments which do not stand in relation to God.

**[why do nations] contemplate empty goals/יהגו־ריק:** Rashi renders *y'hegu* as meaning to contemplate in their heart, not talk (the verb can mean both) which is the understanding I follow here. The word *riq* means emptiness, but I read it to refer specifically to empty aims.

**conspire in secret/נוסדו:** Rashi points out that there is a relation between this word and *sod*, meaning mystery, and as such a relation to *roznim* in the following line (as *raz* means secret, and *roznim* are generally understood to be trusted advisors). Radak suggests *nosdu* means "to take counsel", with perhaps a suggestion that the betrayal alluded to is in fact by someone whom the speaker trusts.

**ropes of oppression/מוסרותימו:** These are ropes used to harness oxen to a yoke. The implicit idea here is that the only true and rightful yoke is the kingdom of heaven.

**Come to me with your perplexities/שאל ממני:** Literally "ask of me." The idea here is that a leader should consult with God for guidance rather than simply act in accordance with his own whims and desires.

## Psalm 3

**when he fled before Absalom, his son/בברחו מפני אבשלום בנו:** The incident is from the book of Samuel. David is in flight before his own son who is trying to kill him. Many translators read this as a psalm of self-justification or expression of straightforward despair, but I see it as a psalm of great complexity in face of betrayal from one's own son.

**God, how many are the pursuers that crush against me! Many rise up to wreak harm./מה־רבו... רבים קמים:** A play on the root *raba*, and on the words that derive from it, *rabu* and *rabim*: How *great* are my troubles, how *many* are the ones who rise up against me.

**the pursuers that crush against me/צרי:** The root *tzar* means narrowness. It also means enemies, but more than anything is suggestive of fear--a sense of internal anguish and constriction.

**to my soul's flesh/לנפשי:** The word *nefesh* is often translated as "soul," and is also translated as

"life." It suggests living force, a mixture of the bodily and spiritual.

**Many are the ones/רַבִּים:** Why does the psalm read *rabim*, which is plural, if the reference is to his son in particular? The explanation, then, must be that Absalom refers both to Absalom and his followers. As with many psalms, it also reaches beyond its historical context to allow for a reading expressive of being overwhelmed in the face of difficulty.

**Strike my opposers in the face/כִּי־הִכִּיתָ אֶת־כָּל־אֹיְבֵי לְחֵי:** This line is written in the past tense, which marks a shift in narrative continuity. I have chosen to understand it not as expressive of an attribute of God, but rather a wish for God's active presence, a hope and expectation for the presence of God in the future. Given the prologue at the beginning of the psalm, one could also read this as expressing David's concern over what God might do to wrongdoers, a thought that fills David with fear on behalf of his son.

**upon your people is your blessing/עַל־עַמְּךָ בְּרַכְתָּךְ:** This is not simply a line reminding oneself of the covenantal relationship between Israel and God, but is rather a plea for compassion on behalf of his son. If God's blessing is upon his people, it must be on his son as well—who even though an enemy, is still, after all, his son.

#### Psalm 4

**For the Conductor of the Eternal Symphony/לְמַנְצֵחַ:** The noun is derived from a root that means primarily eternity. A secondary meaning is conductor, which is often how it is translated. Here, I have merged the two meanings to suggest what I believe to be the theological idea behind the phrase: that of God being the conductor of the symphonic movement of all of creation.

**upon the stringed instruments/בְּנִינֹת:** A word open to dispute, but it seems to be related to the root *nagen*, meaning to play an instrument.

**In my calling out to you, let the answer be implied/בְּקִרְאִי עֲנֵנִי:** Literally, "when I call out, answer me." The phrase is written with the preposition *b'*, meaning "when" or "in." The implication of the wish is desire for immediate response.

**who knows my complaint to be a just one/צַדִּיק:** *Tzedek* means "just," as in just person, but it also means simply "right," as in correct, doing the right thing. *Tzidki*, then, refers to God who knows that I am right; God who stands up for me.

**with overflowing kindness/חַנּוּנִי:** This is a verb form from a root often translated as meaning "to act with grace." It suggests God acting with compassion to humanity entirely independently of their merit, as in the Hebrew word *chinam*, meaning 'freely; for nothing.'

**Mortals/בְּנֵי־אִישׁ:** The word *ish* is also used in the first psalm. Its literal meaning is 'man,' but it particularly stresses humanity's mortal aspect. This is emphasized even further by the phrase here which means "children of man," emphasizing the way one generation follows another.

**Tremble when you contemplate the ways you have missed the mark/וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּחַטְּאוּ:** Literally, "tremble and don't sin." While trembling may seem to suggest a relationship with God predicated on fear, it seems to me that this line suggests, rather, that in sensing our own wrongs we experience a trembling when we see them in light of an awareness of God. The goal is a relation with God based in love and self-reflection.

**Speak to God in your heart, when you lie upon your bed/עַל־מִשְׁכְּבֵכֶם אָמְרוּ בְלִבְבְּכֶם:** Many readers would immediately see a reference to the Shema, the prayer expressing love of God that is said twice a day, words that are meant to be spoken: *Al levavkhem pen yivteh lavavkhem* [in your heart, lest your heart stray from these words]... *uvshacavkha u'qumekha* [and you should speak them] when you lay down and when you rise up]. In fact, the tradition is to say the Shema once before going to sleep and to say at least the first verse again while lying in bed to literally fulfill the words. The message in the context of the psalm is one of *teshuvah* or repentance, thinking to oneself quietly and reflectively before rest.

**Put your trust [in the Source of Hope/וּבִטְחוּ:** An imperative to trust or have faith. What relationship does this have to the previous mention of trembling? Trust in God and reliance upon God are the vehicles to alleviate our fear.

**Many are the ones who say/רַבִּים אֹמְרִים:** The path of morality has been lost such that people no longer know the difference between right and wrong. Rashi reads this as meaning "There are many Israelites that see the wicked with wealth and contentment, and they say, "Who will bring us good so that we can be wealthy, so that we can attain our desires like these ones?" I see it rather as introducing an earnest question coming from those who can no longer find examples of what is good.

**You lift the light of your face above us/נִסְּהָ־עֵינֵינוּ אֹר פְּנֵינוּ:** The verb, which in the form it exists in means "to test" is read by most, including me, as derived from *nasah* with an aleph, a different root that sounds the same, meaning to lift up.

**gladness within my heart at the time when the enemy's grain and wine abound/שִׂמְחָה בְּלִבִּי/מֵעַת דָּגָנָם וְתִירוֹשָׁם רָבוּ:** When one is content, the joy and wine of even one's supposed enemy is no longer a source of anguish.

**With peace and contentment, I lie down and sleep/בְּשָׁלוֹם יִחְדוּ אֲשַׁכְּבָה:** A difficult phrase to translate. Radak has an interesting approach. He says, "Even though they have done me harm, I desire that I will be with peace together--I and them. Then I will be able to lie down and sleep and there will be nothing to trouble me since they have turned back to me." I have translated the word *yachdav* to mean a feeling of integrity or inner wholeness.

**Because you, God, are with the lonely/כִּי־אַתָּה יְהוָה לְבַדְדִּךָ:** *Badad* means lonely, while *lavad* means only. *L'vadad* has therefore been translated in various translations with both meanings. I read the verse as standing as the psalmist's attempt to link his own aloneness with that of God. Metzorat Tzion is among those who reads it as "alone," quoting Deuteronomy 30:3 for support.

**help me to dwell in trust/תוֹשִׁיבֵנִי:** Literally "settle me." The sense of trust is implied.

## Psalm 5

**with a melody like a river/אֶל־הַנְּחִילוֹת:** A *nachal* is a stream or river. The word *nachilot* has often been thought to refer to some type of instrumentation, though its meaning is not clear. I have supposed that its sound may have been melodic, arising from an instrument that sounds something like a river.

**my contemplation before I give it voice/הִגִּיגִי:** From a root that means "to meditate or muse", also occasionally, "to whisper or murmur". Here I have interpreted it as a wish for God to understand one's thoughts before one even gives them voice.

**Listen/הִקְשִׁיבָה:** An intensive form of listening, meaning "to pay attention." As Samson Rafael Hirsh explains, the word suggests that which cultivates in the listener a desire to hear more.

**Each dawn/בִּקְרָא:** Many see this as reference to Shacharit, the morning prayer.

**No wrongfulness dwells in your chest/לֹא יִגְרַךְ רָע:** Literally, no wrongfulness dwells with you. The comparison is with humanity, for whom wrong often does (at least metaphorically speaking) dwell in the chest.

**Those who are boastful cannot stand/לֹא־יִתְיַצְבוּ הוֹלְלִים:** The idea, I think, is that the boastful cannot stand firmly before God in prayer. The word *hollalim* is derived from the root *hallal* meaning praise. In this context, it seems to suggest those who praise themselves.

**Their insides are a chasm of destruction, their throats an open grave/קִרְבָּם הוּוֹת קֶבֶר פְּתוּחַ/גְּרוֹנָם:** A play on words; *qirvam* means their insides (*qerev* in the singular) and *qever* means grave.

**Their tongues are slippery/לְשׁוֹנָם יַחְלִיקוּ:** Malbim notes that *peh*, or mouth, refers to externalized speech and *lashon* refers to what a person feels internally. On the other hand, the constant injunctions against *lashon ha-ra*, or wrongful speech, are very much focused on cultivating a discipline about what one actually says. The root *chalaq* means in different constructions both "slippery" and "half," both of which meanings I try to capture here.

**with approval like a shield/כַּצְנָה רְצוֹן:** Literally, a shield of approval, with the idea that God's approval is itself a shield from harm.

## Psalm 6

**on an eight stringed instrument/עַל־הַשְּׁמִינִית:** A phrase that is understood by Rashi and Ibn Ezra to mean an instrument with eight strings, a number that the Talmud (Aruchin 13b) associates with the messianic era.

**Turn toward me/שׁוּבָה:** A word that means "turn," but also comes to mean a call to repentance.



**Labor of wrongfulness will come back on his head/יָשׁוּב עִמָּלוֹ בְּרָאשׁוֹ:** An expression of a wishful theology in which one's enemy's hurtful actions recoil back upon himself. Ibn Ezra translates it similarly: "The trouble he contemplated [afflicting] will return to his own head." Throughout the psalms we find expression of a desire for revenge, with the idea that violence against the violent will somehow restore divine order. While this is a weak theology, it certainly articulates the realm of human emotion. As I argue in the introduction and elsewhere, the articulation of revenge fantasies are actually attempts to diffuse anger rather than provoke or sustain it.

## Psalm 8

**upon the wine festival lyre/עַל־הַגִּיתִית:** My translation is in keeping with that of Rashi: "an instrument of song that comes from a vat (of wine)." The whole psalm, and the joy it expresses, seems entirely in keeping with a wine festival and its spirit of finging joy in abundance.

**How vast/מְה־אֲדִיר:** A word meaning "mighty," but in light of the psalm, I have chosen to translate it with a word suggestive of awe at God's grandeur.

**your signature/שְׁמִיךְ:** The question of how to translate *shem*, or name in reference to God is a difficult one. In biblical Hebrew it also points to one's essence, and also to the legacy or memory of one's actions.

**person of vengeance/וּמִתְנַקֵּם:** Perhaps a pun on *v'yonqim* earlier (in this case it is pronounced *mitnaqeim*). Here it means people of vengeance; there it refers to infants who are nursing. The irony is obvious.

**When I behold your name/כִּי־אֶרְאֶה שְׁמִיךְ:** The word meaning your heavens (*shamekha*) is much like the earlier word meaning your signature (*shimkha*). In the context of this psalm, the heavens are, in fact, a representation of God's existence.

**You allow us dominion/תִּמְשִׁילֵנוּ:** Hirsch notes that the word root *mashal*, often used to represent rulership, is also used in reference to Eliezar the servant of Abraham to suggest stewardship and obedience to a higher authority. Ideally, then, our power should be used in pursuit of God's justice.

## Psalm 9

**contemplating the death of Lavan/עֲלִמּוֹת לָבָן:** A variety of interpretations have been suggested for this phrase, from the proposition that *mut* refers to death, and *Laben* either refers to a king in David's time, or that the phrase should read *ha-ben*, meaning David's son, Absalom. Another interpretation is proposed by Rashi, who after suggesting references to a variety of specific people, proposes that it refers to *almut* meaning the state of youth, with the idea that God will brighten the darkness of Israel and renew them like youth, revealing their righteousness, leading them as young children. I have chosen to render the word in relation to death, given that a central motif of the psalm is human mortality in contrast to God's eternal life. Lavan is the name one of the enemies of Israel that takes on a mythic dimension, and so the psalms refers to the eventual

disappearance of even what threatens one most.

**I will tell and repeat/אֶסְפֹּרָה:** the root means both "to tell" and "to repeat." I include both words, since one of the frequent promises of the psalmist is to spread the wonders of God to others.

**When my enemies turn to attack from behind/בְּשׁוּב־אֹיְבֵי אַחֲרַי:** This is often translated to mean when my enemies retreat, but this makes little sense. Why should the enemies be punished for retreating? It must rather refer to the enemies attacking from behind, with the verb left out in ellipsis.

**from testimony of time/לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:** This is nearly always translated as "forever and ever" — but I have always wondered at that construction. Is there a forever beyond forever? *Eyd* means witness, and so I translate it here and occasionally elsewhere, as meaning forever, under witness of time.

**clarity of intent/בְּמִישָׁרִים:** From the word *yashar* that means straight—here, clarity of purpose or intent.

**The seekers of blood--God remembers their carnage/כִּי־דֹרֵשׁ דָּמִים אוֹתָם זָכַר/** The word *doresh* is the same as is used in the previous line, emphasizing the contrast between those who seek out God and those who seek out violence.

**Bend toward me and relent/חֲנֹנֵי:** *Chen* means grace, but here is a plea for compassion. BDB lists it as deriving from an Arabic word that means "to yearn or incline towards."

**while beholding your face/עַל־פְּנֵיךָ:** In knowing the countenance of God, the wrongful will intrinsically transform their actions.

**their human frailty/אָנוּשׁ הַמָּה:** The word means human, but the emphasis is on mortality, the recognition that we derive our power and eternity from a relationship with God.

## Psalm 10

**they breathe away like dust/יִפִּיחַ בָּהֶם:** Literally, "he [which I render as the gender-neutral plural] blows on them," but the quote is a description of the contentment and power of the wrongful. The word "dust" is added for rhetorical effect.

**God will not seek me out for punishment/לֹא תִדְרֹשׁ:** Literally, "you will not seek me out," but the subject of the sentence is clearly God. The idea of punishment is implied by the context.

**so that wrongfulness will not again grow rampant to frighten a mortal from the earth/בְּלִי־יוֹסִיף עוֹד לְעֶרֶץ אָנוּשׁ מִן־הָאָרֶץ:** Note also the play on words between *l'aratz*, meaning to frighten, and *ha-aratz*, meaning the earth. The roots are different, but the sounds of the words are quite similar.

## Psalm 11

**When they assault the foundation of morality/כִּי־הִשְׁתּוֹת:** A phrase of uncertain derivation. It seems to be related to the word *shat*, meaning foundation and *shatat* meaning to destroy. Here, I have interpreted it as a reference to not only physical destruction, but rejection of the very foundations of ethical principles that apply universally to all humankind. In the Noahide commandments, those believed given to the non-Jewish world, one of the precepts is establishment of a system of morality and justice.

**portion of their cup/מִנַּת כּוֹסָם:** The "portion of their cup" more figuratively refers to what they deserve. The fire and hail is symbolic of the devastating effects of their own actions.

**You see that their faces are pointed straight ahead/יֵשֶׁר יַחְזוּ פְּנֵימוֹ:** A difficult phrase to translate as the grammar is hard to decipher. Rashi suggests the interpretation that the upright will behold God's face, but Radak suggests that in fact, God will behold the faces of the righteous, an interpretation that seems to me more in keeping with much of the rest of the psalm. It is made problematic because the verb is in the third person plural, but the grammar of the psalms is often unorthodox, and I find elements of Radak's reading most compelling.

## Psalm 12

**kindness exists no more/גִּמְר חֲסִיד:** Literally, "the kind one exists no more."

**have vanished/אָפַּ:** A verb related to the noun *efes*, meaning "nothing," here in a verbal tense.

**They speak with double-edged heart/בְּלֵב וּלֵב יִדְבְּרוּ:** Literally, "with heart and heart they speak." The preceding phrase *sefat halakhot* uses an adjective that means slippery, but has embedded within it a word that means portion, suggesting half-truths and duplicity. Rashi reads this line as meaning that they speak with two hearts: they seem to embody peace, but underneath the surface they are full of hatred.

**all who speak with deception/לְשׁוֹן מְדַבֶּרֶת גְּדִלוֹת:** Literally, "a tongue that speak of great things."

**our lips are weapons/שִׁפְתֵינוּ אֶתְנוּ:** Literally, "our lips are with us."

**Who is more godly than us/מִי אֲדוֹן לָנוּ:** The word *adon* means lord in a worldly sense, but is also used as a reference to God (often translated by others as Lord). The double sense is apparent: it suggests a person who believes himself or herself to be above not only others, but unaccountable also to God.

**They will walk exalted among the wrongful/סָבִיב רְשָׁעִים יִתְהַלְכוּן:** A difficult line to understand. I read it as meaning that the righteous will one day walk with dignity even among those who wish them harm. The psalm then ends on a hopeful note, a vision.

**even when ideals have evaporated from the rest of humankind/כָּרָם זֶלַת לִבְנֵי אָדָם:** A phrase of uncertain meaning. The word *zulat* is related to *zul*, or cheap--here in a moral sense. Radak

points out that *zulat* is the opposite of *kavod*, respect or honor. The word *k'rum*, here translated "when...are evaporated" is actually related to a word that means to raise. To my mind, it refers to the act of upholding the unworthy or immoral as its opposite, pretending it to be good.

### Psalm 13

**Will you forget me continually?/תִּשְׁכַּחֵנִי נֶצַח:** Literally, will you forget me for eternity?

**will you hide from me the kindness of your face?/תִּסְתִּיר אֶת־פְּנֵיךְ:** This phrase, used in different constructions throughout the psalms, literally refers to "hiding one's face," and is used to describe a perceived distance from God. The hiddenness, in reality, is a function of the perceiver, not of God, whose essence is to be eternally available.

**How long can I hold back the proof in my chest?/אָנָה אֲשִׁית עֵצוֹת בְּנַפְשִׁי:** Literally, "how long can I place testimony within my soul?" Metzudat David glosses it as "how can I escape the thought that is in my heart all day long?"

**My heart will leap in joy when you respond to my cry for salvation/יִגַּל לִבִּי בִישׁוּעֶתְךָ:** The word *yeshua* means salvation, but that concept offers theological challenges. How can one understand the concept of salvation (*yeshua*) if one doesn't believe that God acts to compel events in the world, at least not in a simple sense? It must be, rather, that God responds to our cry (*shua*) by enlightening us so that we are able to see even our pain as existing within a relation with the Eternal and Holy.

### Psalm 14

**The walking corpse says/אָמַר נֶבֶל:** Among the many definitions of the root *naval* is corpse. Here, the person who commits wrongful deeds, believing there is no God, is likened to one who is dead. Ibn Ezra says these people are the opposite of the wise; believing there is no God their deeds become corrupt and they make their words rancid.

**All of them have turned away/הִתְעִיבוּ עָלֵיהָ:** The root *ta-av* is used to mean abomination, particularly in the ritual sense of being in a state of impurity and uncleanness. I have continued the metaphor from the first line, emphasizing the motif of decay. The phrase "crawling with worms" has been added to accentuate the connection between physical decay and spiritual corruption. This theme is continued in the word *na'alachu* later in the psalm, yet another word that suggests both physical and spiritual decay.

**Together, as one, they have grown rancid/יַחְדָּו נֶאֱלָחוּ:** Another verb that suggests decay. According to BDB, the root *alach*, which only appears in the passive tense, is related to an Arabic root that means "to turn sour."

**Because they do not call upon God, they will be paralyzed with endless fear/יְהוָה לֹא קָרְאוּ: פָּחַדוּ פָּחַד | הַשֵּׁם:** These two phrases are semantically and causally related. Because these people are unable to exist in relation to God, they will be struck continually with great fear. Note the repetition of the word for "fear" in both its noun and verb forms (*pachadu pachad*), meaning "they

will fear fear." The intensity of that repetition is what leads to the idea of "endless fear," by which I mean fear without clear source.

**saying, "Let God be their refuge"/כִּי יְהוָה מְחַסְהוּ:** This is the rhetoric of the wrongful--renouncing responsibility for the poor and afflicted by saying that such a person should turn toward God, not humanity, for response. The phrase literally means "because God is his refuge," but given the context the reference is clearly to the rhetoric of the taunters.

## Psalm 15

**who can dwell in your tent? Who can reside on your holy mountain?/מִי־יֵגוּר בְּאֶהְלֶךָ מִי־יִשְׁכֵּן/ בְּהַר קֹדֶשׁ:** The question, "who can dwell in your tent?" uses the same verb as that used in its noun form to refer to resident aliens, giving it a somewhat temporary or fragile quality. The second verb, *yishkon*, has the same root form as *shekhina* and *mishkan*, the first referring to the presence of God on earth (a later Rabbinic term with an abundance of mystical connotations) and the second referring to the tabernacle where God dwells in the wilderness. I see the reference as metaphors for types of relation to God, not references to an actual geographic location such as Zion.

**who takes an oath about wrongdoing without retracting out of fear/נִשְׁבַּע לְהַרְעוֹת וְלֹא יִמַר:** This verse is of uncertain meaning, mostly due to the final word. Another possible way of understanding the end of the line is related to the root *marar*, to be bitter. It would then refer to a person who takes an oath about another's wrongdoing without accompanying feelings of bitterness, anger or desire for revenge.

## Psalm 16

**A song like gold/מִכְתָּם:** A word of uncertain origin. Ibn Ezra reads it much the same way, "a psalm as esteemed as gold." The Talmud midrashically separates *mikhtam* into two words--*mach* and *tam*, meaning respectively "humble" and "pure or innocent." As such it describes the ideal relationship between the psalmist and God.

**chase after false gods/אַחַר מְהָרוּ:** Literally, they rush after others, interpreted by commentators as a reference to idols. The problem with idolatry, theologically speaking, is not that "God is a jealous God," but rather that idols fail to provide the happiness they promise, and instead, distort our desires, leading us not to contentment, but eventually to deep sadness.

**emotions/כְּלֵי־תִי:** The word is "kidneys," believed to be the place of emotions. Here, the emotions are clearly a reference to fear.

**place of my innermost glory/כְּבוֹדִי:** Literally, this means honor or glory, but also has the word for liver embedded within it. We find, as in the word *kilyoti* above, allusion to anatomical references within more conceptual ones. This is common in psalms, as physical entities and spiritual or mental ones often share the same root in Hebrew. The anatomical organs were thought to be the sites for various mental and emotional functions.

**the lasting contentment that comes from your right hand/נְעֻמֹת בְּיָמִינְךָ נֶצַח:** This is the truth that is valuable as gold alluded to at the beginning of the psalm—the knowledge that God's arm or presence is available to us always, even in times of great darkness and perceived divine absence.

## Psalm 17

**Listen, God, to what is right/שְׁמַעָה יְהוָה אֶצְדִּיק | צְדָקָה:** This can alternately be rendered as "Listen, God, who is just."

**your eyes pierce through my flesh/תַּחְזִינָה מֵיִשְׂרָיִם:** Literally, your eyes look in a straight line, but I read *mesharim* as referring here to a penetrating gaze. This reading is in keeping with Rashi who says, "If there is to me any merit, let your eyes see it clearly"

**make your kindnesses distinct/הַפְּלֵה חַסְדֶיךָ:** Rashi quotes a verse from Exodus 33:16 where the meaning of *niflinu*, a related word to *haflei* above, means to save. Rashi continues, "save with your right hand all who take refuge in you from those who rise against them." In context, however, this seems to be a plea for God to make divine kindness more visible.

**Our footsteps--now they surround us/אֲשֵׁרֵינוּ עֲתָה סָבְבוּנִי:** This is a shift into the present tense, infusing the plea with increased intensity and immediacy.

**look like a lion, greedy to tear off limbs/דָּמִינוּ כְּאַרְיֵה יִכְסֹף:** The word *kesef* means silver, but unsurprisingly its verb form comes to mean greed.

## Psalm 18

**I will love you the way a mother loves her womb's child/אֶרְחַמְךָ יְהוָה:** The root is *rachem*, from which are derived both the words womb and compassion. In this context, then, its theological meaning is difficult to interpret. What could it mean to have compassion on God? Rashi, quoting to Lev. 19:18 sees it as a term for *ahava*, or love. I have translated it to emphasize the unconditional love a mother has for her offspring, and the word womb is added only to emphasize the etymological root. Clearly, this kind of love is not solely biological.

**my resting down of weapons/וּמְצוּדָתִי:** From a root that means to hunt: A *metzudah*, then, is a place where one finds safety from threat of war.

**my high place off from war/מִשְׁגְּבִי:** Means a high, inaccessible place. Here it refers to a place of escape from threat of the enemy.

**surrounded me/אֶפְפוּנִי:** Related to the word *ofen* or wheel, meaning they circle around constantly.

**worthlessness and ruin/בְּלִיעַל:** I have translated this word to encompass two of its possible

meanings, as they are both resonant to the sense of the psalm.

**underworld/שָׂאוֹל**: The word refers to death, but also to absence from God. As such it can also represent a living death, a descent to feeling of dullness or remoteness from the divine.

**because anger burned within him/כִּי חָרָה לוֹ**: The word *charah* refers to a burning anger, a burning sensation in the throat arising from rage and pain (BDB). The pain of God is at the oppression of the righteous and innocent.

**and frenzied them/וַיְהַמְּם**: My translation is borrowed from Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer.

**pure as corn/כָּבֵר**: I have translated this, punning on the verb *barrar* meaning to purify and the word *bar* meaning corn.

