



MOSES' PROPHECY OR THE PRIMORDIAL SONG OF HUMANITY? PSALM 92 AND THE LITURGICAL READING OF PSALMS IN JUDAISM

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1. Preliminary remarks on the Jewish liturgical usage of Psalms and of the 4th book in particular

Fifteen of the 17 psalms that we are studying this year have core functions in Jewish Liturgy – not merely individual verses, but the whole psalms. At least 11 of those may be recited daily or at least weekly, something quite extraordinary, as we will see.

There are many ways to interpret psalms. They are rarely interpreted liturgically, at least not in the Jewish tradition. They are recited, but not interpreted. The Jewish Prayerbook, though it is the most read book in Judaism, is the least commented. I will present you a liturgical understanding of one of our psalms, probably the best known: *mizmor shir leyom hashabbat*, psalm 92. By liturgical interpretation I mean that a specific liturgical context – not the literary context – will provide my framework of understanding. A liturgical context is created by

- a regular use of a text in a specific place within a fixed liturgy;
- certain traditional understandings, especially midrashim, that are partly the reason for a specific liturgical usage (or were inspired by it);
- the performance of the text which interprets it in a specific way.

You need to know specifically the names of two sections of the Jewish service which I will mention in this lecture: one is called “Verses of Song” (in Aramaic: *Pesukei deZimra*); it opens every Jewish morning service. The other is called “Reception of Shabbat” (in Hebrew: *Kabbalat Shabbat*), the opening of the Friday evening service. Five of our psalms (90,91,92,93,100) are regularly used within the “Verses of Song” section (*Pesukei deZimra*); five (95,96,97,98,99) are used in the *Kabbalat Shabbat* section; two (92,93) regularly follow *Kabbalat Shabbat* as introduction of the evening prayer on Friday; some are the psalms of special days (92 Shabbat, 93 Friday, 94 Wednesday, 103 Yom Kippur, 104 New Moon); some are very often used on specific occasions (90, 91 funeral, *Yizkor*). Ps 105 and 106 don't appear as the psalms themselves in the liturgy but verses from them happened to be quoted in 1 chronicles 16:8-36 that is part of *Pesukei deZimra*.

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Overview of the liturgical usage of the 4th book of Psalms in Judaism¹

(in grey: liturgical larger units)

<i>Pesukei deZimra</i> (every ² morning)	<i>Kabbalat Shabbat</i> (every ³ Friday evening)	Other liturgical usages
		Ps 90 often used in a shivah ⁴ service.
Ps 90 (<i>tefilah lemosheh</i>) on Shabbat Ps 91 (<i>yoshev beseiter elyon</i>) on Shabbat		
		Ps 91 often used in a funeral service.
Ps 92 (<i>mizmor shir leyom hashabbat</i>) on Shabbat Ps 93 (<i>adonai malach ge'ut lavesh</i>) on Shabbat		Ps 92 opens the evening prayer on erev Shabbat after the Kabbalat Shabbat section. Ps 93 follows Ps 92 on erev Shabbat .
		Ps 93 Psalm for Friday
		Ps 94 (<i>el neqamot adonai</i>) Psalm for Wednesday , added usually at the end of the morning service on Wednesday.
	Ps 95 (<i>lechu nerannah l'adonai</i>) Ps 96 (<i>shiru l'adonai shir chadash</i>) Ps 97 (<i>adonai malach tagel ha'aretz</i>) Ps 98 (<i>mizmor shiru l'adonai shir chadash</i>) Ps 99 (<i>adonai malach yirgezu amim</i>)	According to an ancient Palestinian tradition (today only known academically) Ps 99 was the Psalm for Tisha beAv
Ps 100 (<i>mizmor letodah</i>) on weekdays		
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		Ps 102 , not used as a whole, V. 28 used in Yom Kippur Lit. (<i>veatah huh ushenoteicha lo yitamu</i>).
		Ps 103 (<i>LeDavid Barchi nafshi et adonai</i>), Yom Kippur ; V. 15-17 (<i>enosh kechatzir yamav</i>) are part of Yizkor (memorial service) in some congregations, may be used in funeral service .
		Ps 104 (<i>barchi nafshi et adonai, adonai elohai gadalta meod</i>) psalm for Rosh Chodesh , the New Moon, may be added at the end of the service.
1 Chron 16:8-36, daily, always the first text in <i>Pesukei deZimra</i> quotes freely Ps 105 (<i>hodu l'adonai qir'u bishmo</i>), Verses of Ps 96 and Ps 106:47-48 (= end of 4 th book), leading into a non-biblical florilegium that quotes Ps 99:5.9; 94:1-2 .		