**I will not shrug off/לֹא־אָסִיר מְנִי**: This seems to be a phrase with ellipsis, literally meaning I will not turn them away from me.

**I have been honest with him/וְאֵהִי תָמִים עִמוֹ**: The adjective *tamim* can mean simple, honest or innocent. All are possible readings of the line.

**guarding myself from twisting away from your will/וְאֶשְׁתַּמֵּר מֵעוֹנִי**: Literally, I kept myself from my sin. The word *avon* is related to the root *avah* meaning to bend, turn or twist away.

**With the kindhearted you make yourself kind...with the twisted you respond in twists/עַם־חֶסֶד תִּתְחַסֵּד עַם־גְּבֵר תָּמִים תִּתַּמֵּם: כִּז עַם־נָבֵר תִּתְבָּרַר וְעַם־עֲקֹשׁ תִּתְפַּתֵּל**: A wonderful line. The theological import is that the way we treat others is the way we experience God.

**I did not turn back until I made them obsolete/וְלֹא־אָשׁוּב עַד־כְּלוּתָם**: Literally, I will not turn back until they are finished, until they come to an end. More metaphorically, we can read this as a conquering of our fears or obstacles.

**I struck them until they could no longer rise/וְלֹא־יָכְלוּ קוּם**: As with many expressions of desire for violence or vengeance, these words can be read metaphorically as a yearning for a world in which wrongfulness and oppression exist no longer.

**turned toward me the back of their necks/וְאֵיבֵי נִתְתָּה לִי עֶרְףְךָ**: You give their necks to me--in other words, you give me the possibility to kill them, but I do not--reminiscent of David's compassion on Saul when he fell into his hands. He cut off a piece of his cloak, then regretted even that, telling his men not to kill the one anointed by God (see 1 Samuel 24:5-8).

**I annihilated into silence/אֶצְמִיתָם**: Literally, I annihilated them. But the root is related to an Arabic word meaning "to make speechless or silent" (BDB).

**People I don't know now serve me/עַם לֹא־יָדַעְתִּי יַעֲבֹדוּנִי:** This can only be rightfully celebrated insofar as David, as king, represents the will of God.

## Psalm 19

**night after night breathes out knowledge/וּלְיַלָּה לְלַיְלָה יַחְוֶה־דַּעַת:** The root form of this verb *yichayeh* means to tell or declare, but is similar in form to the imperfect tense of verb *chayah* meaning to live or exist.

**There is no word or phrase in which the voice of God's creation is not heard/אֵין אָמַר וְאֵין קוֹלָם בְּלִי נִשְׁמַע קוֹלָם:** The voice here refers to nature, testimony of God's presence.

**rope of their hopefulness/קָוָם:** *Kav* means line, and *kavah* means to hope. Here I have combined them.

**like an athlete/כְּגִבּוֹר:** Literally, "like a strong man." The translation of this phrase follows the understanding of the Conservative Movement's prayer book, Siddur Sim Shalom.

**Your teaching is everywhere, reviving the soul/תּוֹרַת יְהוָה תְּמִימָה מְשִׁיבַת נַפְשׁ:** The word *torah* means both the written (or oral) Torah, and in a more general way, teaching. Here, the teaching is envisioned as emanating from nature itself. The word *t'mimah*, meaning pure, whole, complete, is here envisioned as all-present, emanating from the natural world.

**taken together, they prove righteous/צַדִּיקוֹ יַחְדָּו:** I read this to mean that while one may question the justice of individual events in one's personal or cultural history, taken all together, God's justice is found manifest in the world. When seen over the spectrum of individual or collective history, the forces of good are stronger and more predominant than those of evil.

**keeping them alive brings intrinsic reward/בְּשִׁמְרָם עֵקֶב רַב:** Literally, "keeping them brings good consequences." One conception of righteous action in Judaism, though certainly not the only one, is that of *mitzvah lishmah*, doing a mitzvah for the joy of doing it for its own sake, not out of hope for divine or extrinsic reward.

## Psalm 20

**will send forth your help/יִסְעֲדֶךָ:** The root of the verb means "to sustain," including to provide with food--or in this case, spiritual sustenance.

**The Source of Hope answers all your questions/יִמְלֵא יְהוָה כָּל־מִשְׁאָלוֹתֶיךָ:** God will respond to all your requests, or, as I read it, God will answer or fulfill all your questions, as that makes more sense to me from a theological point of view. Certainly God does not give us everything we want, but in some sense God alleviates our yearning.

**These with chariot...but we through name of our Upholder are brought awestruck to remember/**בְּשֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ נִזְכִּיר/ **אַלֶּה בָּרֶכֶב וְאֶלֶה בְּסוּסִים וְאִנְחָנוּ |** For some it requires force or power to be brought into awe, but the higher spiritual state is awareness of God's essence or goodness. The word *shem*, as elsewhere in the psalm, refers to God's name, but from a biblical perspective also refers to God's essence.

## Psalm 21

**Because you anticipated his wants with blessings of goodness/**כִּי־תִקְדַּמְנוּ בְּרִכּוֹת טוֹב/ A difficult phrase to translate. I have translated it in keeping with the spirit of the preceding line. Rashi reads it, "For before I asked anything from you, you anticipated me with your blessings..." (referencing 2 Samuel 7:12-13)

**He asked from you only life and you gave him the length of days under witness of time/**חַיִּים שָׁאַל מִמֶּךָ נִתְתָּה לוֹ אַרְךְ יָמִים עוֹלָם וְעַד/ He asked only life from you, but you gave him a reputation that will last forever; he asked only for life in this world, but you gave him life that is eternal.

**His honor is great because of your saving power/**גְּדוֹל כְּבוֹדוֹ בִּישׁוּעֶתְךָ/ The glory or honor of a ruler is only in relation to the embodiment of the will of God.

**They will feel your presence as a blazing oven/**תִּשְׂתִּימוּ | כְּתִנּוֹר אֵשׁ לַעַת פְּנִיךָ יְהוָה בְּאִפּוֹ/ You have made him as uncomfortable as with an oven of fire at the time when you turn your face (or attention) toward him. The very presence of God makes the wrongful uneasy.

## Psalm 22

**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?/**אֵלֵי אֱלֹהֵי לָמָּה עֲזַבְתָּנִי/ These, of course, are the phrase in the Christian Bible of Christ's words on the cross--though Christ used the spoken language of time, the Aramaic *zavachtani*.

**and can find for myself no rest/**וְלֹא־דוּמְיָה/ Literally, no quiet.

**their mouths fall in astonishment/**יִפְטִירוּ בְּשִׁפְהָ/ Literally, they spread their lips.

**Into the dust of death you have thrown me like trash/**וְלִעֲפָר־מֹת תִּשְׁפְּתֵנִי/ The verb root *shaph* is related to the word for garbage, *ashpah*.

**antelope/**רְמִים/ An uncertain animal. It has been variously translated as unicorn, antelope or stag.

**I will shine out your praise/**אֶהְלֵלְךָ/ The root of the verb here, a common root in psalms, and in fact the root of the word for psalms themselves, means "praise." But it also means "to make

something shine." I have played on this double senses often throughout the translation.

**For God does not spurn the affliction cries of the poor/כִּי לֹא-בָזָה וְלֹא שָׁקַץ עֲנִיָּוֹת עֲנִי:** The verb *shiqatz* is used repeatedly in Leviticus in its noun form to refer to unclean animals. Here it is used as an antithesis to the way God treats the poor--unlike some people, who do indeed treat them like unclean animals.

**May their hearts always be hopeful/יְחִי לְבַבְכֶם לְעַד:** Literally, may your hearts be alive to God forever, alive to God's wonder and praise.

**Those who live at the ends of the earth will remember and turn back to their Creator/יִזְכְּרוּ וְיָשִׁבוּ אֶל-יְהוָה:** They will remember the acts that God has done and turn back in repentance.

### Psalm 23

**reviving my soul/נַפְשִׁי יִשׁוּב:** This should be taken in the sense of renewal--God returns to me the vitality of my life. The latter reading is in keeping with Rashi, who says, "my soul that is expiring from trials and fleeing--you restore it to how it was in the beginning."

**And when I walk through the valley, overshadowed by death/גַּם כִּי-אֵלֶךְ בְּגִיא צְלֵמוֹת:** It is unclear whether the reference is actually to approaching death, or to the thought and fear of death. I think it can be read as either.

### Psalm 24

**Who can ascend the eternal mountain? Who can rise to the place where holiness dwells?/מִי-יַעֲלֶה בְּהַר יְהוָה וּמִי-יִקוּם בַּמָּקוֹם קָדְשׁוֹ:** While these are references to specific places in Jewish cosmology, signifying Sinai and Zion respectively (or the Temple Mount and Zion), at a more fundamental level they express a real human desire for closeness and proximity to God. Note the parallel to Psalm 15.

**God who is unflinching during war/יְהוָה גִּבּוֹר מִלְחָמָה:** At the simple level, the *gibor* seems to refer to God fighting on the battlefield. But how to accord that with a view of God's goodness? The answer, I think, is that it is not God who is fighting the war, but God who remains steadfast during war, a source of comfort and guidance to all who seek out divine presence.

### Psalm 25

**I lift up my soul/נַפְשִׁי אֶשָּׂא:** Rashi sees this as an act of focusing the heart in prayer, while others see it as a willingness to offer even one's life for the sanctification of God (see *Minchat Shai*). Rabbi Moshe, as repeated in Ibn Ezra, says that it means to give one's life as a gift.

**Do the same for all who put their hope in you/גַּם כָּל-קוֹיֵךְ לֹא יִבְשׁוּ:** A movement of the heart

from making a request on behalf of oneself to making a request on behalf of others.

**Your roads, God, let me know them/דַּרְכֵיךָ יְהוָה הוֹדִיעֵנִי:** This echoes the plea by Moses to know God in Exodus 33:13. Radak refers to this variety of knowing as scientific, that is, a knowledge of nature and causality along with an understanding of how both reflect the handiwork of God.

**forgive my guilt, for it is overwhelming/וְסַלַחַת לְעוֹנֵי כִי רַב־הוּא:** A phrase repeated in the Yom Kippur service as a way of invoking atonement and beseeching forgiveness.

**Who is the one who reveres God?/מִי זֶה הָאִישׁ יִרְאֵהוּ:** The phraseology echoes that of the previous psalm, where there the question was *mi zeh melekh ha-kavod* (Who is this king of glory?), referring to awe at the nature of God. Here the focus has shifted to awe at the potential of humankind.

**for you release my legs from the snare/כִּי הוּא־יוֹצִיא מִרְשֶׁת רַגְלִי:** What does the snare represent? Radak sees this as alternatively the snare of sin or the snare of enemies. I would argue that, given the theme of education, the snare can also be seen as representing wrong ways of thinking about and conceptualizing God.

**lead me now out/הוֹצִיאֵנִי:** This verb is used frequently to refer to the exodus from *Mitzrayim* or the mythological Egypt, suggesting release into freedom.

**Simplicity and clarity will watch over me/תַּם־וְיִשָּׁר יִצְרוּנִי:** What does the word *tam* or simplicity mean in a psalm that yearns for wisdom? It must be that true wisdom brings us, ultimately, to greater simplicity and straight-forward truth.

**save them from all of their suffering, from their guilt and confusion and sin/פְּדֵה־אֱלֹהִים/אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכָּל צָרוֹתָיו:** I have chosen to translate *tzarotav* not as enemies, but rather as a reference to sin in its many dimensions: the confusion that brings it about, the intrinsic guilt it provokes, and the alienation from God that precipitates it.

## Psalm 26

**for I have walked with integrity/כִּי־אָנִי בְּתַמִּי הֵלַכְתִּי:** Alternatively, "I have walked with simplicity."

**Scrutinize me, God, put me to the test/בְּחַנְנֵי יְהוָה וְנִסְנִי:** Malbim sees the first verb as analogous to the smelting of metal in order to arrive at intrinsic properties of the substance itself, and the second verb as analogous to experiments that take one into unknown regions to teach a new truth. I see it similarly. The first verb is a request for God to scrutinize what already exists in the psalmist's heart, and the second signifies a willingness to uncover one's essence through trial or experience.

**Smelt like metal my emotions and mind/צָרְפָה [צָרְפָה] כְּלִיּוֹתַי וְלִבִּי:** The word *tzarfah* means to smelt or refine. In later Hebrew it means "to combine," thereby giving a different reading: i.e., bring my intellect and heart together so that I can serve you more fully.

**I have walked back and forth in your truth/וְהִתְהַלַּכְתִּי בְּאֱמֶתְךָ:** I have walked with a true understanding of God, not a false one.

**In the company of the callous, I did not dwell/מִתֵּי-שׂוֹא:** Another way of understanding this might be: "I have not dwelt with those who die with a feeling of futility, since I have come to know your name."

**Those who conceal their wrongs, I do not enter their midst/וְעַם-נִעְלָמִים לֹא אָבוֹא:** The concealment, theologically speaking, can be both to others and to oneself. Those who have the most difficulty with repentance are, unsurprisingly, those who cannot see their own faults.

**I have avoided gatherings of the violent/שִׁנְאֵתִי קָהַל מְרֻעִים:** Literally, I have hated the congregation of the wrongful. I have translated this as "avoid", in keeping with the spirit of the psalm, and in keeping with a theology based not on cultivating hatred or division, but on promoting compassion.

**I wash my hands clean/אָרַחַץ בְּנִקְיוֹן כַּפָּי:** A reference both to spiritual cleanliness and the related ritual practice of washing one's hands.

**those whose hands contemplate selfishness/אֲשֶׁר-בִּידֵיהֶם זְמָה:** Literally, "in whose hands are harmful schemes." How does contemplation of selfish devisings rest in one's hands? When one does not use one's mind to evaluate one's actions, one's hands seem to take action of their own accord.

**My foot is planted on level ground/רַגְלִי עֹמְדָה בְּמִישׁוֹר בְּמִקְהָלִים אֲבָרַךְ יְהוָה:** This line hearkens back to the first line, "for I have walked with integrity." A *mishor* is a level plain with no stumbling blocks.

**I fall to my knees, in awestruck praise of God/אֲבָרַךְ:** My translation puns on the double meanings of the word *barukh* meaning both to bless and to bend the knee.

## Psalm 27

**whom should I fear?/מִמִּי אֶפְחָד:** A resonance can be found in Psalm 56: "What can a mere mortal do to me?"

**Don't tear me out by the roots/אַל-תִּטְּשֵׁנִי:** A play here, since a noun form of the verb means a tendril of a vine; the phrase in other words comes to mean, "don't uproot me from yourself, you who are my foundation."

**My father and mother may leave me, but you have gathered me in/ כִּי־אָבִי וְאִמִּי עָזְבוּנִי וַיְהוֶה יַאֲסֹפֵנִי:** The line can be read as a reference to parents who abandon one through neglect or abuse. I tend to read it primarily, though, as allusion to loss of one's parents through death. Unlike parents, whose love can at best be available during their lives, God's love exists forever.

### Psalm 28

**don't deafen yourself to my prayer. /אֶל־תִּחַרְשׁ מִמְּנִי:** Or, to use another reading of the root *charash*, don't engrave yourself away from me as a permanent state of alienation.

**I will be compared to those who descend the well of death/וְנִמְשַׁלְתִּי עִם־יֹרְדֵי בֹר:** This is the pit of death or Sheol, representing both actual death and the alienation from God that represents death-in-life.

**Repay them according to their deeds/וְאֶל־מַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו יִהְרָסֻם:** The verse literally calls for the wrongful to be destroyed, but the idea is that they should be recompensed according to the wrong they have done. Besides exemplifying a natural human desire for vengeance, the verse is also expressive of a desire for the wrongful to experience the result their wrongs so that they might refrain from enacting such wrongs in the future.

**Guide them like sheep, lifting them over obstacles their forever/וַיִּרְעֵם וַיִּנְשָׂאֵם עַד־הָעוֹלָם:** Here, as elsewhere in the psalms, God is compared to a shepherd. Note that the word *nasah* means to lift up and carry, but also means "to forgive."

### Psalm 29

**Give praise to God for glory and strength/כְּבוֹד שְׁמוֹ:** Literally, for glory is God's name or essence. The word for glory (*kavod*) is used particularly to refer to the presence of God dwelling in the tabernacle or midst of the people.

**convulses/ יַחֲוִיל:** The wording of this translation is borrowed from the ArtScroll translation. Literally it means to dance or shake.

### Psalm 30

**A Song for the Dedication of the House, by David/מִזְמוֹר שִׁיר חֲנֻכַּת הַבַּיִת לְדָוִד:** This is often read, "Song for the Dedication of the Temple," but of course, the Temple was not completed in David's time. Rashi explains that David composed the psalm for the time when the Temple would be erected. Malbim, along the lines of my own translation, sees the psalm as addressed to the Temple of the body, since the body itself is a place of worship of God.

**I will raise you in praise, my Solace, for you have raised me/אֶרְוִמְךָ יְהוָה כִּי דָלִיתָנִי:** Note the

parallelism here. The first word means "I will raise you up," and the second verb comes from a root that means "to raise from a well," as with water. The sentiment, then, is "I will raise your name in praise, for you have raised me from the depths."

**I am confounded, confused/הייתי נבהל**: I have included two related meanings of the word *bahal*. Another understanding one might use is "terrified."

**So that my depths might sing out to you and never be stilled/למען יזמרו כבוד ולא ידם**: A strange and difficult phrase to translate. *Kavod* can mean glory, innermost essence, or respect.

### Psalm 31

**For you are my cliff and rest from pursuit/כי סלעי ומצודתי**: The same word, *metzudati* is often translated above as stronghold. It comes from the word *tzid*, to hunt, and is then a place where one rests from battle and gathers new spirit.

**In your hand I place my spirit for safe-keeping/בידך אפקיד רוחי**: A version of this is found in the prayer Adon Olam, which is included in many prayer services: *b'yado afkid ruchi*.

**I have rejected those who uphold emptiness and vapor/שנאתי השמרים הבלי-שוא**: This refers to the essence of idolotry: worship of that which is not of ultimate worth.

**My eye is wasted away with anger/עששה בכעס עיני**: The verb *ashasha* is a strong one, suggesting actual physical rot and deterioration.

**My strength falters because of my wrongs/כשל בעוני כחי**: Literally, "my strength has faltered because of my sin." Rabbi Soloveitchik (in his commentary on the Days of Awe) describes one of the effects of sin as depleting one's power to effect creative action in the world.

**my bones have been eaten away/ועצמי עששו**: The same verb is used here as the one used earlier in the psalm to describe the deterioration of the eyes.

**I have become invisible as the dead-hearted/נשכחתי כמת מלב**: I have been forgotten like those whose heart is dead and who go around as living images of the dead. Radak interprets it differently. He reads, "My acquaintances are so afraid [of my appearance] that they have given up on me and pushed me out of their hearts, as though I were dead."

**the voice of my plea, the tone of desperation when I cried for help/קול תחנוני בשועי אלים**: The phrase "tone of desperation" is used to express what can more literally be translated as a cry for salvation. Here, though, the phrasing emphasizes the intensity of one's plea.

### Psalm 32

**When I ploughed the fields in silence/כִּי הֶחֱרַשְׁתִּי:** My translation is build on a multi-layered reading of the root *charash*. On the one hand it means to be silent, an obvious theme in the psalm. On the other hand, it means to plough. I have combined both to give the image of one who continues to work in silence, even though suffering greatly inside.

**the juice of my breast went dry, like the brittle fruit of summer—Selah/נֶהְפַךְ לְשֵׁדִי בְחַרְבְּנִי—Selah/קִיץ סָלָה:** Ibn Ezra says the oil is like the spit, or the life of a person, that when depleted means that person is approaching death. But *shad* most literally means breast, and so I have translated it in accordance with the spirit of the Ibn Ezra interpretation, but incorporating its simple bodily reference.

**And you forgave my sins and errors—Selah/וְאַתָּה נִשְׂאתָ עֹנֵן חַטָּאתַי:** Literally, you lifted from me the burden of my sins.

**at any time they can find/לְעֵת מְצָא:** Similar phrases are found elsewhere in the Psalms, the rest of the bible, and in the prayers (another similar example is *eyt ratzon*, a time of favor). Is it possible that there are times acceptable for prayer and times less acceptable? Ibn Ezra, quoting Isaiah 55:56 says that indeed, one must search out God when God can be found. But he then gives another explanation: The phrase can point to a time when the person praying finds the heart free from distraction.

**You protect me from anguish/מִצָּר תִּצְרְעֵנִי:** *Mitzar titzreini*: A play exists between the words *tzar* (narrowness, affliction) and *titzreini* (protect me).

**I will enlighten and illumine the path we should walk/אֲשַׁכִּילְךָ | וְאוֹרְךָ בְּדַרְךְ-זוֹ תֵּלֶךְ:** The psalmist now turns to lighting the way for others through conveying personal experience.

**Don't be like a horse, a mule without understanding/אֶל-תְּהִי כֶסוּס כִּפְרָד אִין הַבֵּין:** Those who are simply led around by falsehoods are like a horse pulled by a halter. Those who become wise are free. The bridle symbolizes a false sense of God that the psalmist is trying to correct.

**In such a way God cannot approach you/בִּל קֶרֶב אֵלֶיךָ:** The subject here is unstated. I take it to be God or wisdom, neither of which can approach those who are led by false premises.

**Many are the pains of those who persist in their wrongs/רַבִּים מְכַאוּבִים לְרָשָׁע:** Compare this to other places, such as Psalm 34, where it is the righteous who are said to suffer greatly.

### Psalm 33

**make music out of sadness that blasts forth with joy/הִיטִיבוּ נֶגֶן בְּתַרְעוּעָה:** The root *tarah* means to give forth a broken, sobbing sound. The sense then, perhaps, is one of urging the listeners to make even the melody of their suffering better by accompanying it with psalm.

**The one who shapes their hearts to unity of purpose/הַיֹּצֵר יַחַד לְבָבָם:** The word "heart" is in the

singular, suggesting the communal heart---or perhaps that which is universal in the heart of each individual.

## Psalm 34

**לְדוֹד בְּשִׁנּוֹתוֹ אֶת־טַעְמוֹ לִפְנֵי/אֲבִימֶלֶךְ:** The episode refers to a combination of episodes in I Samuel 21. Avimelech is a priest who David asks for bread, falsely claiming that the king has ordered him on a secret mission. Later he asks for a sword under the same pretense. The phrase "he disguised his purpose" is from an episode later in the chapter where David, afraid of King Achish of Gat pretends he is crazy so the king will ignore him.

**וְיִשְׁמְחוּ/וְיִשְׁמְחוּ עִנְיָם וְיִשְׁמְחוּ:** A play on sound here (*yism'u* and *yismachu*), a parallelism between hearing and rejoicing.

**וּמִכָּל־מַגּוֹרוֹתַי/From all my night fears:** The root *gur* means not simply fear, but to dread, connotating a nightmarish feeling.

**וּפְנֵיהֶם אֶל־יִחְפְּרוּ/their faces are never darkened by shame:** Literally, "their faces are not ashamed." The word "darkened" has been added for emphasis and contrast.

**חַנּוּהַ מַלְאָךְ־יְהוָה סָבִיב לִירְאָיו/Angels of God camp around those awed by wonder:** An angel (or messenger) of God camps around all those who revere the divine, the idea being that God sends an angel or messenger to each person individually according to their actions in the world. The angel is probably best understood as a messenger of God's presence.

**טַעְמוֹ וּרְאוּ כִי־טוֹב יְהוָה/Taste and see-- how good is our Upholder!:** This can alternately be translated: "Use your reason (*ta-am* means both reason and taste) and see how good God is," which is how Radak understands it. My translation suggests that it is by using one's sensory perception that one can come to know God. Note the play between this line and the introductory line of the psalm, which also has the word *ta-am*, there interpreted contextually as meaning purpose.

**כִּי אֵין מַחְסוֹר לִירְאָיו/There is no lack for those who hold you in awe:** Given the context alluded to in the superscription, the statement is quite powerful. Even when one's life is under threat, there is no lack for those who hold God to be the supreme object of awe. This statement, used in the blessing after meals, is held by some to be problematic, since they argue that the righteous (who hold God in awe) are just as likely to suffer as anyone else. The real intention of the line, I think, is spiritual. Only in that dimension is there is no sense of lack for those who understand God as the ultimate object of praise.

**מִי־הָאִישׁ הַחֹפֵץ חַיִּים אֲהַב יָמִים לְרֵאוֹת טוֹב: יָד נָצַר לְשׁוֹנֵךְ מֵרַע וּשְׁפָתֶיךָ מִדְּבַר מְרָמָה: טו סוּר מֵרַע/Who is the one who desires life, days of seeing only good? Keep your tongue from speaking wrong, your lips from duplicity. Turn from wrong and do good. Seek out peace and pursue it:**

**וְעָשָׂה טוֹב בְּקִשׁ שְׁלוֹם וְרַדְפָּהוּ:** The psalm interestingly sidesteps its question by replacing it with an injunctive toward action--in other words, if you love days of seeing only good, you should enact good by seeking out peace and pursuing it. Rashi says the word "seek" refers to searching for peace in the place where you live and the word "pursue" refers to the rest of the world in addition. Radak sees the phrase as referring to a search for peace within one's own heart.

**The face of the Sustainer turns toward wrongdoers--to remove their remembrance from the earth/זְכָרָם מֵאֶרֶץ זָכָר:** This is the ultimate biblical punishment of the wrongful--their memory will vanish from the earth. What, then, is immortality? At the very least, it is knowing that one's good deeds transcend one's life and that one's sparks continue to bring blessings to generations to come.

**When the people cry out, God listens. From all their afflictions they are delivered safely away/מִכָּל צָרוֹתֵם הִצִּילָם:** Rashi sees this verse as referring to the righteous ones, but Ibn Ezra sees it, as I do, as referring to the wrongful.

### Psalm 35

**Contend, God, against my contenders/לָחֵם אֶת־לִחְמִי:** Samson Rafael Hirsch points out that David does not refer to them as his enemies, but rather as those that contend with him. By doing so, he emphasizes the fact that they are the ones fighting with him, not he with them.

**may they dig for escape/וַיִּחְפְּרוּ:** The root of the verb means both "to dig" and "to be disgraced." The two are not, one might note, conceptually unrelated, as evidenced by the English phrase "to bury one's head in the sand." Given the literalness of the preceding phrase, I have translated this to reflect a more literal depiction of despair.

**May the dark of devastation come upon them suddenly/תְּבוֹאָהוּ שׁוֹאָה לֹא יָדָע:** Some, like Rashi, translate the word *shoah* as darkness; Radak translates it as confusion, and Ibn-Ezra translates it as that which leaves its beholder struck speechless. Elsewhere, as with the contemporary usage of the term, it means unbelievable destruction, and is, in fact, the word now used for the Holocaust. The literal translation suggests that this is a devastation not previously known, until that moment unimaginable.

**in divine salvation/בִּישׁוּעָת:** There is be a pun between the word *shoah* above and *yeshuato* here, the first referring to devastation, the second referring to the salvation of God.

**While denying God, the blasphemers eat cake/בְּחִנְפֵי לַעְגֵי מְעוּג:** The root *chanaf* means to be polluted, profane (BDB). Note the play between the next words, *la-agei* and *maog*.

**Don't let them exclaim in their heart: "Ha! We have triumphed." Don't let them boast: "We have swallowed them whole/בְּלַעְנוּהוּ אֶל־יְאִמְרוּ בְּלִבָּם הָאִחַ בְּפִשְׁנוּ אֶל־יְאִמְרוּ:** Literally, "don't let them say, our soul!" The idea of triumph is implied.

## Psalm 36

**Transgression speaks to Restlessness in my heart/נַאֲמֵ-פֶשַׁע לְרָשָׁע בְּקֶרֶב לִבִּי אֵין-פֶּחַד אֱלֹהִים/לִנְגַד עֵינָיו:** Note that *pesha* (Transgression) and *rasha* (Restlessness (or more literally wrongfulness)) are personified as characters existing inside us. I have translated *rasha* as Restlessness because the psalm is a dialogue between the force urging transgression and that which is most receptive to it in the human heart.

**Transgression speaks smoothly, looking him in the eye, saying that from the wrongs of Restlessness God will hold him in eternal disdain/כִּי-הֶחְלִיק אֵלָיו בְּעֵינָיו לְמִצָּא עוֹנוֹ לְשָׁנָא:** The verb *hechaliq* is translated by Rashi to mean smooth words, words of flattery. Rashi continues, "[he says that] God will discover his sin and begin to hate him. Another possible understanding of Transgression's argument is that any wrong we have done has already distanced us from God, leading to the lazy logic, why not commit another?"

**He has forsaken contemplation of the good/חָדַל לְהִשְׁכִּיל לְהִיטִיב/Or: he has ceased to enlighten himself about what causes good.**

**Don't let the foot of arrogance come upon me/אַל-תְּבוֹאֲנִי רֶגֶל גְּאוּה/** According to Malbim, the prideful does not refer to one's enemies, but to the pride or arrogance within.

## Psalm 37

**Don't grow heated and angry/אַל-תִּתְחַר/** The root *charah* means both anger and heat.

**and you will be given your your heart's desire/וְיִתֶּן-לְךָ מִשְׁאַלֶּת לִבְךָ/** This actually reads that you will be given in accordance to you *mishalot* or questions. It is not that God will give you everything you want, but will rather calm your confusions.

**Be silent and wait for the Creator/דוֹם לִיהוָה וְהִתְחוּלַל לוֹ/** The phrase means "be silent (*dom*) before God", but midrashically we can also translate *domeh* as "Become like God!" and the second word, *hitcholel*, as "make one's self open to God."

**they will inherit the earth/הֵמָּה יִרְשׁוּ-אֶרֶץ/** Phrases such as this have been used in perverse ways to justify expulsion of others from their land. The intention seems rather to suggest that those who act rightly will live secure in their relationship with God.

**I have been a youth and I have been old, but I have never seen those who are just forsaken or their children seeking bread/נַעַר וְהָיִיתִי גַם-זָקֵן וְלֹא-רָאִיתִי צָדִיק נֹעֵזב וְזָרְעוֹ מִבְּקֶשׁ-לֶחֶם/** This phrase, found in the blessing after meals has proved very problematic to some. Of course we know that the righteous are just as likely to lack sustenance as the unjust. We must rather be talking about spiritual sustenance. Samson Rafael Hirsch notes that the righteous, even if they are poor will never have to ask for bread, for they will have friends enough to help them.

## Psalm 38

**A psalm by David, a reminder/להזכיר:** Towards whom is the reminder directed? To oneself? To God? Radak reads it as addressed to those to suffer to pray to God just as David did. As such, it is a reminder to oneself to remain in contact with God even throughout times of severe affliction.

**There is no contentment in my flesh because of your indignation, no peace in my bones because of my sin/מתם בבשרי מפני זעמך אין-שלום בעצמי מפני חטאתי:** Note that the source of blame here is ambiguous. Equally accountable is God for divine anger, and the psalmist for his sins. This line marks a transition from focusing on God's anger as the external source of one's troubles to looking inward at one's internal spiritual state.

**I have become twisted and distorted beyond measure/נעויתי שחתי עד-מאד:** Note that the first verb here comes from the root *avah*, from which derives one of the words for sin, but which also means "to be bent or distorted." Here, it is constructed in the passive tense to show helplessness in the face of one's drive toward wrongful acts.

## Psalm 39

**to the beloved/לידיתון:** There is no small amount of controversy over the meaning of this word. Yeditun was a Levite singer during the time of David (see I Chron. 16:38, 41, 42; 25:1, 3, 6; II Chron. 5:12. He was also one of the three choir masters in the Temple. Some contend that the word refers to a musical instrument. Lastly, some think the word is derived from the root *yadah*, meaning to thank or confess, and so see the word as part of a confession ritual (Encyclopedia Judaica). But to make things more complicated, the three psalms that have the word Yeditun also have another attribution (Psalms 39 and 62 to David, Psalm 77 to Asaf), leading many to think that the word cannot refer to a person. Finally, however, *yedid* means "beloved" and some believe *yeditun* to be an alternate form of the word, which is how I have translated it here, expressive of a longing for God.

**I was tormented with silence/נאלמתי דומיה:** This means something like "I was silenced with silence," but *duma* or *dom* can also mean 'still' as in Joshua 10:12-13, or struck dumb as in Ezekiel 15:16. In particular, I wanted to evoke the fact that the psalmist's silence was a self-imposed attempt at restraint.

**I remained silent even in the face of good/החשיתי מטוב:** The word *hechashiti* means silent or inactive. Notice all the words for silence in the psalm's Hebrew, compared to the relative parsimony of such terms in English. I was unable to figure out a way to translate all these types of silence differently.

**My pain churned turbid inside me/וכאבי נעכר:** The word *nekar* means to churn or to be troubled. I wanted to convey a sense of both.

**so I will know how to restrain myself/אֲדַעַה מִה־חֲדַל אֲנִי:** Note the similar sounds of the words *chadal*, *cheled* and *hevel*. The three mean respectively forbearance, duration of life and futility, the three central themes of the psalm.

**Rather all is futility, all human beliefs---Selah!/אֶךְ-כָּל-הֶבֶל כָּל-אָדָם נֹצֵב סֶלָה:** The repeated use of the word *hevel* [futility] seems a possible allusion to Kohelet, Ecclesiastes. One can also find parallels in subject matter. In particular, the theme of gaining wealth to no purpose is common to both texts.

**Take your touch from me/הִסֵּר מֵעָלַי נִגְעָךְ:** I translated *nigekha* as 'touch', one of its root's meanings, rather than 'plague' or 'stroke' which are common translations. In part, I wanted to emphasize the anthromorphization of God, such an important motif in the psalm. Seeing God with human attributes is almost always used to convey a particular intensity (or longing for intensity) of relation between humanity and God. The psalmist cries out that God's presence seems to cause only suffering.

**Turn your gaze from me/הֲשַׁע מִמְּנִי:** Some commentators note that this psalm differs radically from other psalms where the speaker is yearning for God to turn toward him and behold his suffering. Here the psalmist explicitly asks God to turn away. For contrast, look at Psalm 25, one of the many psalms where the psalmist asks for God to look toward him (see Frederik Lindstrom, "Suffering and Sin: Interpretations of Sin in the Individual Complaint Psalms," p.254)

## Psalm 40

**from the slippery slime of mud/מַטִּיט הַיּוֹן:** Malbim translates this as quicksand, with the implication being that the more a person sins, the harder it is to extricate oneself.

**you softened your ears toward me/אֲזַנַיִם כָּרִיתָ לִּי:** I translate this from the word *kar* meaning "lamb" or "soft."

**in the scroll of the book that is written upon my body/בְּמַגֵּלְת־סֵפֶר כְּתוּב עָלַי:** Malbim says this refers to that which is imprinted upon the heart. In one way or another, it seems to metaphorically represent the incorporation of God's principles into one's very flesh. It is reminiscent of lines in Birkhat Ha-Mazon, the blessing after meals: "[We thank you God] for your covenant that you have engraved in our flesh."

**You are the Creator—don't withhold from me your compassion/לֹא-תִכְלָא רַחֲמֶיךָ מִמְּנִי:** The same verb is used as the one previously referring to the psalmist being unable to restrain one's lips. Here the psalmist pleads with God not to restrain divine kindness.

## Psalm 41

**They will be content on the land/יֵאֲשֵׁר [וְאֲשֵׁר] בְּאֶרֶץ:** The verb is variously translated as

"happy" or "blessed," but also has a sense of meaning "to go on, to continue." The sense, then, is of one who continues in happiness. In other words, one for whom happiness is not fleeting.

**on the sickbed of sadness/על-עֶרְשׁ דְּוֵי:** The word *d'vai* means illness, but particularly in the emotional sense of being depressed or uneasy in one's flesh.

**The struggles of their convalescence will be made sweet/כָּל-מִשְׁכְּבוֹ הַפֶּכֶת בְּחַלְיוֹ:** A difficult phrase to translate. The root *chalah* means sickness, so some have translated this as invocation of God's power to turn the bed of a healthy person to that of someone ill. But the same root found in the *piel* form has an Arabic etymology meaning to make the face of a person pleasant or sweet (BDB). And *chalya* means jewelery, as in Hosea 2:15, another connotation of beauty. I see this line, then, as exemplifying not God's power to bring about illness, but God's power to comfort those who are suffering.

**His heart gathers sorrow to it like bees gather honey/לְבוֹ יִקְבְּצֶ-אֵן לֹ:** "Like bees gather honey" is a poetic flourish.

saying, "worthlessness is poured over him..." /דְּבַר-בְּלִיעַל יִצוּק בּוֹ: Radak reads this instead as the taunters' claim that his illness is "upon him," meaning that it is the result of his sins.

**A man, a friend who I trusted...I will make peace with those who are not peaceful/אִישׁ-שְׁלוֹמִי... וְאַשְׁלַמָּה לָהֶם:** A play here on the word *shalom*. The friend is called *sh'lomi* and the speaker vows, despite their unfriendliness, "*ashlama la'hem*." My translation differs from the interpretations of most of the commentators who see this as expression of David's vow to take revenge (Sforno, Radak), but I think the use of *shlomi* referring to 'friend' justifies this reading of *ashlamah* to refer to making peace. The root *shalem* in differing constructions and contexts can mean to pay back or, as in the word *shalom*, refer to peace.

**from the beginning until the end of time/מִהֶעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם:** This translation follows Radak, who says "from the first time to the last time; all the days". Others interpret it as a reference to both this world and the World to Come.

## Psalm 42

**a Psalm for Understanding, by the Offspring of Korach/מִשְׁכִּיל לְבָנֵי-קֹרַח:** This is especially poignant since Korach is the one who launched a rebellion against Moses in the wilderness--and was killed by God as a result. His offspring, then, are viewed as having come to a relationship with God, despite the tragedy of his death. Perhaps this, in fact, is part of what composes their longing for understanding.

**And why so in tumult over me?/וְתַהֲמִי עָלַי:** Speaking to himself, the speaker asks why he is so worried on his own behalf.

**For in the future I will again thank you/כִּי-עוֹד אֹדְנוּ יְשׁוּעוֹת:** A play between the word *od*

meaning "again" and the word *odenu*: I will thank him.

**and think of Hermon from the insignificant mount of Mitzar/מִצָּר מְהַר מְצַעַר:** The reference to Mitzar is thought by BDB to be to a mountain near Hermon, but many commentators, including Rashi, identify it with Mount Sinai. The word itself comes from a root meaning to be insignificant. The sense, then, may be that of the speaker calling out from a mountain of his own insignificance. If, on the other hand, read as reference to Sinai, it could be seen as a mountain symbolic of the covenantal relation.

**with your tunneling voice/לְקוֹל צְנוּרִיךָ:** BDB speculates that the word *tzinor* connotes the opening of the sluice of heaven. The word itself seems to mean some kind of conduit.

**With words that stab through my bones my tormentors taunt me/בְּרִצָּח אֲבַעֲצוֹתַי חֲרָפוּנִי/צוּרֵי צוּרֵי:** This can either mean that those who tormented the psalmist taunted him with threat of murder, or that the taunt of asking, "where is your God?" made the psalmist feel as though his bones were dying. I have opted for the second reading.

**Be hopeful; wait for God/הוֹחִילִי לְאֱלֹהִים:** The verb means both "to long" and "to hope." Here, I have taken it to mean to long for with patient expectation.

### Psalm 43

**Before one who speaks lies and acts with injustice/מְאִישׁ־מְרִמָּה וְעוֹלָה:** Juxtaposed here are two dimensions of wrongfulness: speaking and acting. My translation heightens the implicit parallelism.

**Sustainer of the Universe, my only God/אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵי:** Be'er Avraham notes that Elohaim refers to the universal transcendent God of all, and Elohai refers to one's personal relation with that God.

### Psalm 44

**You--your hand gave people a dwelling place and planted them in peace. You broke nations apart and scattered them asunder/הוֹרִשְׁתָּ וְתַטְעַם תָּרַע לְאֲמִים וְתִשְׁלַחם:** Most commentators and translators read this as praise of God for dispossessing nations and planting Israel in their place. My translation focuses on the virtue of God as shepherd of the people, the attribute that is being called upon in the psalm. It is contingent upon reading *yarash* positively to mean "to give as an inheritance," rather than an alternate meaning, "to disinherit."

**We have not declared your covenant a lie/וְלֹא־שִׁקְרָנוּ בְּבְרִיתְךָ:** This phrase is often translated to simply mean, "we were not false to you." But the sense, as well as literal meaning, is, I think, much deeper. The emphasis is not primarily on humanity's allegiance to the covenant, but on the steadfast refusal to believe that one's oppression is due to God's relinquishment of the covenantal relationship.

**Out of loyalty to you, we have been killed every day/כִּי־עַלְיֶיךָ הִרְגָנוּ כָּל־הַיּוֹם:** The psalmist asks if it is because of loyalty to God that the Israelites are persecuted, why God doesn't come loyally to their rescue.

**Our souls are bent to the dust in prayer/כִּי שָׁחָה לְעֹפָר וּנְפֹשָׁנוּ:** Literally, "because our souls are bent," with an emphatic implicit critique. Why doesn't witnessing human suffering provoke a compassionate response by God?

## Psalm 45

**Upon the Lily-Shaped Instrument/עַל־שֹׁשַׁנִּים:** *Al shoshanim*. What this means in terms of instrumentation remains unclear. The word *shoshan* means lily, so the translation is one possible meaning among many. Radak and others interpret it to be a name of a musical instrument.

**a song of love/שִׁיר יְדִידוֹת:** A song of friends or lovers, a song of intimates.

**with a beautiful vision/דְּבַר טוֹב:** Literally, "a good word." But in Hebrew *davar* means both word and thing, here interpreted as a vision.

**Your spirit of majesty will triumph over all harm/וְהִדְרֶךָ אֶצְלָח:** Literally, "your splendor will succeed."

**Ravishing queens/שָׁגַל:** The word as verb means "to violate, ravish," but as noun means "a queen or consort." The implication may very well be overtly sexual, but I have translated it more generally to represent the "ravishing" beauty of the woman.

**the king is wild in desire over your beauty/וַיִּתְאוּ הַמֶּלֶךְ:** Literally the king is in desire (*ta-avah*) over you. The root *avah* suggests physical appetite or lust.

## Psalm 46

**And so we won't be afraid at changes of the earth/לֹא־נִירָא בְּהַמִּיר אָרֶץ:** The word *hamir* comes from the root *mur* meaning to change. It is in the causative form. The implication is that when one takes refuge in God, one will not be afraid at transitive events and the accompanying threat of danger.

**at the tumbling of mountains into heart of the sea; when its waters rage tumultuous froth/הַרִים בָּלַב יָמִים: יְהֵמוּ יַחְמְרוּ מִיָּמִין:** The line reads *harim b'lev yamim: y'hemu yechmru memav*. Notice the sound play with the emphasis on the h, m, and r sounds, which evoke the sounds of the verbs.

**who has astounded the world with his wonders/אֲשֶׁר־שָׂם שְׁמוֹת בְּאָרְץ:** This phrase leaves a

tension between two different possible readings: "I will place names in the land" (read with a minor vowel change), or "I will place devastation in the land", derived from the verb *shamam*, the obvious way to read its vocalization. I am reading the line as expressing a kind of ravishing or overpowering wonder.

**the chariot burnt in the fire/עֲגָלוֹת יִשְׂרָף בְּאֵשׁ:** The word *egel* means calf, and *eglah* means heifer, or with a different vocalization, as here, cart or chariot. The carts clearly refer to those transporting implements of war.

**Be calm/הִרְפוּ:** I have translated this to mean "calm yourself," but the root is *rafah* meaning to sink, relax, or abandon. Another possible reading is the imperative for one to forsake works of war.

## Psalm 47

**Clap your hands/תִּקְעוּ-כַף:** A *tekia* is also a sound of the ram's horn or shofar, and so connotes the sound of calling out to God. Rashi interprets this to mean "join together each with a neighbor to sing out to God with a voice of joy." Radak says, "Israel will say, 'Let all the nations clap hands and rejoice with us, for you already know that the Holy One is God, Ruler of the earth.'"

**Trumpet a cry of exultation to God!/הֲרִיעוּ יְלֵאלֹהִים בְּקוֹל רֶנָּה:** The verb here is also the root for a sound on the shofar, *teruah*.

**For the Exalted One fills us with awe from the highest heavens throughout the earth/כִּי-יִהְיֶה עֲלֵינוּ נוֹרָא מְלַךְ גָּדוֹל עַל-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ:** Note the spacial metaphor: God's awesome presence is found in the highest heights, yet the divine vastness is experienced by those on earth.

**You speak to nations on our behalf/יְדַבֵּר עַמִּים תַּחְתֵּינוּ:** This is sometimes translated with the root *davar* reflecting the Aramaic, meaning "to lead," or the Assyrian meaning to drive away, but in another vocalization means simply to talk.

**countries where we place our feet/וּלְאֲמִים תַּחַת רַגְלֵינוּ:** A difficult phrase. Some might translate this to reflect a subjugation, i.e., God placing nations under our feet. Given the passage's lack of clarity, I have translated it to reflect invocation of God's transformative power rather than might.

**Those who give freely/נְדִיבֵי עַמִּים:** The root *nadav* can mean both nobility (as a noun), and, as a verb, to give freely.

**For to you belong all who protect the earth/כִּי יְלֵאלֹהִים מְגִנֵי-אָרֶץ:** This can alternatively be read to mean that it is the responsibility of God to shield the earth. My reading follows Sforno who sees the *maginim* as those who try to fulfill God's will on earth.

## Psalm 48

**city of the incomparable power/קְרִית מֶלֶךְ רַב:** Literally, city of the great king (or king of multitudes), but I have rendered it in gender neutral terms--here emphasizing power, which is what the concept of kingship in this instance seems to primarily imply.

**Set your heart to comprehending its strength/שִׁיתוּ לְבַבְכֶם אֶל הַחֵילָה:** Rashi and Radak both translate *cheilah* as wall or rampart, a usage that is found in Eicha 2:8, but *chayil* usually means strength, which is how I've translated it here.

**You will lead us even beyond death/הוּא יְנַהֲגֵנוּ עַל-מוֹת:** This phrase is variously rendered in other translations. *Al mut* is seen by Rashi to refer to *almut* or youth, which leads to reading the phrase, "He will guide us like children." But it seems to me that the emphasis on God's love continuing throughout generations suggests that the phrase should be read as suggesting God's love continuing beyond death (*mut*). See Psalm 46 for another usage (and different translation) of this phrase.

## Psalm 49

**all who live under sharp knife of time/חֶלֶד:** The word itself means duration of the world, and a secondary meaning is to dig. Sharp knife of time is a poetic flourish to suggest the word's implication of mortality.

**The tillers of soil as well as offspring of the wealthy/גַּם-בְּנֵי אָדָם גַּם-בְּנֵי-אִישׁ:** In Hebrew, the phrases seem, on the surface, to be more or less identical, but the word *adam* is related to *adamah*, meaning soil (or here those who work it) and the word *ish* may suggest a higher social strata.

**insights acquired first hand/תְּבוּנוֹת:** The root of this word is *bein*, suggesting discernment, the ability to make distinctions between (*bein*) one thing and another. It seems particularly related to empirical knowledge.

**praise only themselves/יְתַהַלְלוּ:** The verb for praise (mostly used for praise of God) is in the reflexive. The idea is that they do not acknowledge the role of God in their lives, and so take credit for actions themselves.

**People who will not redeem their own brothers/אִחַ לֹא-פָדָה יִפְדֶּה אִישׁ:** The description, along with what follows, is that of the person described above, those enamoured of their own self-sufficiency.

**They die, then, for all eternity/וְחָדַל לְעוֹלָם:** *V'chadal l'olam*. Note the play (with only a small interchange of letters) on *cheled* ("sharp knife of time") above. Here the verb means "to cease".

**the foolish and brutish who are lost to an abyss/כִּסְיֵל וְבַעַר יֵאבְדוּ:** The wise suffer physical death, but the foolish and wrongful suffer spiritual annihilation as well (Rashi, Radak).

**Before God, we are all like silent beasts of the field/נִמְשָׁל כְּבַהֲמוֹת נְדָמוֹ:** The root *damah* means to be comparable and *damam* means to be silent. My translation incorporates both the aspect of silence and sense of comparison.

**they rush after their own pleasure/וְאַחֲרֵיהֶם | בְּפִיהֶם יִרְצוּ:** Literally, "they run after their own mouths." Rashi and Radak suggest that *achareihem* refers instead to the ones that come after them. Radak says, "Their children after them will run after their words, that which they heard from their parents. If their parents praised wealth, they would also run after wealth."

**Death will graze on the flesh of their bones/מָוֶת יִרְעֵם:** Death is here personified. "Flesh of their bones" is a poetic flourish.

**will descend to them in the morning/וְיִרְדּוּ בָם:** Both Rashi and Radak translate the verb to mean to subjugate, from the root *radah*. Radak translates this, "Now the wrongful are high and the righteous are low--until the day of death. But on the day of judgment, The righteous will subjugate the wrongful." It seems to me that the simple reading is that the righteous descend (from the root *yarad*) to witness the suffering of the wrongful in the afterlife, and upon seeing it are assured about their own choices.

**from their lofty abode/מִזְבֵּל:** The root connotes elevation, the opposite of the region usually associated with Sheol. The formulation is unclear, but I have translated it to suggest the place they have fallen from.

**But God will redeem my life/אֲךָ-אֱלֹהִים יִפְדֶּה נַפְשִׁי:** Note that the same word used to refer to the redemption by God here is used above to refer to those who refuse to take it upon themselves to redeem a brother.

**All mortals are visitors and don't understand/אָדָם בִּיקָר וְלֹא יבִין:** Note that the word *bikar* (visitor) has a resemblance to *bakar* meaning cattle. Radak translates *bikar* as a word for the soul in its aspect of heavenly glory. He says, "while still alive he has no understanding to grasp the way of all flesh is like cattle, therefore in his death he will be like them and his soul will be lost beyond hope." I read *bikar* to mean visitor, and interpret the whole phrase as reference to the many ways that we misunderstand our place in the world and our relation to God.

## Psalm 50

**The Holy Creator, Source of Strength and Eternal Life/אֵל | אֱלֹהִים יְהוָה:** Three names for God follow upon each other in a row. The first suggests power, the second justice, and the third transcendent mystery. The Tetragrammaton, or final name for God in this list, is seen by many as representing compassion.

**the creatures of the field I hold constantly before my eyes/וְזִז שְׂדֵי עֲמָדֵי:** Literally, "the

moving creatures of the field are with me."

**Even if I were hungry, I would not ask for food/לֹא־אֶרְעַב לֶאֱמֹר לְךָ:** Literally, "If I were hungry, I would not say [it] to you."

**flesh of bulls/בֶּשֶׂר אַבִּירִים:** We see a similar usage in Psalm 22. The word *abir* refers to strength, and in Psalm 22, to the strong bulls of Bashan, a place renowned for good grazing.

**I will draw you out from pits of despair; then you will behold my glory/יִחַלְצֶנּוּ וְיִתְכַבְּדוּ:** The verb *chalatz* means to draw up or off; pits of despair is implied. The following word refers to those saved by God who will then acknowledge the divine glory in a kind of mutuality of relation. Importantly, it is not flesh of bulls that God wants, but recognition of God's presence.

**throwing my words behind you like trash/וְתִשְׁלַח דְּבָרֵי אַחֲרָיִךְ:** "Like trash" is a poetical flourish.

**when you see adulterers you think it not such a bad idea/וְעַם מְנַאֲפִים חֵלְקֶךָ:** Literally, "with adulterers is your portion."

**your tongue is a necklace of lies/וְלִשׁוֹנְךָ תַּצְמִיד:** The lies of the wrongful are portrayed here as adornments, that which they think make themselves beautiful.