The enormous and prominent liturgical usage of the psalms in the 4th book of Psalms is partly due to the fact that according to a well known tradition not only the first one, Psalm 90, was written

¹ Note that there is not *one* liturgical tradition but that various Jewish denominations differ, so this overview is simplified and individual congregations may have other customs. The psalms that appear together in one field are regarded as liturgical units – the chapter division is not relevant in the prayer book.

² In the orthodox liturgy.

³ In the orthodox liturgy.

⁴ Shivah means the daily services at a mourner's home during the seven days after the burial.

by Moses⁵ as it explicitly states in the heading (תפלה למשה איש האלהים *Tefillah lemosheh ish ha-elohim*), but also the ten succeeding psalms, which do not mention any (other) author. **Slide 3**

Legendary Tradition has it that David re-discovered these psalms and incorporated them into his book.⁶ Ps 90-100 are thus thought to be composed by the same Moses who according to tradition transmitted the Torah.⁷ But don't assume that the custom of using these psalms liturgically is very old. That psalms in general are used at all in the prayer book is more surprising than you may have thought.

2. The liturgical place of Psalm 92

In Rabbinic Judaism psalms were not regarded as “prayers”, they were seen as prophetic texts, material to study and thus to be “said”, not to be “prayed”. They certainly were used in Temple times. **Slide 4**

The Mishnah (about 200 C.E.) remembers that the Levites sang a special psalm each day⁸ (the psalms in question were Ps 24, 48, 82, **94**, 81, **93**, **92**; note the three from the 4th book of Psalms), but in the Masoretic text only Ps 92 mentions its day: *mizmor shir leyom hashabbat*; the others do not (although the Septuagint tradition is different⁹). **Slide 5**

The Mishnah further reminds us of the custom that the pious of the past used to spend at least one hour preparing themselves for prayer (mBer 5:1) and the Talmud mentions Rabbi Yosei's strange isolated wish to recite Hallel daily (bShab 118b). In fact, only forms of *Hallel*,¹⁰ that was thought to have been chanted at the crossing of the Red Sea and thus first and foremost not related to the temple, were used liturgically in Rabbinic times. Psalms played a role, but it was in preaching (Midrash). Liturgically, only individual biblical verses, segments of verses or paraphrases could provide the wording for the new non-biblical prayers, but the Rabbinic idea of liturgy is non-biblical.¹¹ The rabbis did not continue the Temple liturgy, consciously not. Things that had happened in the Temple belonged *there* and were not to be repeated elsewhere (such as instrumental music or imitations of Temple objects, etc.). Therefore Psalms did not form the liturgy in Rabbinic times after the Temple was destroyed.

There was a tradition in Eretz Israel that some psalms belonged to special days, and teach something about these days. **Ps 103** for example was a text for Yom Kippur – in modern progressive Judaism it regained this place –, Ps 29 for Shavuot, Ps 22 for Purim, **Ps 99** for **Tisha BeAv** (which we will commemorate tonight and tomorrow), to mention a few, which some Midrashim explain consequently with this assignment in mind. **Ps 93** became a psalm to be said at the beginning of a

⁵ Rashi, based on Talmud Baba Batra 14b, Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 22:13. Midrash Tehillim on Ps 90:3.

⁶ See e.g. the commentator David Kimchi on Ps 90:1.

⁷ On the various authors of Psalms see Talmud BB 14b-15a; Midrash Tehillim 1:6; Midrash Shir HaShirim Rabba 4:4 and Midrash Kohelet Rabba 7:19.

⁸ Mishnah Tamid 7:4. Cf. Talmud Rosh Hashanah 31a, Soferim 18:1.

⁹ There is a scholarly debate about the age of the Septuagint headlines with no convincing arguments why they were left out by the Masoretes; it is more likely that the Masoretic text preserves an older tradition and the Septuagint's headlines are younger.

¹⁰ The “Egyptian Hallel” (the six psalms 113-118) and the “Great Hallel” (Pss 135-136), both texts that are believed to have been chanted at the crossing of the sea (and thus don't belong to the Temple), see Talmud Pesachim 118a.