**The one who sacrifices gratitude pays me the only true tribute/זִבַּח תּוֹדָה יִכְבְּדֵנִי:** Literally, "the one who sacrifices thankfulness honors me." A pun here, because *todah* is also the name of a sacrificial offering of gratitude.

## Psalm 51

**When Nathan the Prophet Came to Him Upon his Return from Batsheva/בְּבֹאֵי אֵלָיו נָתָן:** This episode is recounted in I Kings 1:22-40. It tells of Nathan's message to David that Adonijah, son of Haggit, one of David's concubines, had been boasting that he would be king after his death. David had sworn to Bat-Sheva that Solomon, her son, would become king. Nathan's warning leads to the anointing of Solomon as king.

**Against you alone, I have failed/לְךָ לְבַדְּךָ אֶחָטְאֵתִי:** If this is a continued reference to the death of Uriah and the taking of Bat-Sheva as wife, this cannot be seen primarily as a sin against God. Sins against people are sharply distinguished from sins against God in Jewish thought. While a sin against a person, insofar as it embodies a rejection of a divine principle, is also a sin against God, it still retains its primary quality as constituting a sin against another. This line must refer specifically to a failing in relation to God.

**So you are right with your words; your lips are speak the truth/לְמַעַן־תִּצְדַּק בְּדִבְרֶךָ תִּזְכֶּה/בְּשִׁפְטֶךָ:** These words may be addressed to Nathan, through which the divine voice is presumed

to speak.

**With inclination toward mistake, my mother conceived me/וּבְחֶטְאִי יִחַמְתַּנִּי אִמִּי:** *Uv'chet yechematni imi*. Note the play on sounds here--'kh,' 'm' and 't.' The verb refers to the heat of childbirth, with its root being *chama*.

**Is it true that you desire trust?/הֲאֵת חֶפְצְךָ בְּטַחוּתִי:** The meaning of the Hebrew requires interpretation/ I take this line as a question by David question to God, which is followed by a request for the mystical underpinnings of wisdom.

**a spirit that is rightly directed/וְרוּחִי נִכּוֹן:** The adjective here is from the root *kun*, meaning focused in the right direction.

**a generous spirit/וְרוּחִי נְדִיבָה:** Compare this to note above. See Radak, who interprets it as suggesting a soul overflowing with words of song and praise to God.

**Lift me away from blood stain/הֲצִילֵנִי מִדַּמִּים:** The word *damim* is literally blood (in the plural). Some translate this blood guilt. Both Rashi and Radak see it as referring to the death of Uriah, for which David, in his lust for Bat-Sheva, his wife, was responsible. See 2 Samuel 11:1-17.

**My Upholder, open my lips, and my mouth will proclaim your praise/אֲדַבֵּר שִׁפְתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי יִגִּיד תְּהִלָּתְךָ:** These words precede the Amida, the standing prayer said three times a day, a time when a person stands intimately and personally before God.

**Only then can they offer bulls on your altar/אִז תַּחֲפֹץ זִבְחֵי-צֶדֶק:** God will desire offerings of the righteous only after they have offered up the spirit of their hearts.

## Psalm 52

**when Doeg the Edomite Came/בָּבוֹא | דּוֹאֵג הָאֲדָמִי:** Doeg had called for the death of David (see I Samuel 20:31). The word *doeg* itself means 'worrier.' Most Midrashim argue that he was not in fact an Edomite (*adomi*), but was full of bloodthirstiness (the word *dam*, embedded in *adomi*, means blood).

**Why do you congratulate yourselves over the wrong committed by might?/מַה-תִּתְהַלַּל בְּרַעָה? הַגְּבוּר:** Another possible reading: why do you praise yourself over committing wrong, mighty one? Rashi says, "Why do you glorify in the evil that you do, you who are mighty in Torah?"

**You have loved adorning all your words with deceit/אָהַבְתָּ כָּל-דְּבָרֶי-בָּלַע:** The word *bala* means to swallow, but refers here to deception, attempts to confuse and confound.

**breaking your strength completely/יִחַתְךָ:** The word *yacht'kha* in some of its noun forms means to cause terror. We see an example in Psalm 89, the word *m'chita*.

## Psalm 53

**Upon Falling Sick /על-מחלת/**: Rashi sees this as a type of musical instrument. I have chosen to translate in accordance to the more familiar meaning of the word, which is a reference to illness or weakness.

**The walking corpse says in his heart/אמר נבל בלבו/**: A *naval* is a fool, but *navalah* means carcass. I've combined the two to suggest those who, through their actions, have made themselves into walking corpses. This use, I think, is justified by the words in the rest of the psalm.

**They ravage and abominate themselves, bringing about sorrow/השחיתו והתעיבו עול/**: These verbs, too, suggest bodily corruption. The root *shachat* means to be destroyed, but often in the sense of being physically ravaged. A *toevah* is an abomination, much of the time referring to ritually unclean foods.

**All of them have turned away/כלו סג/**: Samson Rafael Hirsch relates this as an implicit reference to the failure of repentance--they have turned away from God.

**together, like one, they have grown rancid/יחדו נאפחו/**: The psalmist links all people together, seeing in them only the propensity to cause suffering. This, in fact, is a theme of the psalm-- When viewed all together, humanity can look like it has fallen into irrevocable decay. Such a view is the illusion that the psalm takes as its topic and ultimately works to dispel.

**you will be gripped with great fear, even when source of terror does not exist/שם פחדו-פחד לא-היה פחד/**: An intensified usage of the noun and verbal forms of *pachad*, meaning fear. Others read this line to mean that they will be gripped as a fear such as has never existed before. I read it, rather, as expressive of the intensity of fear that comes about when one confronts a perceived meaninglessness in the world.

## Psalm 54

**When the Zippinites Came and Said to Saul/בבוא הזיפים ויאמרו לשאול/**: The incident refers to an event in David's life. After having escaped from Saul into Ziph, the Ziphites informed Saul of David's whereabouts and endangered his life. See I Samuel 23:14-23.

**hear my prayer; give ear to the utterance of my mouth/שמע תפילתי האזינה לאמרי-פי/**: Radak, noting the apparant repetition of meaning in the second part of the verse, sees the first as referring to the unspoken prayer of the heart, and the second referring to the spoken prayer of the mouth.

**annihilate into silence/הצמיתם/**: The word means "to annihilate," but its Arabic and Syriac root means "to compress" or "to make silent." Here I interpret the word to suggest God making the wrongful see the truth of their acts, an act that leaves them stunned into silence.

## Psalm 5

**(convulses) inside/בְּקֶרְבִי:** This word is repeated in different forms throughout. It is worth noting that the word *qerev* is also a cognate of a word that means "those close to me." One of the central themes of the psalm is betrayal by those one had thought to be friends.

**Terror and trembling/יִרְאָה וְרָעַד:** Note the sound play on the words: *yirah* and *ra-ad*.

**from raging wind, from insanity's storm/סַעַה מִסְעָר:** again a sound play--*so-ah* and *sa-ar*. The first refers to the rushing of the storm wind, and the second word means both storm and rage (BDB).

**My intimate friend/וּמִיִּדְעִי:** Radak says this means "one with whom I shared my most intimate secrets." Rashi, quoting Donash, says, "It is not an enemy that has scorned me, and lifted up my scorn, and it is not one who I hated who elevated himself above me and hides it, but my teacher and friend with whom I studied the mystery in the house of God, accompanied by great feeling. He adds, "And this matter is well-known, that the scorn of one whom they love is harsher upon them than scorn of the enemy; one can hide secrets from an enemy, but not from a person one loves, confiding to that person all that is in one's heart."

**with whom I conversed about the sweetness of the mystery/נִמְתִּיק סוּד:** Rashi says this means one with whom I studied [Torah] in the house of study.

**We used to walk together to the house of God together to pray/בְּבֵית אֱלֹהִים נִהְלַךְ בְּרַגְשׁ:** In Psalm 2, the word *ragesh* means multitudes, but Radak reads it here as "companionship." He says, "Even as we were going to the house of God to pray, we were so united; I was profoundly connected to you, and you betrayed me."

**redeeming my soul with tranquility from the battle that rages within--for those same people were once on my side/פְּדַה בְּשָׁלוֹם נַפְשִׁי מִקְרִב־לִי כִי־בְרָבִים הָיוּ עִמָּדִי:** Problematic is the latter part of the sentence, which literally translates "they were with me." Radak, noting that David was often under attack, interprets it to mean that people were fighting against him. I see the line as a continuation of the psalm's theme, that of alienation from those who were previously close.

**but inside his heart was all war/וּקְרִב־לְבוֹ:** A play here, as throughout, on the word *qarav* meaning battle on the one hand, and "close" or "inside" in a slightly different formulation of the word.

**but they were doorways to what lay underneath/וְהֵמָּה פְתָחוֹת:** A *petach* is a door. BDB lists this form as meaning "sword," but derives this meaning from the fact that the verb, which means to open, is used elsewhere in conjunction with a drawn sword. I think the more obvious meaning

is that they were doorways to the real thoughts that lay under the flattery.

**they worry about the portion of their days/אֲנָשֵׁי דְמִים וּמְרָמָה לֹא־יַחַצּוּ יְמֵיהֶם:** The verb here means to divide or cut in half. A possible reading, then, is that they will not live out half their days. The contrast, though, is with people who trust in God. The difference cannot be that the righteous live longer, but that resting in God, their lives have less fear.

## Psalm 56

**Upon Seeing the Silent Dove who Flies Into the Distance/עַל־יוֹנֵת אֶלֶם רְחֻקִים:** I see the psalm as motivated by witnessing a dove of peace flying into the distance at a time when one's own life feels under threat.

**For many are my contenders; they raise themselves up high/כִּי־רַבִּים לְחַמִּים לִי מְרוֹם:** The last word here, *marom* (heights) is seen by many as referring to God. Indeed, it is a name of God, an allusion to the fact that God dwells up high. Here I have translated it in what seems the more immediately relevant way as representative of the arrogance of the oppressors.

**All day my words are saturated with sadness/כָּל־הַיּוֹם דְּבַרִּי יַעֲצִבוּ:** Both JPS and ArtScroll versions understand this to mean that the enemies cause sadness. I think it more obvious to link the sadness to one's own voice. Hearing one's own words makes the sadness and fear more acute.

**So that I might walk before God in the salvaged light of the living/לְהַתְהַלֵּךְ לְפָנַי אֱלֹהִים בְּאוֹר/הַחַיִּים:** The word 'salvaged' has been added based on context and for poetic effect.

## Psalm 57

**a Plea to be Spared Destruction/אֶל־תִּשְׁחַת:** The psalm can also be rendered as an admonition against the destruction of others, since its circumstances seems to involve an opportunity David had to kill Saul, but instead simply cuts off a piece of his garment. In the next psalm, however, it is clearly a personal supplication, which is how I render it here.

**When he Fled Before Saul into a Cave/בְּבִרְחוּ מִפְּנֵי־שָׁאוּל בְּמַעְרָה:** This is a reference to events in I Samuel 24. David is being pursued by Saul in the wilderness of Ein-Gedi.

**the one who makes my journey's road complete/לְאֵל גִּמַּר עָלַי:** Literally, to the God who completes me.

**from the autumn chill that breathes down my back, Selah/חַרְף שֶׁאֶפִי סִלָּה:** The usual meaning of the root *charaf* in the psalms is one who reproaches. But *choref* is harvest-time, a meaning I have played off of here. The chill of the season is representative of the chill one feels at reproach.

**Raise yourself above the heavens, God; spread over all the earth is your glory/רוּמָה**

**עַל-הַשָּׁמַיִם אֱלֹהִים עַל כָּל-הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדְךָ**: Notice that the same preposition is used in reference to both earth and sky. That preposition, *al*, can mean both above and upon. Here the first usage seems to mean the above, and the second upon, hinting at both God's transcendence and immanence.

**My heart is turned toward you, God/נִכּוֹן לְבִי אֱלֹהִים**: The verb here means firm, established, rightly directed.

**Awake, my indwelling glory/עוֹרָה כְּבוֹדִי**: The word *kavod* means honor or glory, particularly the immanent glory of God.

**Spread over all the earth is your glory/עַל כָּל-הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדְךָ**: Notice that the same word (*kavod*) is used in reference to God as is used in reference to the speaker. We awaken our own glory when we recognize the all-present glory of God.

## Psalm 58

**The wrongful are estranged /זָרוּ רָשָׁעִים**: The word *zar* means stranger. The wrongful are strangers to themselves and estranged from God. In fact, one might describe this as comprising the ontological state of "sin."

**They don't hear the voice of those whispering wisdom/לֹא-יִשְׁמַע לְקוֹל מְלַחֲשִׁים**: The *m'lachashim* here are often interpreted to be "charmers" based on other uses of the word in the Tanakh. The root, however, means to whisper. See for example, Isaiah 26:16. Charmers are almost universally portrayed as workers of idolatry in the Bible, so a reading that views them in a positive light is not to my mind very convincing.

**a woman's stillbirth/נִפְלַ אִשָּׁת**: While the Talmud (Moed Katan 6b) describes the *eishet* as a mole, the word *isha*, a form of the word, means more commonly woman, and so I read it as an anomalous rendering of that word.

**Upon my life, God's fury will rage like a storm/כְּמוֹ-חַי כְּמוֹ-חֶרֶן יִשְׁעָרְנוּ**: Unclear phrasing. It appears to mean either 'like life' or 'upon my life.'

## Psalm 59

**When Saul Sent Men to Keep Watch At His House and Kill Him/בְּשַׁלַּח שָׂאוּל וַיִּשְׁמְרוּ אֶת-הַבַּיִת לְהַמִּיתוֹ**: See I Samuel 19. This marks the beginning of Saul's long persecution of David.

**The unflinching gather against me/יִגְוְרוּ עָלַי עֲזִים**: Literally, the strong gather against me, The emphasis may be on the fact that they have made a permanent outpost at David's house, as the word *gur*, besides meaning to gather, means to dwell. The word *ozim* literally means the strong, but the emphasis seems to be on their harsh, unbending quality.

**But you, God, you laugh/וְאַתָּה יְהוָה תִּשְׁחַק-לְמוֹ**: The laughter here comes from a recognition

that the power and glory of the wrongful is transitory and ultimately, when seen in the light of eternity, marks their destruction.

**Their power is so strong/עֲזוֹ:** Literally this simply reads "his power." I take it to be exclamatory, arising from a feeling of futility at the strength of the enemy.

**by the curse and deception that they speak/וּמִמְאָלָה וּמִכַּחַשׁ יִסְפְּרוּ:** How do one's curses and deception take one captive? It is because they represent the estrangement from God and from one's true expression of self.

**And it will known that the God of Justice guides Jacob until the ends of the earth—Selah סֵלָה** וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי־אֱלֹהִים מִשַׁל בִּיעֲקֹב לְאַפְסֵי הָאָרֶץ: Radak sees this recognition as consisting of the recognition of God's providence over Israel provoking a consciousness of God's universal redemptive power.

**They wander in search of food; still hungry, they lie down to sleep/לֹאֵכֶל [יִנְיֵעִין] הָמָּה יִנְוֵעִין** אִם־לֹא יִשְׂבְּעוּ וַיִּלְיִנוּ: The message is obvious. The wrongful are never satisfied. No matter how much they prowl for satisfaction, they are left unfulfilled.

**My Solace, to you I make melodies/עָזִי אֵלַיךְ אֲזַמְרָה:** This literally reads "my Strength;" because of a use of the word a line later, I use a different phrase.

## Psalm 60

**a Wellspring of Teaching/לְלִמְדָה:** Both Ibn Ezra and Rashi interpret the instruction as related to war and military victory. Ibn Ezra, positing that a *shoshan* may be an implement of war, says the psalmist recalls God's power to overcome the enemy even after he grows weak. I interpret the psalm as using experience during war as an occasion for more expansive teaching.

**Aram-of-the-Two-Rivers and Aram-of-the-Swollen Plains/אַרְם נְהָרִים וְאַת־אַרְם צוֹבָה:** These are two place names, referring to two separate kingdoms of Aram. The second word, *tzovah*, has a root that means swollen, so its reference in this context is a conjecture based on that.

**when Yoav returned and struck Edom in the Valley of Salt/וַיֵּשֶׁב יוֹאָב וַיַּךְ אֶת־אֲדוֹם** בְּגִיא־מֶלַח: There are three different accounts of this event in the Tanakh and they differ considerably, even to the extent of attributing different outcomes to the war and different participants in it. See II Samuel 8:13 and I Chronicles 18:12.

**Heal its cracks/רָפָה שְׁבָרֶיהָ:** The verb meaning 'to heal' is usually spelled *rafah*, with an aleph at the end. Ibn Ezra points out that this version is frequently an alternate spelling.

**You made your people suffer hardship/הִרְאִיתָה עַמְּךָ קִשָּׁה:** Literally, you have shown your people hardness, severity.

**Your truth/קִשְׁט:** A loan word from the Syriac. The usual word for truth in Hebrew is *emet*.

**I will exult as I divide Shechem; I will measure out the Valley of Booths/ אֶעֱלֶזָה אֶחֱלֶקֶה שִׁכְמִי וְעֵמֶק סִכּוֹת אֲמַדֵּד:** These are both place names inside the land of Canaan, the holy land. The emphasis is on God reclaiming these areas of Canaan for the Davidic kingship. The second part of the verse literally reads "the valley of Succot." Succot means booths, and is also the name of a Jewish holiday during which people dwell in booths.

**Moav is the pot I wash in. Upon Edom, I throw my shoe. Upon Philistine, I break myself/ מוֹאָב אֶסִּיר רַחְצִי עַל-אֲדוֹם אֲשָׁלֵךְ נַעְלִי עָלַי פְּלִשְׁתֵי הַתְּרַעְעִי:** More references to the imagined voice of God. David's family was killed in Moav after he took refuge there, thinking he was safe. Edom has a long history of being perceived as an enemy of the Jewish people and are seen as deriving from Esau and later representing Rome. Philistine is also a notorious enemy, particularly in the Samson story.

**It the Holy One who will trample our oppressors to the ground/וְהוּא יְבוֹס צְרִינוּ:** The phrase "to the ground" has been added for poetic closure.

### Psalm 61

**When a rock is lifted high above/בְּצוּר־יְרוּם מִמְּנִי:** This is alternately rendered "To a rock too high for me [to climb alone]."

**You give testimony to those who revere your name/נִתַּתְּ יְרֵשֶׁת יִרְאֵי שִׁמְךָ:** Literally, "you give inheritance." The inheritance is seen variously by different commentators. Malbim sees it as referring to Davidic kingship, Rashi as a return to Jerusalem, and Radak sees it as referring either as the Tent of Meeting (where Moses met with God) or the Temple. He says, "God, give the gift that I may dwell in your tents, for this is the inheritance of those who hold you in awe." I see it, as a spiritual inheritance, not a physical one, a testimony of God's existence.

**I will fulfill my vows from day to day/לְשַׁלְּמִי נִדְרֵי יוֹם אִיּוֹם:** Some see the "vows" as a reference to daily prayer.

### Psalm 62

**I will not stumble much/לֹא-אֶמוּט רַבָּה:** A contrast to other psalms where the psalmist maintains he will not stumble at all. Here, the sense seems to be more realistic.

**You will slay yourselves, all of you/תִּרְצָחוּ כָּלְכֶם:** The emphasis, as throughout much of the psalms, is on the wrong the wrongful plan coming back upon themselves. Just as they have attempted murder, their intentions will fall back upon themselves.

**Truly all humanity is nothing but vapor/אֵךְ הֶבֶל בְּנֵי-אָדָם:** There are echoes here to Kohelet, the Book of Ecclesiastes. Also, perhaps, a pun, as Hevel (or in its more common rendering, Abel) is the son of Adam. The word *adam* is here rendered as humanity, its other meaning.

**all of them together, they are lighter than breath/הֵמָּה מִהֶבֶל יַחַד:** The same word is used here as is translated as vapor above.

**do not empty yourselves in plunder/וּבְגָזָל אֶל-תֵּהַבְּלוּ:** Once again we find the same root--*hevel*--meaning emptiness or vapor. Here it is used in an unusual verbal form.

**Though wealth bears fruit/חַיִּל אִי כִּי יִנוּב:** The word *chayil* here can also be used to mean strength or army. I think the emphasis is on wealth, however, and the injunction is one of not attaching oneself to wordly goals and pursuits.

**don't give to it the entirety of your heart/אֶל-תִּשְׂתֵּיתוּ לֵב:** The phrase literally translates something like "don't put any heart in it" and is idiomatic, meaning "don't pay it any attention."

**according to the wealth of their deeds/תִּשְׁלֵם לְאִישׁ כְּמַעֲשָׂהוּ:** Literally, He will pay a man according to his deeds. The word "wealth" has been added to emphasize connection with preceding verses in this in the psalm. It is not wealth in a monetary sense that is important to God, but abundance of good actions.

### Psalm 63

**When He Was in the Wilderness of Judah/בְּמִדְבַּר יְהוּדָה:** This refers to an episode where David faced external oppression (he was surrounded by forces of Saul) and was attacked also by thirst.

**I search for you at dawn/אֶתְּהַ אֶשְׁחַרְךָ:** Contained in the verb is the word dawn; as a verb form it means to search for intensely, perhaps with the meaning of waking early in the morning in pursuit of God's presence. Some see this as a reference to Shacharit, the morning prayer.

**My soul cleaves to your presence/דָּבַקָה בְּפִשִּׁי אַחֲרֶיךָ:** The word that has been translated presence means literally back, that which comes afterwards. The image is that of one clinging onto a departing presence from behind. The root *davaq* in later mysticism comes to stand for a mystical union with God.

**They will be dragged by sword into quicklime/יִגִּירוּהוּ עַל-יְדֵי-חֶרֶב:** The root *gir* is related to the Arabic meaning quicklime. The verb *garar* means to drag. I've translated it to play on both meanings.

**They will be food for the jackals/מִנְתַּ שְׂעָלִים יִהְיוּ:** The word *shualim* commonly means "foxes," but here they seem to be a larger and more destructive animal. BDB speculates that it refers to jackals.

### Psalm 64

**when I speak/בְּשִׁחִי:** This can also be read "when I complain."

**a bitter word/דְּבַר מָר:** The metaphor is one of a bitter word being strung on an arrow, designed to pierce one's heart. There is a concept in later Talmudic Judaism that speaking about someone in a hurtful way (known as *lashon ha-ra*) is akin to murder.

**They search for everyone's faults/יִחַפְּשׁוּ עוֹלֹת:** The word *ohlot* here is read (using a different punctuation) as the plural of *avlah*, sin or fault.

**All who are straightforward of heart/כָּל־יִשְׁרָיִלֵב:** The word *yashar* means straight. The word *yishrei lev* means "moral," as twistedness comes to be associated, as in English, with wrong.

## Psalm 65

**To you silence is praise/לְךָ דְמִיָּה תְהִלָּה:** An interesting phrase with which to begin a psalm which was probably meant to be chanted out loud. The psalmist begins with a line that recognizes the futility of ever adequately praising God, but continues by praising nonetheless.

**and to you all vows are fulfilled/וְלִךְ יִשְׁלֵם־נֶדֶר:** Literally, a vow is fulfilled. This vow is read most often as a vow of the Jewish people--either to worship again at Zion or to fulfill the halachic observance placed on the people at Sinai. I read it here as standing for the vow of individuals. God is also that which allows for fulfillment of human endeavors.

**towards you all flesh comes/עֹדֶיךָ כָּל־בֶּשֶׂר יִבְאוּ:** Radak interprets this to mean coming before God in prayer. He says, quoting his father, "To you alone is the desire of my prayer for there are those that praise you but that which a person praises with his strength or wisdom is not complete praise, for there is no human praise without deception." He adds another interpretation: "A king of flesh and blood can hear from two or three people, but cannot hear from everybody, but you (God) hear the prayer of all flesh as though it were one person, while each person prays his or her own particular prayer." The phrase can alternately be read as a recognition of one's relation to God in face of mortality.

**When the urge to twist away from God overpowers me/דְּבַרִי עֹנֹת גָּבְרוּ מִנִּי:** The word *avonot* is often translated as "sins," but it comes from a root that means to twist away (*avah*).

**The hills exult, surrounded by water/וְגִיל גְּבֻעוֹת תַּחְגֹּרְנָה:** The word *tachgornah* comes from a root meaning to gird, usually used in reference to armor. It has a related Assyrian meaning, "to surround." The word "water" is implied by the motif of thirst throughout the psalm.

## Psalm 66

**Burst forth with joy/הֲרִיעוּ לְאֱלֹהִים:** The word *hariyu* means to give a blast of a trumpet or horn, or metaphorically to burst out. The sense of 'joy' is derived from context.

**Sing to the glory of God's name. Make glory the form of your praise/זָמְרוּ כְבוֹד־שְׁמוֹ שִׁימוּ כְבוֹד תְּהִלָּתוֹ:** The sound of this line emphasizes the parallel between the name of God and one's praise (both words are *kavod*).

**even your enemies pretend to obey/יִכְחֲשׁוּ־לְךָ אֵיבֶיךָ:** Many have interpreted the verb here to mean "confess", but its simple meaning is to be false or deceptive, an understanding which suggests that they are loyal out of fear rather than change of heart.

**You brought us like prisoners to a stronghold/הַבְּאֲתָנוּ בְּמִצְדָּה:** The phrase "like prisoners" is implied. The root *tzud* means to hunt, and a *metzudah* is a stronghold. Here, however, the association seems to be not with arriving to safety, but with the sense of being hunted, treated like an animal (as are, too often, prisoners).

**in the end, you led us out to drink our fill/וּתוֹצִיאֵנוּ לְרוּיָהּ:** Literally, you led us out to abundance. The word *re'vayah* means filled to the point of satiety. See Psalm 23. The phrase "in the end" is implied after all the other mentions of what seem like instances of God's cruelty.

**even ones that burst forth through my lips/אֲשֶׁר־פָּצוּ שְׂפָתַי:** This seems to imply even those vows which were spoken unintentionally.

## Psalm 67

**a Melody/מְזֻמֹּר:** Elsewhere this is translated as " a psalm", but the root means to make a melody. I have translated it this way here because it seems the better translation to accompany the word "song".

## Psalm 68

**all who obstruct you...those who reject you אֹיְבָיו...מְשַׁנְּאָיו:** Literally, his enemies...his haters. The object has been changed to the second person for purposes of clarity.

**before your face/מִפְּנֵי:** The word meaning before, *mip'nei* literally means before one's face (*panim*). This phrase, or forms of it, are repeated throughout the psalm, though I sometimes use phrases like "divine presence" to express it. The psalm offers constant references to the face of God, but also to the face of fire. This urge to be witnessed by God is one of the central themes of the psalm.

**As smoke is swallowed into air/כִּהְנִדֵּף עֶשֶׁן תִּנְדָּף:** The word "air" is implied.

**the great chariot-driver /לְרִכָּב:** Literally, the chariot driver, but the reference is to God as guide of the world. This is a motif throughout the psalm.

**into lives that are fruitful/בְּכֹשָׁרוֹת:** Radak translates this: "The same ones who were tied in chains of iron, God will bring them out." *Koshara* is translated by BDB to mean prosperity. I have chosen to translate it along that line, in a way that expresses the fruition of a search for a purposeful life.

**even the sky wept/שָׁמַיִם נָטְפוּ:** The verb here means to drop or drip; weeping is implied by the intensity of the context.

**Our Provider gives forth a generous drizzle of rain/גָּשֶׁם נְדָבוֹת תִּנְיָף:** The root *nadav* means

to give generously, but here it seems to refer to the rain falling in abundant quantities.

**The river and weary soil/נַחַלְתֶּךָ וְנִלְאָה:** The word *nachaltekha* is generally understood as inheritance (and actually means "your inheritance") but here I read it as related to the word *nachal* meaning river. Such a reading is justified, I think, by the emphasis in the preceding lines about the effect of God's presence on the natural world. The word *nilah* means weary, but BDB lists this as an example of it standing as symbolic for weary land.

**God renews it/אֵתָהּ כּוֹנֵנְתָהּ:** Literally, God establishes or prepares it.

**God, with your goodness you help the afflicted endure/תִּכְיֶן בְּטוֹבֶתְךָ לְעֵנֵי אֱלֹהִים:** The same root is used here as in the above note. It means to establish, fix, make secure.

**My Upholder, you give forth your word. The women who bring forth blessing will be a great multitude/אֲדֹנָי יִתֵּן-אִמֶּר הַמְּבַשְׂרוֹת צְבֵא רַב:** A difficult line to make sense of. *Ham'basrot* is in the feminine, and the word *basar* means to bear tidings. The word *tzavah* usually refers to the heavenly array, but here refers to abundance of people.

**The woman of the house will divide her wealth/וְיָנֹת בֵּית תְּחַלֵּק שָׁלָל:** The image seems to me to be one of great unification under God, an image of those with means sharing their wealth with those less fortunate.

**with maid-servants who sleep near the fire/אִם-תִּשְׁכְּבוּן בֵּין שִׁפְתַיִם:** The word *sh'fata'im* may refer to a pot that sits on a fire, or perhaps the fire itself. Literally, the verse reads, "those who sleep near the pot (or fire)." From context, it seems to refer to servants whose job it was to watch the pot or keep the fire going. This translation involves combining the previous verse with this one, which is reasonable considering that the above verse speaks of dividing spoils, but doesn't mention with whom. Also, the division of verses was a much later addition, and so there is some uncertainty as to how to divide them.

**If you have dwelt on ground of darkness, you will rise, like wings of the dove gilded with silver/אִם-תִּשְׁכְּבוּן בֵּין שִׁפְתַיִם כְּנֹפֵי יוֹנָה נֹחֶפֶה בְּכֶסֶף:** The verse is a difficult one to make sense of, but this understanding makes most sense to me.

**When God's presence spreads over kings/בְּפָרֵשׁ שְׂדֵי מְלָכִים:** The word *Shaddai*, a name of God, also means "breasts," and so has a protective, comforting connotation.

**you will bring white like snow to the shadow of darkness/תִּשְׁלַג בְּצַלְמוֹן:** The word *tzalmon* has been variously translated, from meaning the shadow of death, to the shadow of darkness, to reference to an actual mountain.

**...Mount of Bashan; its pastures make for good grazing/הַר-בָּשָׁן:** The word Bashan itself means smooth ground and is known for its exceptional pasture land. See Psalm 22:13.

**Why do you tremble, ridges of high summit, mountain desired for God's abode/לְמָה לָמָּה לְשַׁבְּתוּן תִּרְצְדוּן הָרִים גְּבוּנִים הָהָר חִמַּד אֱלֹהִים לְשַׁבְּתוּן:** The root *ratzad* or *t'ratzdun* means to watch (BDB), and here some have interpreted it as people who watch with an element of envy or

longing. Radak reads the word as *tirqadum*, with an allusion to Psalm 114, where the mountains are spoken of as trembling. This is the translation I follow here, as it makes the most sense in context.

**The tongue of your dogs will lick up its puddle/לָשׁוֹן כְּלָבֶיךָ מֵאוֹיְבִים מְנֵהוּ:** A difficult phrase to translate. A possible reading is that it is the enemies' own dogs that lick up their blood.

**There Benjamin, the youngest, took power/בְּנִימֵן אֶצְעִיר רֹדֵם:** The word *rodem* literally means "ruled over them," with the implication being that Benjamin, the youngest, ruled over the other tribes of Israel. There are two explanations of this. The first is that Benjamin led the tribes in crossing the Sea of Reeds, an explanation advanced in Sotah 36b (based on a pun) and mentioned by Rashi. Another explanation comes from the fact that Saul, the first king of Israel, was from the tribe of Benjamin, and Jerusalem was the land portioned to Benjamin under the name "Jebus" in Joshua 19:28. See Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 93).

**bulls/אַבִּירִים:** Literally, the mighty ones, but in Psalm 22, as here, this word is used to refer to bulls.

**those who stampede with lust for silver/בְּרָצִי-כֶסֶף:** This translation encompasses the ambiguity of the word *b'ratzei*, which can be derived from two possible roots. The first means to long for or desire, and the second means to crush or trample.

**Scatter the nations, the ones who work only toward wars/בָּזַר עַמִּים קְרָבוֹת יַחְפְּצוּ:** This involves reading the verb *bizar* as *pazru*, Rashi's interpretation.

**The well-fed will come from Egypt/יֵאָתִיו חֲשֻׁמָּנִים מִן מִצְרַיִם:** The verb here is in an Aramaic form. The phrase translated "well fed" is from a word of unknown meaning. Some suggest it means nobles, but it may also be an alternate rendering of *ha-sh'manim*, meaning fat.

## Psalm 69

**because the waters are up to my throat/כִּי בָאוּ מַיִם עַד-נֶפֶשׁ:** The word *nefesh*, or soul, is associated with breath and therefore life.

**I am sunk in frothy swamps of sun-flickered depths/טָבַעְתִּי בֵּין מְצוּלָה:** Literally, "I have sunk in quicksand of the shadowed depths."

**My throat is dry with terror/נִחַר גְּרוֹנִי:** From the root *charar* meaning dry or parched. The concept of terror is implied.

**my eyes grown weak, scanning the horizon for arrival of my God/כָּלוּ עֵינַי מִיחַל לְאֱלֹהֵי:** Literally, "My eyes are wasted from waiting for my God."

**Like bones without flesh are those who wish me extinction/עַצְמוֹ מְצַמִּיתִי:** The word *atzmu*,

which means to act with might, has the same root as the word for bones. In my translation, I have played on the sense of bones. Its more plain meaning would be simply that those who wished the psalmist extinction have grown stronger.

**Even though I have not stolen, I repay them what they demand/אֲשֶׁר לֹא־גָזַלְתִּי אֶז אֲשִׁיב/**  
Rashi and Radak both speak of the money as paid under compulsion of the enemy, but it can also be understood as a determined effort for peace; paying money that people suspect you of stealing, even though you have not stolen it.

**I have become loathsome to my brothers/מוֹזֵר הָיִיתִי לְאֶחָי/** The word *muzar* literally means to become a stranger, but the implication is that the speaker has been scorned by his siblings because of their repugnance at his affliction.

**I am my prayer to you, God--may it be always a time of favor/וְאֲנִי תַפְלִיתִי־לְךָ | יְהוָה עֵת רִצּוֹן/**  
A line that has been variously translated, and that appears several places in the liturgy. I take this line to have a twofold significance. First of all, the idea of actually embodying one's prayer is very moving. I also interpret the wish for prayer to be at a time of favor as signifying a wish to have connection to God whenever one prays.

**Don't let the flood-streams of water rise over my head. Don't let the deepest ocean rise up to my throat/וְאַל־תִּשְׁטְטֵנִי | שִׁבְלַת מַיִם וְאַל־תִּבְלַעְנִי מְצוּלָה/** The words "head" and "throat" are implied by context. The first verb means flood and the second means to swallow.

**turn toward me your face/פָּנָה אֵלַי/** The word for "turn" and the word for "face" are derived from the same root, and here I have used both words in translating it.

**I longed for compassion, but there was nobody/וְאֶקְוָה לְנוֹד וְאֵין/** The root *nud* means to shake as in a person who nods their head in compassion with another's story.

**They put wormwood in my food/יָתְנוּ בְּבְרוּתִי רֹאשׁ/** Wormwood is a poison.

**May their table become a snare to contentment/יְהִי שִׁלְחָנָם לְפָנֵיהֶם לֶפְח/** Because they tried to kill me through food, let the place of their own eating be devoid of peace.

**For you are the one who flattens pursuers to contrition/כִּי־אַתָּה אֲשֶׁר־הִכִּיתָ רֹדְפוֹ/** A difficult phrase to translate. Radak says, "for you are behind all this evil that they do, for if you had desired it, they would not have had enough strength to do harm to me; rather that which you struck, they continued [striking]." Such a reading holds God responsible for the harm for the wrongdoers. I have, instead, translated *radfu*, a verbal form, to be an errant wording for its noun form, meaning pursuers.

**will build for Judah cities where people peaceably dwell/וְיִבְנֶה עָרֵי יְהוּדָה/** The phrase "peaceably dwell" is implied by the context, a prayer for restorative justice.

**Psalm 70**

**May they be fenced off from behind/יִסְגּוּ אַחֲרַי:** This translation is motivated by the fact that *ysisogu* derives from the same root as *siyag*, meaning fence.

**do not come too late/אַל-תֵּאַחַר:** A play on the word *achor* above. *Achor* means after, but can also mean behind. I am reading *achor* here to mean "come too late" or "come after the fact."

## Psalm 71

**respond to my cry of pleading/וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנִי:** Literally, "and save me," but the root is also related to a term that means a cry for help. In the translation, I have often translated words such as "salvation" in ways that attempt to awaken meanings that have been used so often, they no longer convey their original tenor of emotion.

**I have been a sign of ruin to many/כְּמוֹפֶת הַיַּיְתִי לְרַבִּים:** *Mofet* means a sign, but clearly in this case, the sign is one of degeneration.

**For my enemies speak of me unkindly/כִּי-אָמְרוּ אוֹיְבֵי לִי:** The word "unkindly" is implied from context. Though the tense of the verb is past, the reference is clearly to an act that weighs on the speaker in the present.

**I will remember your faithfulness, more powerful than anything else that exists/אֶזְכֹּר אֶת-צְדִקְתְּךָ לְבַדְּךָ:** The literal translation is, "I will remember your righteousness, yours alone."

**to all who come afterward, your steadfast presence/לְכָל-יָבוֹא גְבוּרָתְךָ:** This is contrasted with the generation that currently exists, mentioned in the previous phrase. Here, the hope that one can influence generations yet to come gives one hope. *Gevura* often means strength, but in later contexts comes to mean restraint, and here is used to refer to constancy of presence.

**for your righteousness, God/אֱמֶתְךָ אֱלֹהֵי:** More commonly translated "for your truth," but the word is derived from the same word as *emunah* meaning dependability. Also, the word is literally "my God."

**those who seek after my life/מִבְּקֵשֵׁי רַעְתִּי:** Literally, those who seek my harm.

## Psalm 72

**wisdom to distinguish right from wrong to his son/צְדִקְתְּךָ לְבֶן-מֶלֶךְ:** The attributes that are sought after are attributes of God that the king is supposed to represent. So what is requested is not simply righteousness, but holy righteousness, righteousness in the image of God.

**and valleys flower with virtue/וּגְבְעוֹת בְּצִדְקָה:** The word "flower" has been added to emphasize parallelism with the preceding lines.

**in the sun's staggering brightness, in the luminous blue of the moon/עַם-שָׁמֶשׁ וּלְפָנֵי יָרֵחַ:** "Staggering brightness" and "luminous blue" are poetic flourishes motivated by an attempt to evoke the emotion of awe expressed in the psalm.

**May results of his justice extend from sea to sea/וַיֵּרֶד מִיַּם עַד-יָם:** A pun on the word used for God descending in the previous verse. There God is asked to descend, using the root *yered*, and here the king is envisioned as having dominion (in the context of establishing justice), from the similar root *radah*.

**will come with homage of drink/אֶשְׁכַּר יִקְרִיבוּ:** The word *eshcar* is of uncertain meaning, but is related to *secar*, meaning alcoholic drink. BDB lists a parallel in Ezekiel 27:15 which suggests that it might mean 'gift.'

**He shelters he downtrodden and weak/יָחוּס עַל-דָּל וְאֶבְיוֹן:** Alternatively, he pities them, from the root *chus*. Here, I interpret it as related to the verb *chasah*, meaning to shelter, a more active mode of relating.

**From the midst of violence he redeems their life/מִתּוֹךְ וּמִחַמַּס יִגָּאֵל נַפְשָׁם:** Many commentators see *tokh*, meaning "within," as indicative of those wrongs that take place in secrecy. I have interpreted it instead as related to the following word, and therefore meaning "from the midst of violence."

**all nations will praise his power/יִאֲשְׁרוּהוּ:** A word used as an adjective, here converted into a verb. *Ashrei*, as in Psalm 1, means happy, praised or blessed. The word "power" was added to avoid repetition of the direct object, "him."

### Psalm 73

**the arrogant/בְּהוֹלְלִים:** The root *hallal* means praise, as in *Hallelu Ya*. Here, the *hollalim* are those who overly praise themselves.

**They do not suffer the ordinary toil of mortals/בְּעֵמֶל אָנוּשׁ אֵינָמוּ:** Notice the word *eyn*, a word of negation repeated from above. It also means nothingness, and so reinforces the psalm's theme of existential nothingness or aloneness.

**They place their mouths in heaven/שָׁתוּ בְּשָׁמַיִם פִּיהֶם:** An act of arrogance; they place their mouths in the place of heaven, speaking as though they were God.

**and from a full cup squeeze only a drop/וּמִי מָלֵא יִמְצוּ לְמוֹ:** A phrase variously translated, depending upon how one interprets the psalm. I read the two verses together to mean that in their inability to fully perceive the holy, the people are unable to take in the full abundance of God

**If I were to tell what I have suffered/אִם-אֶמְרֵתִי אֶסְפָּרָה כִּמוֹ:** Literally, "If I were to say, I will tell it how it was..."

### Psalm 74

**A Psalm in Search of Wisdom/ מַשְׁכִּיל**: *Maskil* is a frequent appositive used to describe some of the psalms. The root *sekel* means enlightenment, wisdom, understanding.

**Remember those who bear witness to you /זָכַר עֲדָתְךָ**: *Z'khor adat'kha* Literally, remember your congregation. But the word for congregation is itself derived from *eyd*, meaning witness.

**tribe of your eternal presence /שֵׁבֶט נַחֲלָתְךָ**: Literally, "tribe of your inheritance." The inheritance of God lies in the ability of people to recognize the divine eternal presence.

**And now they have broken it open, splintering its engravings/ וַעַתָּה [וַעַתָּה] פְּתוּחֵיהּ יַחַד**: A difficult phrase to translate. Radak says, "All the entrances and drawings that were made of gold. all of them together they were striking down with an axe and sledgehammer. Rendering *pitucheha* as engravings is related to the understanding of the word in Exodus 28:11 where it seems to mean exactly that. But its root means to open, and has a noun-form meaning doorway. I have combined both meanings. In addition, the phrase is followed by the word *yachad*, meaning together. I have omitted this for sake of fluidity of the English, but the sense is that of destroying "all of them as one."

**You taught the stars and sun where to shine/ אָתָּה הַכִּינֹת מָאוֹר וְשֶׁמֶשׁ**: Literally, you made them firm, but the root *kun* also means to give direction.

**A corpse-like people insulted your name/ נָבַל נָאֲצוּ שְׁמֶךָ**: The word *naval* comes from a root from which comes the word *naveila*, meaning carcass or corpse.

**by the coldhearted all day/ מִנִּי-נָבַל כָּל-הַיּוֹם**: The same word that is translated above as "corpse-like" is here translated as "cold-hearted."

## Psalm 75

**a Plea to be Spared Destruction/ אַל-תִּשְׁחַת**: This is in the command form: "Do not destroy!"

**I will judge with fairness and truth/ אֲנִי מִיִּשְׁרִים אֶשְׁפֹּט**: Literally, I judge fairly. Again, the meaning is unclear. I have interpreted it, again, as an act of affirmation by God of divine attributes.

**The unjust of the land will find and drink only its remnants/ אַךְ-שְׂמֵרִיהָ יִמְצוּ יִשְׁתּוּ כָל-רֶשְׁעֵי-אָרֶץ**: This is reading *matzu* as though it had an *alef*, as though it were written in a defective form of the word. The meaning of the sentence, in other words, is that the wrongful are not able to partake fully of God's blessings.

## Psalm 76

**In Israel reputation of the Creator is widespread/ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל גָּדוֹל שְׁמוֹ**: Literally, in Israel God's name is great. The word 'name' here and elsewhere is translated to suggest essence or reputation, as this is a central understanding of the term biblically, and especially in the context of the psalms. The word *gadol*, which literally means "big," is translated here to reflect its connotation

of transcendent vastness.

**And so it will be when your tabernacle of peace is built in Jerusalem/וְיִהְיֶה בְּשָׁלֶם סֶכּוֹ:** A long phrase is used here to translate a very short one, but the problem lies partly in interpretation. The first question, given the linguistical structure of Hebrew, is whether the original verb is meant to be interpreted in the past or future tense. Most commentators interpret this as a reflection of the former, reflecting a kind of nostalgia for previous times. I have chosen, instead, to interpret it as reflecting a future dream. The next question has to do with the word *shalem*, which can alternatively refer to the city of Jerusalem or a state of wholeness. I have chosen to translate it to allow for a reading of both. In addition, I have incorporated into my translation another understanding of the root, which is *shalom*, meaning peace.

**than the sight of mountains of corpses/מִהַרְרֵי-טָרֶף:** The word *teref* refers to limbs of prey, but here seems a referent to human remains.

**People will give thanks even in their anger. The remnant of their rage you will restrain./כִּי-חַמַּת אָדָם תּוֹדֵךְ שְׂאֵרֵי חַמַּת תַּחַגֵּר** A difficult and gnarled line, one requiring interpretation. I have wrestled with it to the best of my understanding.

## Psalm 77

**My hand reaches forth during the night without resting/יָדִי וְלֵילָה נִגְרָה וְלֹא תָפּוּג** Radak says, "[This means} my wound, and the wound is a moan, the heart's pain at being in exile. That is why it says 'night,' for at night people turn from the occupations of the day and turns toward what really weighs upon them. And it says *niygrah* because the sighs persist, one after the other." The word *niygrah* literally means a pouring forth. In this case, BDB suggests that the pouring forth is metaphorical for stretching out toward God, an interpretation I follow in my rendition.

**my soul gets tangled in knots/וּתְתַעֲטֵף רוּחִי:** The verb *atef* in the reflexive means either to grow weak or to wrap oneself, hence the sense of getting convoluted with pain.

**Is it my fault/חַלּוּתִי הִיא:** The root *challal* means to profane, and hence is associated with wrongful action against God. Here it exists in a noun form.

**and what comes as a consequence, nobody knows/וְעַקְבוֹתֶיךָ לֹא נִדְעוּ** Literally, "your consequences are not known." We can witness the effect of God's presence in the world, but what comes as a result remains a mystery.

## Psalm 78

**The children of Ephraim kissed the enemy's bowstrings/בְּנֵי-אֶפְרַיִם נוֹשְׁקֵי רֹמֵי-קֶשֶׁת:** Some see the word *nesheq* as meaning arms for battle, but the word *nesheq* also means kiss. I see it as a statement about their overweening willingness to surrender. Remember, too, that the "enemy" can be read metaphorically.

**in plain sight of our ancestors, you performed wonders/נִגְדָה אֲבוֹתֵם עֲשָׂה פְלֵא:** 'Plain sight' is implied by the word *neged*, which means right in front of.

**But they continued to misunderstand you/ וַיִּוְסִיפוּ עוֹד לְחַטֹּא-לוֹ:** The verb translated as "to misunderstand" means to miss the mark, and is often translated as meaning "to sin."

**Then you heard and were torn apart/ שָׁמַע יְהוָה וַיִּתְעַבֵּר:** An extremely rare use of this form of the verb. *Avar* means to cross or to pass over, but the verb is in the reflexive, meaning, perhaps, to be tangled within oneself.

**Each person was nourished and sated/ לָחֶם אֲבִירִים אָכַל אִישׁ:** Literally, "they ate bread of the strong"--in other words, the food was fortifying.

**With all of this, they failed to see you/ בְּכָל-זֹאת חָטְאוּ-עוֹד:** Literally, with all this, they again missed the mark. Note the word *od*, meaning again, and its previous use to refer to God's constant feeding of the people. The irony is obvious. God continues to give abundantly, but the people persist in misunderstanding the divine nature.

**they repented and prayed to their Upholder/ וּשְׁבוּ וּשְׁחֲרוּ-אֵל:** The first verb literally means turn, but is from the same root as *teshuvah*, meaning repentance. The second verb is related to *shachar*, a word that means to search, but Ibn Ezra relates it to Shacharit, the morning prayer.

**sorrow in Shimon/ יַעֲצִיבוּהוּ בִישִׁמון:** Some derive *y'shimon* from the root *shamam*, meaning to devastate or destroy. But it can equally apply to Shimon, a region in Judah.

**Their sycamore trees with frost/ וּשְׁקִמוֹתַם בְּחֲנַמַּי:** Both words are of disputable meaning. Rashi sees the type of tree as a fig, and the second word as meaning hail. He also notes Saadia Gaon's translation of the second word as a kind of locust, an interpretation mentioned by Radak. BDB, on the other hand, sees the first word as meaning "sycamore" and the latter as meaning "frost."

## Psalm 79

**flesh of those who love you has been given to brutes of the earth/ בְּבֶשֶׂר חֲסִידֶיךָ לְחֵיתוֹ-אָרֶץ:** The word *chasadekha* has come to suggest a level of devotion, but its root is *chesed*, meaning active love. The phrase translated "brutes of the earth" might also be translated "animals of the earth," but here the emphasis seems to be on destructive potential.

**Don't remember of us our earlier sins/ אֵל-תִּזְכֹּר-לָנוּ עֲוֹנוֹת רֵאשִׁינִים:** Ibn Ezra interpret this phrase as reference to deeds of one's ancestors. Radak sees it as reference "to the earlier sins that they did in the days of their youth," how I interpret it as well.

## Psalm 80

**appear and shine brightly/ הוֹפִיעָה:** *Hofiah*. The root here is *yafah*, meaning to shine brightly, but later comes to mean "to appear." I have incorporated both meanings.

**You made a small garden among the nations/ תִּגְרַשׁ גּוֹיִם:** The literal translation is "expelled the nations," but given the political implications of this ideology, I have chosen a translation that

allows for co-existence—the only true way of understanding monotheism.

**From the absence of your presence, they perish/מַגְעֶרֶת פָּנֶיךָ יֹאבְדוּ:** Literally, "from the rebuke of your face." I have interpreted this as reference to the perceived absence of God's presence. Radak says, "This is to say that you hid your face from them and pushed them away."

**Then we will not build fences from you, backing away/וְלֹא-נִסּוּג מִמֶּךָ:** The verb *sug* means to fence about, and *siyg* means to move back or away. I have combined both meanings as they seem expressive of the ways we grow distant from God, building fences between ourselves and the holy.

## Psalm 81

**Upon the wine-press instrument/עַל-הַגָּתִית:** A *gat* is a wine-press, and a *gatit*, mentioned in this psalm as well as Psalms 8 and 84, seems to refer to a kind of instrument. Others suggest that this refers to a song meant to be sung on the holiday of Sukkot (BDB).

**which covers with dark our day of rejoicing/בַּיּוֹם חֲגֻגוֹ:** The word 'dark' is implied. On the New Moon, or the first of the month according to the lunar calendar, the sky is dark, without visible moonlight. The monthly festival and its rejoicing are made even more intense by recognition of the fact that at the same time we rejoice, the physical world emanates darkness.

**eternal law by the God of Jacob/מִשְׁפָּט יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב:** The eternal law is the establishment of a holiday in which almost paradoxically, it is the absence of light that is celebrated. This teaches that God can be celebrated, even in the darkest places.

**when he went down into the land of Egypt/בְּיַצְאָתוֹ עַל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:** The grammar here is a bit confusing. Radak says, "There are those who explain this as reference to the Israelites who went out from Egypt, for it is written 'the people of Israel went out with a raised hand. But the truth in my eyes is that the going out refers to God going up, as it says, "He went out over the land of Egypt to save us." I read it instead as a reference to Joseph who went not *out of* but *to* Egypt; even in Egypt, the celebration of the New Moon took place--symbolizing the possibility of joy in times of deepest darkness. Note that Egypt has a mythical quality in biblical Judaism and so refers to oppression in all its forms.

**but the Eternal waits for them forever/וַיְהִי עִתָּם לְעוֹלָם:** Literally, "God is their time forever," but I read *itam* with an *ayin* as the word *itam* with an *alef*, meaning "with." Radak says, "[This refers to] the time and season of their blessing; for goodness would begin to flow forth to the world without any break if they would only listen to the voice of God.