¹¹ Sh. Nash, “The role of Biblical verses in prayer according to the Rabbinic tradition”, in: J.L. Kugel (ed.), *Prayers that Cite Scripture*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2006, pp. 43-59; J.H. Newman, “The scripturalization of prayer in exilic and second temple Judaism”, in Kugel, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-24.

festival. When Shabbat fell on a festival, **Ps 92** was recited before. It is assumed that the tradition of using Ps 92 on Friday evenings started in Eretz Israel during the 5th century C.E.¹²

The situation in Babylonia in post-talmudic times was different.¹³ An influential group of people called Karaites (8th/9th cent. C.E.) rejected the Rabbinic tradition of oral Torah and only accepted biblical traditions (Mikra, therefore “Karaites”). For these Karaites, Psalms were *the* ideal form of prayer,¹⁴ the Karaite liturgy was biblical. **Slide 6**

Rav Saadya Gaon in the 9th century, defending Rabbinic Judaism, explains about the psalms – certainly having the Karaite “abuse” in mind – that one should not think that expressions in the psalms like “have mercy upon me”, “save me”, and similar were the words of a person addressing God, because the book of psalms contains prophecies, not prayers. Saadya says:

“We must realize that all of these are from the Eternal One, who expressed them in these forms of speech employed by His creatures ... [We must] convert the speech of the prophet in this book, [such as] ‘Have mercy upon me’ to the speech of the Eternal One – ‘I will have mercy upon my servant’ – and from ‘heed my prayer’ to ‘I will heed your prayer’, and from ‘deliver me and save me’ to ‘I will deliver him and save him’, and similarly in this book. All is the word of the Eternal One and nothing is human discourse ...”¹⁵

The psalms are prophecies, to be read as study texts.

As preparation for the morning service, however, people used study texts. **Slide 7**

The first prayer book by Rav Amram Gaon (9th cent. C.E.) quotes the list of the beginnings of the seven daily psalms from the mishnah as a study text.¹⁶ The first prayer book also has the recital of Psalms 145-150 before prayer, as a Rabbinic statement says: “Whoever recites *Ashrei* [a framed version of Ps 145] three times a day is assured of his share in the world to come” (Ber 4b) – now this opens the recital of the last six psalms as the Daily Hallel (Pss 145-150), and becomes the core of *Pesukei deZimra*.¹⁷ To open this section, not a psalm, but the recital of 1 Chronicles 16:8-36 was some time later chosen. The chronicles text is a florilegium that quotes mainly from Psalms 105 and 96. **Slide 8**

In medieval times, long after the Geonic debates against the Karaites were forgotten, further psalms were added. On Shabbat seven, the four Psalms 19, 34, 90 and 91, and the three Psalms 33, 92 and 93 were said to frame the so called “Great Hallel” (Psalms 135 and 136), chanted when crossing the sea. This whole block is added before the Daily Hallel (Ps 145-150) in a traditional Shabbat morning service as a teaching about the Exodus, creation and the world to come and to prepare fittingly for the Shabbat prayer.

Psalm 92 – the psalm I would like to focus on – was included because of its headline: a song in some relation with Shabbat, and because of its Rabbinic interpretation that I will present to you soon. Since psalms are prophecies – as Saadya claimed – *Mizmor shir leyom hashabbat* contains a prophecy about Shabbat. But a South African rabbi of the last century once truly remarked in a sermon: *Mizmor shir leyom hashabbat* “reminds one of the sensational headlines of the yellow

¹² Lawrence A. Hoffman, “Introduction to the Liturgy of Kabbalat Shabbat: Politics, Piety, and Poetry”, in: L.A. Hoffman, *Kabbalat Shabbat* (My People’s Prayerbook 8), Woodstock VT, 2005, p. 13, who bases his remarks on research by the Israeli liturgical scholar Ezra Fleischer.

¹³ Robert Brody, “Liturgical uses of the Book of Psalms in the Geonic period,” in Kugel, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-81.

¹⁴ J. Mann, “Anan’s Liturgy and His Half-Yearly Cycle of the Reading of the Law”, *Journal of Jewish Lore and Philosophy* 1 (1919), p. 339.

¹⁵ Y. Qafih (ed.), *Tehillim ‘im Targum u-Perush ha-Gaon Rabbenu Se’adyah ben Yosef Fayyumi*, Jerusalem: Keren ha-Rav Yehudah Leyb, 1966, 53; quoted in R. Brody, “Liturgical Uses”, in Kugel, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

¹⁶ *Seder Rav Amram Gaon* (ed. D. Goldschmidt, Jerusalem: Mosad haRav Kook, 1971), p. 40. As the manuscript of this text was often copied and usually adapted to local minhagim, it is often not clear how original the texts are. The manuscripts of the text we have stem from between the 14th and 16th centuries C.E.