## Psalm 82

**God, you stand amidst all flawed objects of praise. From the midst of false gods, your will judge /אֱלֹהִים נֹצֵב בְּעֵדֹת־אֵל בְּקֶרֶב אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁפֹּט:** The sentence is complicated by the fact that the words used to refer to false gods and idols (here translated as flawed ideals) are the same as those that are used in other places are used to refer to God. I take this as an implicit critique of certain

forms of religiosity; even the name of God can be idolatrous if used to represent that which God is not.

**lifting the spirits of those who refuse to do right/ וּפְנֵי רָשָׁעִים תִּשְׂאוּ:** Literally, "you lift up the face of wrongdoers."

**I have said to humanity—you are made in the image of God, handiwork of the Most High, all of you/כֻּלְכֶם עֲלִיוֹן כְּלִבְנֵי עֲלִיוֹן אֱלֹהִים אֲתֶם וּבְנֵי עֲלִיוֹן כְּלִבְכֶם:** Literally, "I have said you were gods, offspring of the highest, all of you." The word for God is used ironically throughout the psalm to refer to that which appears to be in the image of God but acts precisely like its opposite.

### Psalm 83

**against you, they make an alliance/עֲלֶיךָ בְרִית יִכְרְתוּ:** This line has two resonances. A *brit*, meaning covenant or alliance, can be between two nations, but it is also the word used for the covenantal relationship with God. The nations have both devised an alliance against God and spurned the covenantal relation that already exists between God and Israel.

**like Orev, The Raven...and Tzalzuma, Shadow of Withholding/כְּעֹרֵב וְכַזְאֵב וְכַזְבָּח וְכַצְלִמְנֵעַ/כָּל-נִסְיָכֵמוֹ:** The names here are both transliterated and written as the definition of the word's meaning.

**Without your presence before them, they will always be terrified and ashamed/יִבְשׁוּ וַיִּבְהָלוּ/עַד-יָעֵד:** Without God, we live in constant anxiety and terror. The phrase "without your presence before them" has been added to clarify this understanding.

**You--most worthy of praise over all the earth/עֲלִיוֹן עַל-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ:** *Elyon* literally means highest. Another way to interpret this line is that God, being highest over all the earth, watches over the earth with protective care.

### Psalm 84

**My soul pales with languish/וְנִכְסְפָה וְגַם-כָּלְתָה | נִפְשִׁי:** The first verb is based on the root *kasaf* meaning both to grow pale and to long for. The second verb, *kalta*, means to grow extinguished, but also to pine, languish.

**my earthly Earthly Protector and my Heavenly God/מֶלְכִי וְאֱלֹהֵי:** The word *melekh* is used both as an attribution of God and as reference to earthly kings. I see the line, which literally reads 'my King and my God' as evoking both the immanent and transcendent aspects of God.

**their heart is an easy road/מַסְלֹת בְּלִבָּבָם:** Literally "highways are in their heart." The heart is well-travelled since the person who acknowledges that strength comes from God lives in a state of contemplation, open to the divine in all things. Rashi says this refers to the person who contemplates in his heart the meanderings of his path in order to straighten his road."

**Because a day in your courtyards is sweeter than a thousand somewhere else/כִּי טוֹב-יוֹם:**

**בְּחִצְרֵיךָ מֵאֶלֶף:** The phrase "somewhere else" is implied. Literally, it is better than a thousand.

**those estranged from your will/ רָשָׁע:** The word is *rasha*, in translations by others often rendered as "evil." Here the emphasis is on the state of estrangement brought about by having turned away from God.

### Psalm 85

**love for humanity look down from the sky/ וְצִדְקַת מְשָׁמַיִם נִשְׁקָף:** The word translated as love of humanity is *tzedek*, related to concepts of charity and justice.

**placing footsteps of the faithful on the path/ וַיִּשֶׂם לְדֶרֶךְ פְּעָמָיו:** This line allows for multiple translations. Because of the ambiguity of the Hebrew direct object, we could read this line as reference to the footsteps of Righteousness, personified in the psalm. Alternatively, this could refer to the psalmist himself, or the person questing for God's presence. My reading suggests that God will help us return to righteousness by placing it with us on our path.

### Psalm 86

**respond to my cry, for I am poor and desperate/ עֲנֵנִי כִּי־עָנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן אָנִי:** A string of word play. The word meaning "respond" (*aneni*) plays off both the word *oni* meaning "poor," and the word *ani* meaning "I." In the language of the psalmist we have concepts of self, affliction, and God's answering all related one to another.

**The soul of your servant is made glad/ שְׂמֵחַ נַפְשׁ עַבְדְּךָ:** Some, like Radak, read this as an injunction: "Make the soul of your servant happy, for it is in sorrow and groans," but the word *sameach* is in the adjectival form. It is not in the correct gender, but inconsistencies of this sort are not unheard of in biblical Hebrew. What is more, reading it as a statement of one's already existing happiness makes more sense in context of the surrounding lines.

**Piece together my heart to be wondrous of your name/ יַיְחַד לְבָבִי לִירְאָה שְׁמֶךָ:** Just as the psalmist has prayed for a unity of nations in service of God, here he prays for a unity of self. The phrase in Hebrew reads simply "unify my heart."

**Make of me an emblem of goodness/ עֲשֵׂה־עִמִּי אוֹת לְטוֹבָה:** As with the line above that asks God to share his strength with his servant, this line asks God to work in partnership with the psalmist to become an emblem of good to all humanity. Literally it reads "make with me," but I have rendered it in a more idiomatic way.

**you have helped and consoled me/ עֲזַרְתָּנִי וְנִחַמְתָּנִי:** A wonderful line, indicative of the consolation that comes when one straightens out one's thoughts about God.

### Psalm 87

**Of Zion it is said, everyone was born in its borders/ וּלְצִיּוֹן יֵאָמֵר אִישׁ וְאִישׁ יֵלְדָהּ:** A remarkable statement. The implication is that the dream of Zion is the unity of all humankind;

figuratively, we all have been born in Zion, the place of greatest holiness.

**poets as well as profaners/שָׁרִים כְּחַלְלִים:** Rashi renders this "singers as well as dancers." The grammar, though, suggests to my mind an opposition between the first word and the second. I read it instead with a derivation from the root *chalal*, meaning 'to profane'.

## Psalm 88

**at a time of illness, in search of answers/על-מחלת לענות:** Rashi describes this illness as sickness of heart and torment brought about by the sake of exile. The second verb he renders as torment, since given the ambiguity of the Hebrew, it can be rendered either as cognate of the word meaning 'to answer' or 'to afflict.' Meiri sees the sickness as related to the effect the instrument has upon the listener, provoking in him or her the desire to repent. I translate the verb motivated by a recognition that illness is a time when we search for answers.

**Heman the Ezrachite/להימן האזרחי:** Some see this Heman as related to the Heman in I Chronicles 2:6 (whose father was Zerach), identified as being exceptionally wise. Others see him as one of the Levites in the temple, with the word Ezrachi referring to his status as citizen. Whichever designation is meant, there is a clear relation between him and Eitan the Ezrachite, mentioned in the next psalm.

**like the walking dead/וְחַיִּי לְשָׂאוֹל הַגֵּיעוּ:** The word Sheol, elsewhere rendered solely by its name, refers to the pit of death, but in the psalms represents also a spiritual death, a profound distance from God.

**Among the dead I am free, like the anonymous slain who lie in the grave. those you remember no more/בַּמֵּתִים חִפְּשִׁי כְּמוֹ חַלְלִים | שְׁכַבְי קֶבֶר אֲשֶׁר לֹא זָכַרְתָּם עוֹד:** From where he stands, in the midst of pain, God's remembrance or attention to the psalmist is regarded as a source of suffering. From the psalmist's darkness, death seems better than a life of alienation from God.

**Imprisoned, I cannot become free/כָּלָא וְלֹא אֲצֵא:** I read this as imprisonment by circumstances. Radak reads it as the imprisonment of exile, but in either case, the verb *yatzah*, meaning to go out, is closely tied to the exodus from Egypt, and the going out of slavery. Here the slavery is that of one's circumstances.

**I have been afflicted and dying since youth/עָנִי אֲנִי וְגִיעַ מִנְעַר:** The root translated as dying can also mean weary. But it is often associated with the weariness preceding death, as in the case of Aaron, where the same root is used.

**Across my flesh has flashed your burning anger/עָלַי עָבְרוּ חַרוֹנֶיךָ:** Literally, "against me." Given that the spiritual suffering of this psalm is integrally related to the bodily, I have chosen to emphasize the body here. One might equally read it as anger flashing across one's consciousness.

## Psalm 89

**The heavens—you arranged them with your care/תָּכַן אֲמוֹנֶתְךָ בְּהֵם:** The word translated as "presence" is actually the word for "faith," a motif in these opening lines of the psalm.

**The mystics tremble at your strength/אֵל נַעֲרָץ בְּסוּד־קִדְשִׁים רַבָּה:** Difficult to untangle and translate. The word "el" here is also a name of God, sometimes associated with power. The syntax of the original, however, is quite strained.

**my help through a man of conviction/וּתְאִמֵּר שְׂוִיתִי עֶזֶר עַל־גִּבּוֹר:** Alternatively, a warrior. A *gibor* in Hebrew suggests might in battle, but also the character trait of unflinching strength.

**so that my hand was with his hand/אֲשֶׁר יָדִי תִכּוֹן עִמּוֹ:** So that my hand gave him a foundation or ground.

**his despisers, I will push them away/וּמִשְׁנֵאִיו אֶגּוֹף:** Literally, "I will strike them." The emphasis, though, is upon clearing a way for the righteous, here personified in the form of David.

**I will place his hand on the ocean, his right on the river/וּשְׂמֵתִי בְיָם יָדוֹ וּבְנָהָרוֹת יָמִינוֹ:** Often this line has been translated to express simply dominion and power. Radak, for instance, says, "He will have strength and dominion over all who dwell along the coast as well as the cities along the rivers." Here, I am translating it to express, rather, the imagined extent of David's kingship, representing the hoped for unity between the holy and the political.

**But you, God, have forsaken and rejected. You betrayed your anointed one, our great and only hope /וְאַתָּה זָנַחְתָּ וּתְמָאֵס הִתְעַבְרַת עִם־מְשִׁיחֶךָ:** This begins a response to God, an accusation that God has relinquished the divine promise. The word "God" does not appear, but it has been included for clarity of expression. The phrase literally reads, "you transgressed against your anointed."

**You turned his sword to blunt rock/אָף־תְּשִׁיב צוּר חֲרָבוֹ:** Alternatively, the Rock (God) turned back the enemy's sword. The word 'blunt' is implied through context--the sword has become no longer useful as means of weaponry.

**Who will never see his soul slip to the underworld's grasp?—Selah/יִמְלֹט נַפְשׁוֹ מִיַּד־שְׂאוּל/סְלָה:** While syntactically unclear, it seems clear to me that this is meant to be phrased as a rhetorical question. The question asks whether anyone can truly escape confrontation with death and feelings of futility.

## Psalm 90

**Mortals can turn to you until they are crushed. You say, 'Return, children of Adam./תִּשָּׁב/אָנוּשׁ עַד־דָּכָא וּתְאִמֵּר שׁוּבוּ בְנֵי־אָדָם:** This is rendered by ArtScroll as "You reduce man to pulp." Rashi says, "You bring afflictions on a person until you return him to the joy of strength, and he is close to death, and you say to him, "it is through afflictions that people turn back from their evil ways," Obviously the potential readings are vast. The sentiment understood this way has never worked for me, particularly since the verb in the first clause is identical to the one in the second. In the second, it clearly refers to repentance. My translation argues that God offers humankind the opportunity to turn to faith until the day of their death.

**At dawn a person flowers and is fragrant/בִּבְקֶרֶת יִצִּיץ וְחִלָּף:** More literally, in the morning he sprouts up, but then it changes. I have formulated it this way to emphasize the expressed frailty of life and the quick changes of fortune.

**our secrets are illumined by the light of your face/עֲלֵמֵינוּ לְמָאוֹר פְּנִיךָ:** The emphasis is on God's witnessing presence illuminating even that which we would prefer to hide.

**For all our hours pass away in your fury/כִּי כָל־יָמֵינוּ פָּנוּ בְּעִבְרֶתְךָ:** The sense, I believe is that distance from God, experienced as "fury," is a kind of living death. The word is literally days, not hours.

**Fill our morning with your acts of your kindness and we will sing and rejoice all our days/שָׁבְעֵנוּ בְּבִקְרֶת חֶסֶדְךָ וּנְרַנְנָה וְנִשְׂמְחָה בְּכָל־יָמֵינוּ:** This is contrasted with the feeling of mortality and transience that is experienced in the beginning of the psalm. The psalmist sees the possibility of rejoicing in the eternity of God.

**May the sweetness of the Holy One, our Creator, be constantly before us/נָעַם אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ עָלֵינוּ:** Literally, "may it be upon us." Two possibilities of looking at reality are offered in this psalm. The first is a feeling of emptiness based on the transience of life. The second is an awareness of the presence of God, which is an antidote to that emptiness.

**And the work of our hands, give us direction. And the work of our hands— give it direction toward you/וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו כֹּונָה עָלֵינוּ וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו כֹּונָהוּ:** The root here means "to establish," but is also related to the concept of direction. The plea that one's the work be given direction toward God is implied, as God is the source of eternal direction.

## Psalm 91

**sleeps in the shadow of God's breast/בְּצֵל שְׁדַי יִתְלוֹן:** The word *Shaddai*, and its more frequent counterpart *El Shaddai*, are references to God. While translations differ, the simple meaning of *Shaddai* is "breast," suggestive of a comforting and nurturing presence.

**Under sheltering wings, the Creator will protect you from sun/בְּאַבְרֹתָיו אֶיֶסְךָ לָךְ:** Literally, "God will cover you," with emphasis on divine presence as a shield from all that troubles or threatens.

**Only with your eyes will you behold suffering/רַק בְּעֵינֶיךָ תִּבְטֵן:** The word "suffering" is implied, but left out in ellipsis. The sense is that one will be protected from the effect of suffering. While not exactly a sustainable theology, it is arguably the best way to live--with confidence in the ultimate protective power of God.

**and show you the fruit of my salvation/וְאֶרְאֶה בִּישׁוּעָתִי:** The word "fruit" has been added to emphasize the idea that salvation is not something achieved all at once, but that requires time to be cultivated and grow.

## Psalm 92

**upon soft voice accompanied by harp/עֲלֵי הַגִּיּוֹן בְּכִנּוּר:** The word "*higayon*" comes from a root that means "to moan, growl, utter, speak, muse" (BDB). BDB also lists it as "resounding music, meditation, musing." The meditative aspect is especially relevant on Shabbat, a day when we reflect on the beauty of creation.

**Your thoughts are deep as a valley/מָאֵד עֲמְקוֹ מַחְשְׁבֹתַיִךְ:** Literally, "your thoughts are very deep." The root of the word for deep, however, is the same as the root for valley.

**they will be destroyed by testimony of time/לְהַשְׁמָדֵם עֲדֵי-עַד:** The psalm actually suggests a causal relation. When they wrongful thrive, it is only so they can then be destroyed. As a way of playing on that theme and giving a less combative understanding, I have translated *adei-ad* as "by testimony of time." Here, as elsewhere, I have played on the fact that *eyd* means witness.

**All the wrongful will be divided within/יִתְפָּרְדּוּ כָּל-פְּעֻלֵי אָוֶן:** This reading comes from the fact that the verb meaning division is written in the reflexive.

**You lift up my strength like a wild ox/וַתָּרֶם כְּרָאִים קַרְנֵי:** The word *qeren* means strength or ray of glory.

**My eyes have seen those who watch for my fall/וַתִּבֶּט עֵינֵי בְּשׂוּרֵי בְּקִמִּים עָלַי:** Interestingly, what is valued here is awareness of the dangers that confront one, a clear-sightedness rather than reliance upon a supernatural act of salvation.

**The righteous will spread their leaves like a palm tree/צִדִּיק כְּתִמְר יִפְרַח:** The word "leaves" has been added to convey the sense of the Hebrew, which means "to bud or shoot up." The sense is that the actions of the righteous have a rippling effect in the world.

**They will continue to flower in old age/עוֹד יִנּוּבֹן בְּשִׁיבָה:** The image is one of the spiritual flowering of the righteous even as their bodies begin to fail.

### Psalm 93

**The rivers grew swollen, God/נִשְׂאוּ נְהָרוֹת ! יְהוָה:** Literally, they lifted up. It is the same verb as is used in the following line.

**You live on, God, for the length of days/יְהוָה לְאֶרְךְ יָמִים:** Literally, "God, for the length of days." The psalm is a meditation on both God's power and longevity. Having been there from the beginning, God will be there until the end.

### Psalm 94

**God who upholds the righteous/אֱלֹ-נִקְמוֹת יְהוָה:** This literally reads "God of vengeance," but I have chosen to emphasize the aspect of upholding the righteous rather than the concept of revenge.

**The One who teaches humanity to reason/הַמְלַמֵּד אָדָם דַּעַת:** The irony here is profound. The previous questions are rhetorical and based on reason, such as the question "does not the one who shapes the ear have the ability to listen?" This is the final crescendo in the list, as the God who forms the basis of reason, is found guilty of irrational acts.

**The courts will once again become righteous /כִּי־עַד־צִדִּיק יָשׁוּב מִשְׁפָּט:** This follows the reading of Radak who says, "The time will come again when justice will return to righteousness." "Justice" here is read as "courts," the mechanism or system of justice that has become corrupt.

**the wise-hearted will walk in their light/וְאַחֲרָיו כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל:** Literally, they will walk after it. I see this as reflective of the light of justice and the hope that eventually more and more people will be attracted to walk in its glow.

**my soul dwells almost in silence/כַּמְעַט | שְׂכֵנָה דּוֹמָה נִפְשִׁי:** The meaning of this is twofold. It expresses a perceived proximity to death, but also a state of mind in which one finds oneself in such distress that one can no longer communicate one's pain.

**When I try to speak, my legs give way beneath/אִם־אֲמַרְתִּי מָטָה רַגְלִי:** The verb comes from a root that means "to spread," or in context "to slip." The meaning, it seems, is that the psalmist no longer has conviction even in his own words.

**Have you made friends with the throne of destruction?/הֲיִחַבְּרַךְ כִּסֵּא הַחַיִּת:** This, addressed to God, suggests that the psalmist, in midst of despair, contemplates the idea that there is a force of evil in the universe and that God has allied with that force against him.

**Has the creator of suffering engraved against me a law?/יִצַר עֲמַל עָלַי־חֵק:** Here, in the midst of the psalmist's turmoil, God is perceived as the creator not of good, but affliction.

**The strength of their corruption will come back to their chests/וַיָּשָׁב עֲלֵיהֶם | אֶת־אוֹנָם:** Literally, this reads "their vitality/wealth will return." But *oun* means strength or force. The argument, then, is that the strength of their wrongdoing should fall back upon them. Rashi, referencing Job 21:19, interprets this to refer to their rape (*ounes*), which they will suffer themselves in order to understand what it is like. Metzudat Tzion interprets it, as I do, to mean strength.

**let it overthrow their destruction, Holy One, our God/יִצְמִיתֶם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ:** The same verb is used as in the previous line. Literally, it means "destroy them." I see it, however, as a wish for reciprocity; just as their own wrongs destroy them, let God destroy their propensity for destruction.

## Psalm 95

**For you are a far-reaching power/גְּדוֹל יְהוָה:** Often translated simply as "God is great," but the greatness of God is related to a sense of abundance or expanse, as *gadol* means large. Here, as elsewhere, I have translated it in relation to God's omnipresence and vastness.

**peaks of great mountains are known to God alone/וְתוֹעֲפוֹת הַרִּים לֹ/ו:** This could also be understood to mean the mountains *belong* to God, but given the parallel in the preceding line, the emphasis seems to be on God's intimate knowledge of even unexplored ranges of land.

**Forty years I remained estranged from the generation/1 אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה אֶקְוֵט בְּדוֹר:** The verb translates literally as loathing (BDB). The sense, though, is God's distance from the generation of the Exodus based on their actions.

## Psalm 96

**the Holy Presence in our lives/יְשׁוּעָתוֹ:** This phrase is translated from a word most often rendered as "salvation." I attempt here and elsewhere to wrestle with a sense of salvation's theological import. If we do not uphold a theology in which God literally protects us from harm, what we can believe in is the saving reality of God's holy and calming presence.

**awe of you transcends all false objects of praise/נֹרָא הוּא עַל-כָּל-אֱלֹהִים:** Literally, "God is awesome." As that word has lost its original intensity through common usage, I have chosen another way to convey the sense of awe and wonder, especially in comparison to those things we idolatrously uphold above the goodness and unity of the divine.

**Give allegiance to God, families of nations/הִבּוּ לַיהוָה מִשְׁפָּחוֹת עַמִּים:** The phrase "give your allegiance" is more literally translated as "praise." Here, though, I think it is a call for all of humankind to acknowledge God as a source of unity.

## Psalm 97

**Sculptors of greed will be ashamed/יִבְשׂוּ כָל-עֲבָדֵי כֶּסֶף:** Literally, "all those who serve statues." The translation is motivated by an understanding of idolatry as that which leads us astray from true goals. The intention here, as in the prohibition against graven images, can be understood not as a prohibition against art, but as a warning against holding an image before us that through its allure, can pull us away from the divine and towards ideals that ultimately disappoint us.

**Bow down before your Creator, all who promise empty ends/הִשְׁתַּחֲוּ-לוֹ כָּל-אֱלֹהִים:** The word *elohim* is used also to speak of God, but here it refers to the false gods, the ones who promise happiness but cannot deliver it.

## Psalm 98

**You announced your presence before the nations/הוֹדִיעַ יְהוָה יְשׁוּעָתוֹ לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם:** Salvation has here been translated as "presence," suggesting that God's redemptive presence is the real meaning of salvation.

## Psalm 99

**admonishing them when they wandered astray/וְנִקְמָם עַל-עֲלִילוֹתָם:** Radak reads this as God

taking revenge on Korach and his supporters, and Rashi reads it as punishment against Samuel because his sons did not walk in the way of Torah. To my mind, the emphasis seems to be on God rebuking the wrongful actions of the people as they strayed. *Alilotam* comes from *alilah*, a word that can mean wantonness or deed, but in this case the deed seems to be that of wandering astray from God.

### Psalm 100

**You created us and it is to our Creator we belong/הוא עָשָׂנוּ וְלֹא [וְלוֹ] אֲנַחְנוּ:** This is one of many examples in biblical texts for which tradition replaces the written form with a different understanding of the word, so that the word is actually read differently from how it is written. I follow the written form, but the alternative reading is, "God made us; we didn't make ourselves." I see this line as clearly related to the following one, suggesting an image of God as guide and shepherd.

### Psalm 101

**Those who swerve from you---I have stayed from them distant/עָשָׂה-סָטִים שָׁנַאתִי:** The literal reading is "I have hated him." The emphasis of the psalm, however, is on removal of oneself from a context of hate.

**Evil—I do not study its path/רָע לֹא אֲדַע:** Literally, "Evil--I do not know it," but this can be said of virtually no one. A better rendering, I think, reflects the resolution to not pursue wrongdoing.

**I will humble into silence/אוֹתוֹ אֶצְמִית:** The word *atzmit* means "annihilate," but is derived from an Arabic root meaning "to make silent."

**The haughty of eye and unsatisfied of heart—they are unable to know you/גְּבַה־עֵינָיִם וְרָחַב לִבָּב אוֹתוֹ לֹא אוֹכֵל:** Literally, "the broad of heart." In this context, I take it to mean a heart too wide, with too many longings to be satisfied. The next phrase leaves off the infinitive and reads simply "he is unable." The ending *very* has been supplied for clarity.

**Every morning, in my mind, I wipe the wicked from the earth/לְבֹקְרִים אֶצְמִית כָּל-רְשָׁעֵי-אָרֶץ:** Literally, "every morning I would destroy the wicked from the earth." Radak says, "This is because they are all adversaries and obstacles, that I will cut off from the city of God, which is Jerusalem." I read this, rather, as an imaginative gesture, exemplifying not reality, but the dream and desire that those who act harmfully might eventually turn from their ways. The same is true of the following phrase.

### Psalm 102

**For my days are consumed like smoke/כִּי-כָלוּ בְעָשָׁן יְמֵי:** Alternatively, "my days are consumed in smoke." Given the parallelism implicit in the following line, I read the *bet* (meaning "in") as a *kaf* (meaning "like"), leading to this rendition.

**an owl estranged in desolate places/חַרְבוֹת כְּכֹס חַיִּיתִי:** The sense of displacement is implicit in this line as well as the one above. The simile is meant to evoke the strangeness and incompatibility of oneself with one's circumstances or surroundings.

**But you, God, are enthroned forever/וְאַתָּה יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם תֵּשֵׁב:** These lines are meant to contrast the experience of the psalmist with the reality of God. In doing so, the psalmist attempts to evoke pity, as though to say: "God, you who do not know of human suffering, pay attention to my plea."

**For the time for relenting has come/עַתָּה לְחַנּוּנָה:** This verb is similar in meaning to the root above, *rachem*. Both mean taking compassion, though the root *chanan* is often translated as "grace," God's taking compassion on us whether or not it is deserved. I have phrased it as "time for relenting" because this seemed to capture the emotion of this passage of the psalm.

**Nations will stand in awe of your name/וַיִּירָאוּ גוֹיִם אֶת־שֵׁם יְהוָה:** This is a common argument made to God based on a presumption of divine self-interest; if the Holy One helps the people, all the nations will give the tribute of acknowledging divine glory.

**Turn toward the plea of those whose heart is a wasteland/פְּנֹה אֶל־תְּפִלַּת הָעֵרְעֵר:** The root *arar* comes from a root that means stripped bare. Here, it serves as a metaphor for those stripped of hope. Rashi reads it as "ones who cry out [to God]."

**But you are different/וְאַתָּה־הוּא:** Literally, "but you are the one [God]" The emphasis is one the contrast between mortality of human life and immortality of God.

**You will see the children of those who serve you settle in tranquility/בְּנֵי־עַבְדֶּיךָ יִשְׁכְּנוּ:** The phrase "you will see" has been added to emphasize the theme of the psalm: God's permanence and ability to see change compared to the limited perspective of humankind.

### Psalm 103

**Be wild, oh my soul, for the Source of Wonder/בְּרַכֵּי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־יְהוָה:** Literally this reads "Bless, oh my soul...", but the word "bless" does not do justice to the enthusiasm of the psalm.

**don't let me forget all your kindness and help/וְאַל־תִּשְׁכַּחֵי כָל־גְּמוּלוֹ/וְאַל־תִּשְׁכַּחֵי כָל־גְּמוּלוֹ:** The word *gamulav* comes from the root *gamal*, meaning "to wean or to benefit." The sense in a spiritual context seems to be like encouragement for growth.

**who satiates my mouth with delight/הַמְשַׂבֵּיעַ בְּטוֹב עֵדֶיךָ:** This understanding of *edyeik* as "mouth" follows the interpretation of Radak, who says this is said in contrast to the sick person, for one who is sick refuses all food--and behold God, may the Holy One be blessed, does great kindness with a person in that God gives one sickness so we can atone for our wrongs, and heals us from sickness--and the mouth, which is the organ that had refused food, becomes satiated with the goodness that comes from health."

## Psalm 104

**Stand in wonder, oh my soul, before the Eternal/בְּרַכִּי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־יְהוָה:** This translation comes from the association of *barukh* with *berekh*, the bending of the knee. The essential emotion is one of wonderment.

**The trees of the Holy One are healthy and strong/יִשְׁבְּעוּ עֵצֵי יְהוָה:** Literally, they are full, sated. The water which has been such a central motif in the psalm is the source of their health.

**Your craftsmanship overflows the world/מְלֵאָה הָאָרֶץ קִנְיֶיךָ:** Literally, "the earth is full of your possessions." But clearly from the context of the psalm it is God's providential care that makes them "possessions" in any true sense of the word.

**The glory of God will continue forever/יְהִי כְבוֹד יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם:** The word *kavod*, or glory, is associated with the presence of God dwelling amidst the people.

**I will sweeten my conversation for your sake/יַעֲרֹב עָלָיו שִׁיחִי:** One of the many translations of the root *arav* is 'to be sweet'. Here, the beauty and order of the natural world provokes a longing for an equivalent order in the moral world.

**Soon sinners will vanish from the earth, the wrongful exist no more/יִתְמוּ חַטָּאִים | מִן־הָאָרֶץ | וְרַשָּׁעִים | עוֹד אֵינָם:** This has often been read in a revengeful way: "Let the sinners be destroyed from the earth..." Radak, in a slightly more affirmative tone, interprets it, "no more sinners will come after them [after the ones who already exist]. Metzudat David also has an interesting commentary. Interpreting the voice of the psalmist, he says, "My prayer is that the sinners will be finished, which means to say that they will overcome their urges and not commit sin, and afterwards there will be no wrongful people in the world." This is in keeping with my interpretation, which sees the psalm envisioning a moral order to match the splendor of the beauty of the natural world. See also the beautiful interpretation by Berurah in the Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 10a, which is also in the same spirit as my own.

## Psalm 105

**Pour out your thanks to God/הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה:** The word *hodu* (thanks) comes from a root that also means to throw or cast (BDB). Here and elsewhere I render it as a kind of spilling over with gratitude.

**the relation you engraved with Abraham/אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת אֶת־אַבְרָהָם:** The word *karat*, used often in relation to establishing covenants, literally means to cut. People who are "cut off" from the nation are described with the same word. In this case, the meaning is one of establishing a permanent relation.

**You made it stand immutable for Jacob/וַיַּעֲמִידָהּ לְיַעֲקֹב לְחֹק:** The word *choq* means statute, but comes from a root that means to engrave. As statute, it refers to those laws that are permanent, and according to the rabbis, inscrutable. Here, I again interpret it as God's presence standing in eternal relation with the people.

saying, "To you I will give the promised land/לְאָמַר לְךָ אֶת־אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: Literaly, "To you I will give the land of Canaan." Since I believe that the promised land is meant to be read spiritually and metaphorically, I have translated it accordingly.

**You warned them of a famine in the land/וַיִּקְרָא רָעַב עַל־הָאָרֶץ:** Some, such as Sforno, read this as causative--God caused a famine to come down upon the land. But the verb means more literally "to read or call out." The emphasis throughout is on God not as punisher of enemies, but as faithful provider.

## Psalm 106

**Give thanks to the Creator for all that is good/הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה כִּי־טוֹב:** Or, give thanks to God for God is good. Perhaps one could argue that the two amount to the same thing. Metzudat David says, "[thank God] for God is good and from God comes no evil, for always, throughout time, God enacts deeds of kindness." It is noteworthy that the psalmist thanks God here for goodness, not power. The goodness of God is manifested in the actuated goodness of the world.

**Who can put into words your eternal commitment?/מִי יִמְלֵל גְּבוּרֹת יְהוָה:** *Gevurah* is often understood as might, but also means restraint. In relation to God, I interpret it to mean a kind of unwavering commitment.

**Watch over me with your protection/פָּקְדֵנִי בִישׁוּעָתֶךָ:** Literally, "with your salvation"

**so I can see the happiness of those who have chosen you for their own/וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת־בְּטוֹבְתְךָ בְּחִירֶיךָ:** Literally, this means "your chosen ones." My reading here follows the understanding of Spinoza, who interprets "chosenness" to mean rather that which one has chosen. I translate similarly in the following line which in a literal reading calls Israel God's portion, and which I render as "those who have chosen God as their own."

**But you saved them for the sake of your message/וַיִּוְשִׁיעֵם לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ:** Literally, for sake of God's name. Name as reference to God is often better understood as essence; here I understand the essence of God to be the divine message.

**You saved them from the hand of those who denied their humanity/וַיִּוְשִׁיעֵם מִיַּד שׂוֹנְאֵי:** Literally, their haters. What does it mean to hate somebody if not a failure to see their essential humanity?

**They sacrificed their sons and daughters to demons that demanded destruction/וַיִּזְבְּחוּ אֶת־בְּנֵיהֶם וְאֶת־בָּנוֹתֵיהֶם לְשִׂדִּים:** The concept of demons is a very unusual one in Jewish biblical literature. It is paralleled once in Deuteronomy 32:17-18, which reads:

So Jeshurun grew fat and kicked--  
You grew fat and gross and coarse---  
He forsook the God who made him  
And spurned the Rock of his support.  
They incensed Him with alien things,  
Vexed Him with abominations.

They sacrificed to demons, no-gods,  
Gods they had never known,  
New ones, who came but lately,  
Whom your fathers did not know.  
You neglected the Rock that begot you,  
Forgot the God who brought you forth.

The entire concept of child sacrifice, a pagan ritual, requires much more exploration than is my intent here. I would recommend Jon Levinson's *Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son* as an insightful and thought-provoking treatment of the issue.

**You turned away from those who had defied your will/ וַיִּתְעַב אֶת־נַחֲלָתוֹ:** *Nachalato* actually means possession or portion. At times, I have chosen to de-emphasize this relation in order to focus on the actual issue under discussion. Here, the accusation is that the people, or "property" of God, have betrayed their maker or "owner."

### Psalm 107

**Give thanks to the Creator for all that is good/הַדּוֹן לַיהוָה כִּי־טוֹב** Literally, as in the last psalm, give thanks to God because... good." It is unclear whether the "good" mentioned is the goodness of giving praise, the goodness of God, or (as implied in the rest of the psalm) the goodness of God's actions. The translation takes as a starting point that God's goodness is inseparable from God's acts.

**They cried out to you about all that made quiver their minds/וַיִּצְעֲקוּ אֶל־יְהוָה בְּצַר לָהֶם:** Literally, they cried out to God in their constraint, their trouble.

**From all their constraints/מִמְצוּקוֹתֵיהֶם:** *Mi-mitzuqotehem*. A play on the word for shouting out (*tzoeq*) in the previous line. The sense of the word is also paralleled by the word *tzar* in that line, also meaning constraint (and translated as "all that made quiver their minds").

**In that place you settled the famished; they established a city in which to live/וַיּוֹשֶׁב שָׂם וַיִּזְכְּרוּ עִיר מוֹשָׁב רְעֵבִים וַיִּכְוְנוּ עִיר מוֹשָׁב:** The psalm moves back and forth between a theology which sees the land's barrenness as punishment for the people's sins to a theology which sees survival as dependent on human labor.

**Who is wise? Those who preserve these truths, who understand in their depth the steadfast kindness of God/מִי־חָכָם וַיִּשְׁמַר־אֱלֹהִים וַיִּתְּבוֹנֶנּוּ חֲסִדֵי יְהוָה:** The grammar and syntax is a bit confusing here. Another possible reading: Who is wise and and preserves these truths and deeply understands the kindness of God? Radak says, "Whoever is wise truly observes the words said in this psalm and guards them with his heart and remembers that everything comes from the hand of God, may the Holy One be Blessed; God raises up and brings down, makes rich and dispossesses, crushes and heals." In my reading, the emphasis is on God's kindness, not power for sake of itself.

### Psalm 108

**My heart is sturdy, God/נִכּוֹן לִבִּי אֱלֹהִים:** As has been noted elsewhere, the word for heart in Hebrew refers also to mind, as the intellect was thought to reside in the heart. A wonder of ancient Hebrew is that the faculties of body and mind were not thought to be quite so distinct. This is a notion that is perhaps lost in modern times, where the two faculties are often seen as distinct or oppositional. In Biblical Hebrew it is possible, therefore, to talk of a heart-mind. The word translated as "sturdy" can also mean simply "correct, rightly directioned."

**Because towering above the heavens is your kindness; your constancy reaches the highest level of clouds/גְּדוֹל מַעַל-שָׁמַיִם חִסְדְּךָ וְעַד-שְׁחָקִים אֲמַתְּךָ:** While this may seem to be an image of a God that is vastly distant, I think it rather suggests the vast, overarching quality of God's presence.

**Do you go with us when we march off to war?/וְלֹא-תֵצֵא אֱלֹהִים בְּצַבָּאתֵינוּ:** This can either be read as a question or a statement. Another way to translate this line, then, expresses a conviction that God is, in fact, not with the people when they go off to war.

### Psalm 109

**But I myself am prayer/וְאֲנִי תַפִּלָּה:** An extraordinary line, replicated elsewhere in the psalms and picked up later as a central theme of Hasidism. The idea that one can actually become prayer, a living embodiment of praise, is seen here as having both protective and moral force.

**Place a warrior above them, let the great accuser stand to their right/הִפְקֵד עָלֵיו רָשָׁע וְשָׂטָן**  
**יעמד על-ימינו:** This psalm uses the word *satan*, later transformed into the personified form of the Christian concept of Satan, a demiurge opposed to God. Although Satan is personified in the Job story, the root is generally understood to mean a force of adversary or opposition, not a personified demon with powers in war with God. The word *rasha*, often translated as wrongful, is here translated as "warrior," in keeping with the psalm's desire for revenge.

**my heart is hollow inside/וּלְבִי חָלַל בְּקֶרְבִּי:** The root *hallal* can also mean pierced or wounded. Love of God and its disappointment has injured and dulled the heart.

### Psalm 110

**By David, a psalm, a pronouncement of God, the Upholder/לְדָוִד מִזְמוֹר נְאֻם יְהוָה | לְאֲדֹנָי:**  
This psalm cries out for interpretation, even more than most. On the surface, it is difficult, if not impossible, to untangle the grammar and syntax. I have tried to piece together a reading that holds together, but it required effort. The psalm as literally written seems to be addressed by God to "my master." Rashi, quoting the Talmud, interprets that to be Abraham, and Radak sees it as God addressing David. As I write this, the best understanding I can come up with is that both terms refer to God.

**on the day you gather forces /בְּיוֹם חִילְךָ:** Literally, "on day of your army." My translation follows Rashi, who says, "When you gather an army to pursue them, your people will volunteer to go with you, along with all who love you."

**from the womb's darkness/מִשְׁחָר:** *Shachar* can mean blackness and also means dawn. Radak

interprets it to mean the dawn of one's life, the moment one emerges from the womb. We have in the psalm, then, a continuity: from the womb, to the first light of living, to youth and beyond.

**as I vowed of Malchitzedek, the virtuous king/1 1 על־דַּבְּרֹתַי מֶלֶכִי־צֶדֶק**: The name Malchitzedek means "My king is righteous." Malchitzedek is known as a paradigm of a righteous gentile and a just king in his dealings with Abraham (for the story, see Genesis 15:18-20)

**flinging aside even kings on the day of my wrath/מַחֵץ בַּיּוֹם־אָפוּ מַלְכִים**: The word *machatz* means literally "to wound severely, smite through, shatter" (BDB). I have translated according to the verse's underlying intention; God's strength in comparison to earthly rulers.

### Psalm 112

**In your direction is found continual delight/בְּמִצְוֹתַי הִפֵּץ מֵאֵד**: Literally "in God's *mitzvot*." The *mitzvot* are interpreted here as manifestations of God's direction.

**All desires of the wrongful will ultimately be lost/תַּאֲוֹת רְשָׁעִים תֵּאבֵד**: The word "ultimately" does not appear in the Hebrew, but I believe that is the psalm's intention. In time, the desires of the wrongful evaporate or are lost to the grave; what endures is the good we create.

### Psalm 113

**making the woman who has not given birth feel like a joyful mother of children/מוֹשִׁיבֵי מוֹשִׁיבֵי אִמֵּי־הַבָּנוֹת שְׂמֵחָה**: Radak reads this as God "overturning the natural course of nature, making the barren woman give birth...the barren woman will be as happy with her children in proportion to her previous sadness." I read this change as not reliant upon an overturning of the natural order, but rather returning a person to the emotional state of having attained that which they most wish for, whether that wish has been attained or not.

### Psalm 115

**because of your kindness and your constancy in our lives/עַל־חֶסֶדְךָ עַל־אֱמֶתְךָ**: The word for truth (*emet*) is semantically related to the word for faith (*emunah*). As often in psalms and liturgy when "truth" is declared to be an attribute of God, one must ask, then, what that word signifies. It seems to me best understood as unflinching constancy of presence.

**Their idols of silver and gold lead to sadness/עֲצִבֵיהֶם כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב מֵעֵשָׂה יְדֵי אָדָם**: The word for idol here (*atzabeihem*) is related to the word for sadness (*atzuv*). An idol, then, is that which promises joy, but leads only to sorrow.

**the unknown along with the named/הַקְטָנִים עִם־הַגְּדֹלִים**: Literally, "the small along with the great." This has been interpreted to refer to age, with prayer encompassing the whole spectrum of life's continuum. But in the context of the psalm, the intention seems obvious enough to me. Not only will the house of Aaron and Israel bless God, but also all those who are nameless.

### Psalm 116

**You keep watch over the willing/שֹׁמֵר פְּתָאִים יְהוָה:** Often translated as "the simple" or "the deceived," but the word can perhaps be best understood as "open minded" (BDB).

**You opened my tight and hard-knot places/פִּתַּחְתָּ לְמוֹסְרֵי/** A *moser* is a bonding rope, and is related to the word that means to tie, bind or imprison. Here it is related to the ways we are imprisoned internally within ourselves.

### Psalm 117

**Your loyalty exists for all time/וְאֵמֶת יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם:** This is a translation of *emet*, usually rendered as truth. Here and elsewhere I have understood it as God's unwavering presence.

### Psalm 118

**Your presence is known through all who help me/יְהוָה לִי בְעֵזְרִי:** Literally, "God is for me with my helpers." I interpret this to mean that God makes divine help known through people.

**With them on my side, I can look squarely on my fears/וְאֲנִי אֶרְאֶה בְּשֹׂנְאֵי/** Literally "I can look on my haters." It is the confidence of God's presence (experienced through others) that gives the psalmist conviction enough to face down even that which most degrades and opposes. The word *sonai* is clearly meant to be understood in contrast to *ezrai*, helpers.

**All the nations surrounded me-- in the name of my Protector I circumcised their heart/כָּל-גּוֹיִם סָבְבוּנִי בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה כִּי אֲמִילֵם:** The reference here is not entirely clear (why are the nations surrounding him?). Other translations render the second part of the sentence: "I cut them down." But the word used is the word for circumcision. The action, interpreted this way, is not a violent one, but rather represents conversion to the ways of God.

**they burned me like fire with thorns/דָּעְכוּ כְּאֵשׁ קוֹצִים:** This translation involves reading *doakhu*, which usually means to extinguish a flame, as a corrupted rendering of the root *ba-ar*, meaning to burn (this is the interpretation of BDB).

**The rock rejected by builders has become the cornerstone of faith/אֶבֶן מְאֹסוֹ הַבּוֹנִים הִיְתָה/** לְרֵאשׁ פִּנָּה: Literally, "it has become the cornerstone," perhaps of the Temple, but metaphorically the cornerstone of faith and worship.

### Psalm 119

**If only I could straighten my footsteps to hold fast to your statutes/אֲחֲלִי יִכְנוּ דְרָכֵי לְשֹׁמֵר/** חֻקֶּיךָ: Literally "if only my roads would straighten out to keep your statutes." The word for statutes is *chuyim*, meaning the immutable laws of God that are beyond rational explanation (the word *choq* is related to a root that means to engrave; in other words, they refer to that which has a kind of *a priori* existence. They are often related to ritual observance, those actions that are designed to keep a person on the right path. The word is sometimes translated as "statute" or "precept," sometimes as "immutable law" or "eternal law," and sometimes as "mystery of your law."

**as I learn the ways of your righteousness/בְּלִמְדֵי מִשְׁפָּטֵי צְדָקָה:** The word translated "particular instances" is a form of the word *mishpat*, meaning a civil law. It is translated more generally as justice, and more literally as law.

**By paying attention to her wanderings in keeping with your word/לְשׁוֹמֵר כְּדִבְרֶךָ:** Literally "to observe according to your word." The object is missing. One might think the reference is to observing commandments, but the line before it refers to heart. I am reading this, then, as an observing or guarding over one's heart.

**Let me not wander from the orchard of your will/אַל־תִּשְׁגְּנִי מִמִּצְוֹתֶיךָ:** The verb here means to stray unintentionally; the word "orchard" has been added to reinforce my sense of the *mitzvot*, generally understood as commandments, as that which is infused with love.

**so I would not fall away from your purpose/לִמְעַן לֹא אֲחַטָּא־לָךְ:** Or "so I would not miss the mark in relation to you." The word is often translated as sin, but I read it here and elsewhere as straying from a fundamental aspect of oneself.

**Show your servant fruit of your kindness/גָּמַל עַל־עֲבֹדְךָ** The root *gamal* means to ripen, wean, but also to recompense. Here the fruit of God's kindness is seen as the reward for serving God.

**You rebuke those who willfully defy you, along with those who stray without intention from your will/גְּעַרְתָּ זֵדִים אֲרוּרִים הַשְּׂגִימִם מִמִּצְוֹתֶיךָ:** Radak says these are reference to the same person, one who is not connected with God.

**Your testimonies are my obsession; like people, they give me good counsel/גַּם־עֵדוּתֶיךָ שְׂעֻשָׁעֵי/אֲנִישֵׁי עֲצָתִי:** Radak interprets them: "my friends."

**grant me a new spirit in keeping with your word/חַיֵּי כְּדִבְרֶךָ:** Literally "keep me alive in keeping with your word."

**for your decisions help cultivate goodness/כִּי מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ טוֹבִים:** Literally "for your laws/decisions are good." What makes them good is that they help to cultivate peaceful societal relations.

**I will respond to those who scorn me, for in your word I have trusted/וְאֶעֱנֶה חֲרִפֵי דְבָרְךָ/כִּי־בִטַחְתִּי בְּדִבְרֶךָ:** Radak interprets the scorers as saying, "There will be no salvation for that one," and the trust consisting in a trust that God will indeed uphold one according to the divine word.

**Don't take away truth from my mouth, for I have longed to perform your justice/וְאַל־תִּצַּל/מִפִּי דְבַר־אֱמֶת עַד־מָאֵד כִּי לְמִשְׁפָּטְךָ יִחַלְתִּי:** Radak says, "I ask that you do not take the word from my mouth but rather accustom my mouth to speak the truth, for if you don't do this, it will be as if you had taken it [my mouth] away from me, for it was in your power to help me and to open my mouth to speak what is good."

**Before kings, I will speak testimony of you and not be ashamed/וְאֶדְבַּרָה בְּעֵדוּתֶיךָ נֶגַד מְלָכִים/וְלֹא אֲבוֹשׁ:** The word *eydotekha*, which literally means "your testimonies, is often translated as "testimony [or evidence] of your existence."

**I remember your loyalty to justice from the beginning of creation, God, and take comfort/זָכַרְתִּי מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ מֵעוֹלָם אֲיִהוּ וְאַתְנַחֵם:** Radak says "I remember the decrees you brought against good people in years past, and afterwards you brought them much good, and with this I have been comforted, for I know that if you now make decrees against me, later you will bring me good."

**The mysteries of your law were melodies for me in the house of my fears/זְמֵרוֹת הַיַּיִל חֻקֶיךָ:** One of the most beautiful lines, I think, in the psalms. The idea is that observing ritual law, however inscrutable, can lead to a connection with God.

**I have longed for the softness of your face with the entire strength of my heart/חֲלִיתִי פָנֶיךָ:** This understanding follows Rashi, who says, "This is the same language as "my portion is God said my soul, therefore I will wait for him" (Lamentations 3). The root *chalah* can mean both to weaken or soften, and so I am interpreting it here as a longing for a particular quality of God's face--soft and relenting.

**My suffering has brought me good; only through hardship have I learned the bedrock of your truth/עֵינַי לִמְעַן אֶלְמַד חֻקֶיךָ:** Rashi says, "It is good that I have been afflicted and suffered--because of that I turned from a wrongful path and observed your statutes." He also mentions other interpretations that read, "I have found that indeed it is good for me that I suffered, etc; It is good in my eyes that I suffered afflictions in order to learn Torah in sorrow."

**Your hands formed me and gave me direction/יְדֵיךָ עָשׂוּנִי וַיְכַוְּנוּנִי:** The root *kun* means to establish or to give a foundation, but is also related to the word *kavanah*, meaning spiritual directedness.

**All your commandments to consider others are the basis of faith/כָּל-מִצְוֹתֶיךָ אֱמוּנָה:** Or, "all your commandments come from your faithfulness to us." Radak sees it as a kind of rebuke. "It is said that you have commanded concerning the weak that no one should oppress them, and you work justice, as you have written, 'Do justice with the stranger, the orphan and the widow.' If so, help me against those who pursue me with lies for no reason."

**Anguish and anxiety found me, but I found delight in your will/צָרָוּ וּמְצוֹק מְצָאוּנִי מִצְוֹתֶיךָ:** Radak says, "At the time when trouble found me, your will was my delight; it comforted me in face of the trouble I was wrestling with."

**You are close, God, and all your commandments come from the flood of your truth/קָרוֹב אַתָּה וְכָל-מִצְוֹתֶיךָ אֶמֶת:** Rashi has an interesting commentary. He says, "You are close to those same ones who are distant, those who distance themselves from your teachings--if only they would turn back from their path!"

**The first of your words is truth. All your judgments forever point to what is right/רֵאשִׁי-דְבָרְךָ אֶמֶת וְלְעוֹלָם כָּל-מִשְׁפָּט צְדָקָךָ:** Rashi identifies the first of God's words with the Ten Utterances, beginning with "I am the Lord, your God."

**I have wandered away like a lost sheep--seek out your servant!/תַּעֲיִתִי כְּשֵׂה אֵבֶד בִּקְשׁ עַבְדְּךָ:** A wonderfully human way to end such a lengthy proclamation of faith. Radak says, "And look! I

have strayed in this knowledge, and still haven't been able to uphold it, and so I am like the lost sheep that doesn't know how to return to the place it desires; so does my soul still not know how to return to its foundation. And just as the true shepherd seeks the lost sheep until he finds him and returns him to the pasture, so may you seek your servant until you return him to his foundation, which is the foundation of his existence. The beseeching is so that you will help me in knowledge, for I have not forgotten your commandments--therefore help me and do not forget me."

### Psalm 120

**A Song of Uplift/שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת:** This is the first of a series of fifteen "ascent psalms." Most commentators link these to the steps that led up to the Temple (with one psalm recited on each step), but some, such as Sforino, see the steps as taking place on a spiritualized, internal plane.

**Oh, so many years of drawn out wandering!/אוֹיָהּ לִי כִּי־גֵרְתִי מִשָּׁר/** The word *garti* means to live as a resident alien and suggests homelessness and impermanence.

**I dwelt so long in darkened tents craving a home/שָׁכַנְתִּי עִם־אֶהָלֵי קֶדָר/** Literally, tents of Kedar. The people of Kedar were nomads who wandered from place to place. "darkened tents" plays off the fact that the root of "*qedar*" means dark or gloomy.

### Psalm 121

**who made each crevice, who smoothed each stone:** These lines have been added because the Biblical strategy of including opposites like heaven and earth is meant to suggest all the entities between them.

**the one who nurtures Israel through its darkest nights/הַגֹּהַן לֹא יָנוּם וְלֹא יִישָׁן שׁוֹמֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל/** Literally "the guardian of Israel." As night is a motif in this poem, both literally and figuratively--and also a time when a guard is most needed--I chose to emphasize the emotion of the psalm through translating accordingly.

**the shade under your right hand, whenever you move it up or place it down/יְהוָה צִלְךָ עַל־יְדֶיךָ/** "Whenever you move it up or place it down" has been added to suggest the intimacy of God's attentive presence.

### Psalm 122

**I will pursue good for the sake of all/אֶבְקֹשָׁה טוֹב לְךָ/** Literally, I will seek out good for you (or your sake). The principle of God, especially in this psalm, is unity. To search out good on behalf of God is to searching out good for all creatures. Radak reads it as a prayer by those in exile that all people might return to Jerusalem, but I read it more as a prayer that all return to the spiritual state that Jerusalem represents.

### Psalm 123

**Like the eyes of devoted workers/כְּעֵינֵי עֲבָדִים/** *Avadim* can mean slaves, but here the

suggestion here is one of a relationship based on serving another with awe and reverence.

**disdain of those who think themselves unreachable/הלעג השאננים:** The root *sha'an* means to be at peace or rest (BDB). Here it refers to complacency, self satisfaction in one's pride.

### Psalm 124

**Turbulent waves would have suffocated us, drowning out our life עבר על-נפשנו המים הזידונים:** A few words have been added to flesh out the image. There is also a pun here. The word *zidonim* comes from a root that means to boil up or seethe, but is also related to the word meaning to be presumptuous or arrogant. As such it applies both to the river and the willful pride of those who act wrongly.

**Our only help comes in the name of God/עזרנו בשם יהוה:** Metzudat David says, "Our help comes when we mention the name of God, maker of heaven and earth; the help does not come by force of our own strength."

### Psalm 125

**For the Creator does not let a group of the wrongful/לא ינוח שבט הרשע:** Literally, "a wrongful tribe." But the word "tribe" here refers to a contingent assumed to have shared interest in committing wrong.

**and give to the steadfast their heart's content/ולישרים בלבותם:** *Yesharim* are elsewhere translated as moral or straightforward. The root means "straight," but straight in the sense of straightforwardly righteous.

**Peace be to those who struggle with God/שלום על-ישראל:** This line is the only place where I have interpreted the word "Israel" according to the likely etymological reading of the term, "those who struggle with God." I do this because of the expansiveness of the psalm's tone, which seems to have a universal scope rather than a particularist one.

### Psalm 126

**God has acted with grandeur...God has acted with wonder toward us/הגדיל יהוה לעשות/עם-אלה: ג הגדיל יהוה לעשות עמנו:** The phrase *higdil la-asot* means something like "has made great through acting." Here it is accompanied by a sense of awe at the recognition of God's presence in the world.

**we will be as though in the divine presence throughout/היינו שמחים:** This is a translation of a phrase that literally reads "we were happy." As it is in the preterite tense, I read it similarly to the first verse; God's wondrous acts create a tonal overlay for remembering even past suffering.

**like sudden streambeds in the Negev/כאפיקים בנגב:** The Negev, or southern region of Israel is extremely parched and dry. Just like streambeds that seem to come out of nowhere, the psalmist hopes for the arrival of God's redemptive presence.

### Psalm 127

**you who rise at dawn, who stay up late/מִשְׁכִּימֵי קוֹם מֵאַחֲרֵי-שָׁבֶת:** The psalm expresses the idea that human actions without God's help are futile. Whatever we try to accomplish, no matter how dedicated our actions, our attempts will prove useless without God's help.

**Because his children will make peace, speaking softly to the enemies at the gate. כִּי-יִדְבְּרוּ אֶת-אֹיְבִים בְּשָׁעַר** Although this psalm has been read very militarily, with the children representing the hope for victory in battle, I read it quite differently. To me this psalm represents one of the most powerful visions of children as peacemakers, our hope for the future.

### Psalm 128

**and you will gaze upon the hope of Jerusalem all the days of your life/וְרָאָה בְּטוֹב יְרוּשָׁלַם כָּל-יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ** I read this line as a vision of Jerusalem that one keeps perpetually in one's mind, and then works for tirelessly. The last line, "peace in the land of Israel," is part of this vision.

### Psalm 129

**They lengthened the hours for labor/ [לְמַעַנְיֹתָם] הָאָרִיכוּ לְמַעַנְוֹתָם:** Literally, "they lengthened the furrow," which means lengthening the time workers had to work ploughing it.

**And for those who fail to recognize the blessing of God upon all of us, we bless you in the name of God/ וְלֹא אָמְרוּ אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה:** Literally, for the transgressors who do not say, "may the blessing of God be upon you" ... I read this as a transformative moment, blessing even those who because of their alienation from God are unable to bless one in return.

### Psalm 130

**Listen to the innermost depths of my voice/שְׁמַעָה בְּקוֹלִי:** This line, following upon the preceding one, imagines the psalmist crying out to God from a great distance. Literally the line simply means "listen to my voice," but the perceived distance is implied both in the preceding line and the one that follows.

**more than the watchman at the gate longs for morning, more than the tired watchman at the gate longs for the first flicker of dawn/ מִשְׁמָרִים לְבֹקֵר שְׁמָרִים לְבֹקֵר:** Emphasized here is the insistent, desperate quality of waiting. "The tired watchman at the gate" been added in an attempt to convey the sense of waiting and longing.

**You will redeem Israel from all its guilt and confusion and sin/וְהוּא יִפְדֶּה אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכָּל מִלְּוָה וְעוֹנֹתָיו:** Here I have used three words to translate one, something that is awkward but at times needed in translation. The word *avon* can mean both the guilt that arises from sin and the confusion that gives rise to it (see BDB).

### Psalm 131

**I haven't walked too proudly and didn't push to stand out/וְלֹא-הִלְכְּתִי בְּגִדְלוֹת וּבְנִפְלְאוֹת מִמֶּנִּי:** The second part of the phrase uses a word that means "wonder" or "miracle," but comes

from a root that means "to stand out." Its form and syntax is a bit complicated and requiring of interpretation, which I have done.

### Psalm 132

**until I find a place for you, a tabernacle for the Invincible Strength of Jacob/עד־אמצא מקום/ליהוה משכנות לאביר יעקב**: Strangely, the word *makom* (place) is in the singular and *mishkanot* (tabernacles) is in the plural. For sake of simplicity, I have rendered both in the singular, but one could speculate about other ways of understanding this.

**don't turn away your future hope/אל־תשב פני משיחך**: I often translate the word *mashiach* in its many forms as something like "anointed one," as that is its basic meaning. But the messianic idea is very much embedded in the Davidic kingship--as emblem for the possibility of political rule given shape by and direction by God. (Not, I might mention, that the Davidic kingship ever represented that in actuality, which is part of the intention of this phrasing).

**but upon him a crown will blossom, shining perpetually bright/ועליו יציץ נזרו**: I have combined several resonances of the last lines into two phrases. The word *ya-tzitz* means both "to blossom" and "to shine."

### Psalm 134

**be humbled, all who serve the Eternal in wonder/ברכו את־יהוה כל־עבדי יהוה**: This translation plays on aspects of the word *barukh* (traditionally rendered blessed). As I mention in the glossary and elsewhere in the notes, ideas of humility and wonder are embedded in the word.

**who stand in God's sanctuary throughout the long nights/העמדים בבית־יהוה בלילות**: Literally, God's house. In one sense, then, every house can be a house of God. Here I have translated it as sanctuary because: a) that seems to be the reference, and b) the house is represented here as emblem of holiness.

### Psalm 135

**You struck down the firstborn of Egypt from humankind to cattle and flocks. You sent forth signs and wonders throughout the land, to Pharaoh and all of his servants/שֶׁהָפָה בְּכוֹרֵי מִצְרַיִם מֵאָדָם עַד־בְּהֵמָה: ט שָׁלַח אֹתוֹת וּמִפְתֵּיִם בְּתוֹכֵי מִצְרַיִם בְּפָרְעָה וּבְכָל־עַבְדָּיו**: I read these two lines as not expressive of two wonders, but one. The God who sent plagues on Egypt actually warned the people beforehand with signs and wonders.

### Psalm 136

**Give thanks to the Creator for all that is good/הודו ליהוה כי־טוב**: There is an ambiguity in this line. It could either be read "give thanks to God for it [giving thanks] is good" or "give thanks to God for God is good." In any case, the goodness of God is inseparable from goodness in the world.

**for God's kindness is toward the world/כי לעולם חסדו**: The world *l'olam* can mean either

forever (eternity in time) or for the universe (eternity in space). Here, I believe, it is the divine concern over the material world that it being evoked, not the eternity of God's existence.

**The one who struck Egypt through their firstborn—for God's kindness is toward the world/לְמַכָּה מִצְרַיִם בְּבְכוֹרֵיהֶם כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסִדוֹ:** This line is the first of many in which God's kindness is seen exemplified through acts of violence or revenge. Metzudat David says, "[this means] by the hands of the firstborn, for when the firstborn heard about the plague against the firstborn, they stood against their fathers and killed them in order to hurry [bringing about] the sending forth of Israel." As readers, we must wrestle with the fact that in the biblical landscape, violence toward one's enemies is often seen as an act of kindness on the part of God. This psalm is part of the Shabbat liturgy, and it is my own practice to read softly the lines that point to such destruction. It becomes, then, not so much praise, but affirmation of God in the face of mystery, sadness, and complexity of the ways of the world.

### Psalm 137

**By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down, and there we wept when we remembered Zion/עַל-נְהָרוֹת אֲבָל שָׁם יִשְׁבְּנוּ גַם-בְּכִינוּ בְּזַכְרֵנוּ אֶת-צִיּוֹן:** Though I experimented with other renditions, I could not get away from this simple and eloquent rendering, having in mind, I admit, the reggae version by the Melodians.

**Lay it naked, strip it bare, down to its very foundation הָאֲמָרִים עָרוּ אֶרֶוּ עַד הַיְסוּד בָּהּ:** The stripping of Jerusalem stands for both the whole continuum of physical destruction and exile, but also metaphorically stands as prelude to the image of rape that continues in the following lines.

**Oh daughter of Babylon, ravaged one/בֵּית-בָּבֶל הַשְּׂדוּדָה:** The root *shadad* means to treat violently, despoil (BDB). Here it is clearly an allusion to rape.

**One day you, too, will see your brightest future shattered against a rock/אֲשֶׁרִי אֶשִׂי אֲחִזּוּ וְנִפְצָן אֶת-עֵלְיָךְ אֶל-הַסֶּלַע:** This is a midrashical translation of an extremely problematic verse. It's literal rendition seems to praise those who shatter Babylonian infants against a rock. I read it, instead, as a wish that the perpetrator of violence be made to experience the pain that he or she has inflicted.

### Psalm 138

**God-- accomplish for me what I cannot finish/יְהוָה יְגַמֵּר בְּעַדִּי:** Or "God completes me." Radak reads the line as a wish that God continue divine kindness in the psalmist's life. He says, "Just as you have begun to do good things for the nation, so bring to fruition kindness on my behalf."

### Psalm 139

**My paths and night thoughts—you sift through them/אֶרְחִי וְרַבְעֵי זְרִית/** The word *revi* means lying down, but particularly as a euphemism for sex. God's knowledge is so intimate, it encompasses even our most private acts.

**From front and behind you encompassed me; you laid your hand upon me in protection/**

**אָחוּר וְקִדְמֵי צִרְתִּי וְתִשָּׁת עָלַי כִּפְכָּה**: Much has been written about this line. There is some ambivalence among commentators about whether this approaching is a sign of God's benevolence or anger, as the word *alai* can mean 'against me', and therefore the whole phrase could be rendered: "you laid your hand against me." Given the context, however, the line seems reference to God's protective presence.

**I thank you, for your wonders are breathtaking/אֹדֶךָ עַל כִּי נִרְאוֹת נִפְלִיּוֹת וְנִפְלְאוֹת**: This is strange phrasing and requires interpretation. Interspersed in this verse is the word *nifleiti*, meaning to be separate, distinct. The verse might mean something like "I thank you for my wonderful uniqueness."

**And in your Book of Wonders all was written/וְעַל-סִפְרְךָ כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂי־יְהוָה יִכְתְּבוּ**: The book of God is often given a somewhat somber quality in its association with Yom Kippur, but this version of the Book is one of God's creative and sustaining presence.

**Days were shaped and fashioned; to you they are as one/יָמִים יִצְרוּ וְלֹא [וְלוֹ] אֶחָד בָּהֶם**: There is a distinction in this line between the *qri* of the line (how it is traditionally read) and the *kativ* (how it is written on actual parchment). Rashi has an interesting commentary, He says, "All the deeds of a person and their ends are revealed before you as if they were already fashioned, even though not one of them has yet existed--and these are the wonders of the deeds of God."

**Is it not true, God, that I oppose those who oppose you? And those who rise up against you, I reject? הֲלוֹא-מִשְׁנֹאֵיךָ יְהוָה אֶשְׁנֵא וּבִתְקוּמִיךָ אֶתְקוּסֵט**: The actual language here is more laden with hatred. My version preserves the sense of opposition, but lightens the sense of good versus evil (and its accompanying self-righteousness).

**Understand the turbulent branching of my thoughts/וְדַע שְׂרַעְפֵּי**: The word *sarafai* means "disquieting thoughts" but its root has a relation to the idea of "branching out" (BDB).

**on the path of of eternal life/בְּדֶרֶךְ עוֹלָם**: Others read "lead me forever on the road." To me, the phrase suggests God's providential guidance away from roads that lead toward futility and toward roads that bring blessing and life.

## Psalm 140

**they will think themselves higher than you--Selah/יָרִוּמוּ סִלְהָ**: The line requires interpretation, as its literal meaning is simply "they will be exalted." My translation follows an interpretation of pride, in which means holding oneself above others means also holding oneself above God. This is also the interpretation of Rashi.

**dirt of their own lips cover them/[יִכְסֹּמוּ] עֲמַל שְׂפָתֵימוֹ יִכְסֹּמוֹ**: Literally, "the labor of their [his] lips." As the labor here is obviously a reference to harm, and as the word *amal* can mean to labor in the sense of being a laborer, I've used the word 'dirt' for its double meaning in this context.

**Let blazing coals hail down, making them stumble/יִמִּיטוּ [יִמוּטוּ] עֲלֵיהֶם גְּחָלִים בְּאֵשׁ יִפְלֹם**: The word *yimotu* comes from a root meaning to stumble. Its form here is a bit unclear. BDB interprets it here as "and may they drop coals upon them." I read it as expression of a vision of

the enemy suffering punishment.

**A person with hateful tongue will never be at peace in the land/אִישׁ לְשׁוֹן בַּל־יִכּוֹן בְּאַרְצְךָ:** Literally, simply a person of tongue. *Lashon* or tongue is very much associated in Jewish tradition with *lashon ha-ra*, gossip or hateful speech.

### Psalm 141

**Don't bend my heart to the temptation of hate/אַל־תֵּט לְבִי לְדַבֵּר אֶרְעַע:** Literally, don't bend my heart to an evil deed (or word). I read this as a plea not to fall into the same behavior of those who act to commit harm.

**Let the righteous rebuke me with kindness, reprove me for the sake of my soul/יְהִלְמֵנִי צְדִיקִים בְּרֻחַ חֵן וְיִוְכִיחֵנִי חֶסֶד וְיִוְכִיחֵנִי:** This line shows a willingness to suffer at the hands of the righteous in order to better oneself in the eyes of God.

**Like trees cleaved and ruptured upon the earth/כְּמוֹ פִלֵּחַ וּבִקְעָה בְּאַרְצְךָ:** Another line that is difficult to interpret. Although the word "trees" is missing from the original, most commentators interpret the devastation to mean devastation of trees.

### Psalm 142

**I pour out before you the lake of my complaint/אֶשְׁפֹּךְ לְפָנֶיךָ שִׁיחִי:** The word *eshpok* means to pour, as in to literally pour liquid. The word "lake" has been added.

**on this road that I wander lurk many pitfalls of ruin/בְּאַרְחֻזֹּתָ אֶהְלֵךְ טַמְנוּ פַח לִי:** Literally, "on this path they have hidden a trap for me."

**Look to the right and see there is for me no fellow traveler/הִבֵּיט יְמִין וְרָאָה וְאִין־לִי מְכִיר:** Literally "there is no acquaintance," i.e. no one recognizes me (the root of *makir* is *nakhar* meaning to recognize). Rashi interprets this as David bemoaning the fact that not one person from among Saul's legions has stood up for him.

**With me all the righteous wait to see whether you will heap blessings in recompense upon me/בִּי יַכְתְּרוּ צְדִיקִים כִּי תִגְמַל עָלַי:** The root *keter* can mean both to crown and to surround (as a crown surrounds one's head). I read it as the latter--the righteous surrounding David to witness the nature of God's reward.

### Psalm 143

**God, hear the pleading of my prayer/שְׁמַע תְּפִלָּתִי:** Literally "hear my prayer." But it is the tone and intensity of the prayer, along with the emotion behind it, that craves response.

**Answer me with your steadfast presence/בְּאֱמֻנָתְךָ עֲנֵנִי:** The word *emunatekha* literally means, "your faithfulness." I take faithfulness of God to refer to constancy of presence.

**because compared to you, no creature is just/כִּי לֹא־יִצְדֵק לְפָנֶיךָ כָל־חַי:** Literally, "before you."

But the sense is one of comparison. Compared to the infinite justice of God, every creature comes up short.

**A great obstacle pursued my soul/רָדַף אֹיֵב אֶנְפְּשִׁי**: Literally, "enemy." I read this as metaphoric, especially given the following line and its reference to dark places (which I find difficult to understand literally).

**I spoke about the craft of your hands to all who would listen/בְּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיךָ אֲשׁוּחַח**: The line simply speaks of talking about God's handiwork. As there is no object, I read it as the psalmist talking to whomever is interested.

**my soul like thirsty earth/נְפֹשִׁי אֶנְפְּשִׁי כְּאֶרֶץ־עֵיפָה לָרָג**: The word *ayeyfa* means "faint" or "weary," but in relation to earth is probably best understood as thirsty. I use this word because it equally applies to a condition of the soul.

**my breath wheezes ragged in my chest/כָּלְתָה רוּחִי**: I see this as continuing the image of breathing above. The psalmist is in such a desperate state that breath betrays him. The verb *kalta* literally means "to be finished, at an end." The word is also be related to an adjectival form *kaleh*, which means "failing with desire, longing" (BDB).

**If you hide your face from me/אֶל־תִּסְתֵּר פָּנֶיךָ מִמֶּנִּי**: The idea of *hester panim*, the hiding of the face (here phrased as a verb), is a common one in the psalms, suggesting God's perceived absence.

**those who drown in the pit of death/יִרְדּוּ בֹר**: Literally, "those who go down to the pit." The pit here, as elsewhere, refers to death--metaphorical or actual. The word drowning seemed to better convey the sense of mortal danger evoked.

**Let me know which road's shoulder I should cling to/הוֹדִיעֵנִי דֶרֶךְ־זוֹ אֶלְךָ**: Literally, "make known to me which road I should walk on." But given the desperation of the psalm, including the utter surrender of the following line, I have translated it to heighten the intensity of emotion.

**because to you I have raised up my soul/כִּי־אֵלֶיךָ נִשְׂאתִי נַפְשִׁי**: The word *nasa*, meaning "to lift," can also mean "to marry." Another way of understanding this line, then, is that the psalmist proclaims that his soul has married God (and therefore will not leave, no matter the circumstances).

**for I have concealed them from you until today/אֵלֶיךָ כִּסֵּיתִי**: Literally, "to you I have concealed them." Clearly the psalmist is not concealing them now, and the logic seems to be that his having concealed them should be reckoned as his virtue, motivating God to pay careful attention to his troubles now, when it really counts.

**All my torments will dissolve into nothing/וְהִאֲבִדְתָּ כָּל־צָרָי נַפְשִׁי**: Literally, "you will destroy them." I see the line reflecting the psalmist's growing confidence in God's protective presence.

**Psalm 144**

**The one who brings peace to people under my sway/הַרֹדֵד עַמִּי תַחְתִּי:** Literally, "the one who subjugates people under my rule." The idea behind Davidic rule is the union of political justice and divine law. What justifies such a concept is not urge toward power, but will toward peace.

**מִבְּרֹק בְּרֹק וּתְפִיזִים שְׁלַח חֵצִיךָ וְתַהַמֵּם**/Loud flashes of lighting—you scatter them.

**You send forth your arrows and they crash in a frenzy:** Note this is a reversal of Psalm 18: "He sent forth his arrows and scattered them, many lightning bolts and frenzied them." This version is written in second person, the former in the third person.

**whose right hand is a false source of false help/יְמִין שְׁקֵר:** This is meant in comparison to God. The word "help" is implied; the line simply says that they are a lie.

**our daughters are columns, their bodies a palace/בְּנוֹתֵינוּ כְּזוֹיֹת מִחֻטְבוֹת תְּבִנִית הַיְכָל:** More literally, "our daughters are like dark pillars, architecture for a palace." As this is somewhat unintelligible, I have translated it as I do.

**Glad is the nation for whom such is their life. Happy are the people for whom this is their God/אֲשֶׁרֵי הָעַם שְׂכָכָה לוֹ אֲשֶׁרֵי הָעַם שִׁיהוּ אֱלֹהָיו:** See the note on the word *ashrei* in Psalm 1. *Ashrei* suggests a longevity of happiness, for which there is no obvious word in English. I have used different words in different contexts in an attempt to arrive at that sense.

## Psalm 145

**in gladness as well as sorrow/לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:** *L'olam va'ed*, traditionally rendered "forever and ever," is translated variously throughout the psams, but here I translate it to emphasize foreverhood in face of the realities that might present an obstacle.

**they proclaim the glory of your guidance/וּכְבוֹד הַדֶּר מַלְכוּתוֹ:** This translation reads *malkhut*, meaning political rule, as guidance.

**names of the wrongful in the end disappear/וְאֵת כָּל־הַרְשָׁעִים יִשְׁמִיד:** The line actually attributes the destruction as coming from God. ("God will destroy them"). The paradigm for destruction in its theological sense, however, is that one's name will be destroyed; in other words, one will no longer be remembered for goodness.

## Psalm 146

**Let my soul stand in wonder of the Holy/הִלְלִי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־יְהוָה:** I have translated this similarly to *barkhi nafshi et Adonai*. Both verbs are more literally translated as blessing or praising, but the attitude they invoke is one of wonder.

**Let my life stand in praise of God/אֶהְלֵלָה יְהוָה בְּחַיִּי:** Literally, "I will praise God with my life."

**who stands faithful with us forever/הַשְּׁמֵר אֶמֶת לְעוֹלָם:** Literally, "the one who guards truth." In Hebrew the word truth (*emet*) is related to the word for faith (*emunah*), and the attributes of God invoked here seem to me to be more about faithful presence than the guarding of truth.

**who straightens those hunched over by sorrow/יְהוָה זָקַף כְּפֹפִיִּים:** This line is most literally

read as "who straightens the bent." It is, in fact, part of a prayer we say in our liturgy every morning. According to the Talmud, the prayer is to be said upon straightening up in the morning in preparation for the day. Radak interprets the line, as I do, to refer to those who have been afflicted with all kinds of sorrow.

**The Holy One will sustain us forever/לְעוֹלָם יִמְלֶךְ יְהוָה:** Literally, God will govern. I take God's governance here as representing an example by which we can orient our lives.

### Psalm 147

**because among the world's pleasures, praise is most beautiful of all/כִּי-נְעִים נְאוּה תְהִלָּה:** *Na-im* means pleasant, and *navah* can mean befitting, but also can mean beautiful as it does in Song of Songs 1:5 and 6:4. See also Psalm 33. I interpret the line to affirm the supremacy of praise to other forms of more transitory pleasure.

**You are the one who restores Jerusalem/בִּנְיָה יְרוּשָׁלַם יְהוָה:** Significantly, the verb is in the present tense and literally means "build," suggesting that the building of Jerusalem, representative of a "city of peace" is an ongoing process involving both God and humanity.

**You are infinite, your reach beyond measure/גְּדוֹל אֲדוֹנֵינוּ וְרַב-כֹּחַ:** The word for "infinite" is *gadol*, meaning large. The word translated as "reach" is *koach*, translated elsewhere as strength or potential. Here, it is the potential of divine force that needs humanity to fulfill it.

**Do you do this for every nation? Do they all have insight into your ways/לֹא עָשָׂה כֵן לְכָל-גּוֹי וּמִשְׁפָּטִים בְּלִי-יָדְעוּם:** The simple meaning of the grammar is declarative rather than interrogative, but this reading seems to me justified by the rest of the psalm in which God's presence is manifested throughout nature. Here, as in Psalm 104 and others, recognition of the natural order is thought to lead to insight into the moral order. I read the line not as a proclamation of superiority of the Israelites, but rather an implicit recognition that insight into the divine ways is available to all.

### Psalm 148

**For the Infinite commanded you into being and you were created/כִּי הוּא צִוָּה וּנְבְרָאוּ:** The line literally reads simply "God commanded them." The commanding into creation, and in particular, into the specific role they will play in creation is implied. The third person object has been changed to the second person for sake of clarity.

**you lift up a ray of strength for your people/וַיִּרָם קֶרֶן לְעַמּוֹ:** The word *qeren* means horn, but also means glowing ray of light, such as the one emanating from Moses' face when he descended from Mount Sinai.

### Psalm 149

**praise of the Holy One wherever the faithful gather/תְהִלָּתוֹ בְּקֶהֱל חֲסִידִים:** *Chasidim* is here read as "faithful," meaning those who express their love of God with actions in the world. It is often translated "pious ones," but its root, as explained in previous psalms, means bottomless love. Recognizing God's love for us, we are turned toward making the world a place in which

God's love is experienced by others.

### **Psalm 150**

**Praise God with cymbals that ring loudly, Praise God with cymbals that come crashing down/תְּרוּעָה בְּצִלְצִיִּים שָׁמַע הַלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצִיִּים**: The first word is an adjectival noun (the word is comprised by a hyphen between a noun and an adjective) comes from the word *shema*, meaning hear. The second is the word *terua*, related to a sound made on the shofar. It is associated with a loud sound, a shout, that which penetrates the very heavens. As such it is a fitting word to come near the conclusion of this last psalm in the sequence of psalms as they have been transmitted by tradition.

**Let everything that breathes praise God/כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְּהַלֵּל יְהוָה**: The word *neshamah* can mean spirit, but it is associated with breath. See Proverbs 20:27: "The spirit [or breath] of a person is the candle of God..."