¹⁷ Framed by the blessings *Barukh she-amar* and *Yishtabach*, the blessings before and after this study of Verses of Psalms.

press, when one reads the paragraph underneath the headline and finds that it does not give the news which that headline purports to convey.”¹⁸

3. Ps 92 and the Rabbinic tradition

The Commentator Rashi (1040-1105)¹⁹ explains based on a teaching in the Talmud (bRH 31a) (quoted from Mikraot Gedolot haKeter): **Slide 9**

מזמור שיר של ליום ליום השבת שאומרים אותו בשבתות והוא מדבר מעין העולם הבא שכולו שבת

“Psalm. Song for the day. For the day of Shabbat: that they [the Levites] sang on shabbatot. And it deals with the subject of the World to Come which is wholly Shabbat.”

Psalm 92, which is about the fate of the wicked and the righteous, is thus a prophecy about the world to come where the wicked, now blooming like grass, will be destroyed, and the righteous will flourish like a palm tree. Therefore Psalm 92 is very fittingly about Shabbat, it is just not this one that we celebrate but the World to Come, when all evil will be put to rest (להשבת *lehashbit*).²⁰

Rashi does not mention the broadly assumed Mosaic authorship of this Psalm here because he had done this earlier on Ps 90:1.²¹ **Slide 10**

The Targum,²² however, translates the beginning of this psalm surprisingly:

שבחא ושירא דאמר אדם קדמאי על יומא דשבתא

“Praise and song that the first human being said about the Sabbath day.”

So is it Adam’s psalm (or Eve’s)? Midrash *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* explains: “R. Shimon said: The first man said this psalm, but it was forgotten throughout all the generations till Moses came and renewed it in his own name.” (PRE 18) For a liturgical understanding it makes a difference whether this text is a prophecy by Moses about the future, to give hope, or if these are among the first words of the first human being, thus the primordial song of humanity with which, since then, we all may join in.

The Midrash (e.g. MidTehillim on Ps 92:1)²³ explains: **Slide 11**

“When Adam sinned against the command of the Holy One, blessed be He, God sat in judgment upon him to punish him. [The Torah says: When you eat from this fruit, you will die; Gen 2:17.] But what was the outcome? [As we know, Adam surprisingly did not die.] You find that Adam was created on the eve of Shabbat: In the first hour, he came into being as a thought; in the second hour, God consulted the ministering angels;²⁴ in the third, God gathered the dust; in the fourth, God kneaded the dust; in the fifth, God made the form; in the sixth, God joined the parts; in the seventh, God blew breath into him; in the eighth, God stood him on his feet;

¹⁸ Louis I. Rabinowitz, *Sabbath Light: Sermons on the Sabbath Evening Service*, Johannesburg: Fieldhill Publishing, 1958, p. 75.

¹⁹ Rabbi Shelomo ben Yitzchak, a biblical and talmudic commentator and halakhist, who studied in Mainz (and briefly in Worms), and lived in Northern France.

²⁰ On this meaning of the root שבת *sh-b-t* see Midrash *Sifra*, Bechukotai 26:8.

²¹ There he also attributes each psalm to one of 11 tribes of Israel (Shimon is left out) according to the 11 blessings of Moshe in the Torah (Deut. 33). Ps 92 is attributed to Yehuda, because of the words *tov lehodot*, cf. Gen. 29:35.

²² The date of the Targum on Psalms is debated. D. M. Stec, *The Targum of Psalms* (The Aramaic Bible 16), 2004, assumes the 6th cent. C.E. but admits that this is guesswork.

²³ Other versions of this midrash can be found in *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 18.20, Shabbat 118a. David Kimchi and Menachem HaMeiri quote this midrash abridged in their commentaries on Ps 92:1. See also Targum Shir HaShirim 1:1: “Ten songs were recited in this world. The first song was recited by Adam when his sin was forgiven him and the Shabbath day came and protected him. He opened his mouth and said: A psalm, a song for the Shabbath day” (Ps 92:1).” The second song was recited by Moses and the children of Israel at the sea (*shirat haYam* Ex 15), the next songs were Num 21:17 (song of the well), Deut 32 (*Ha’azinu*, Moses’ song), Josh 10:12, Judg 5, 1 Sam 2 and 2 Sam 22. The last song in this world is *Shir haShirim* by Solomon and the 10th will be recited in messianic times (Isa 30:29).

²⁴ A debate in the midrash inspired by the plural form of “Let us make man” in Gen 1:27.

in the ninth, God enjoined him; in the tenth, he sinned; in the eleventh, he was brought to judgment; in the twelfth, he was driven out – driven out because when God was about to decree his destruction, the Shabbat arrived and brought his expulsion instead. ... When Adam saw the power of the Shabbat [that he was kept alive], he was about to sing a hymn in her honour. But the Shabbat said to Adam: 'Do you sing a hymn to me? Let us, I and you, sing a hymn to the Holy One, blessed be He.' Hence it is said: It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord."²⁵

The Midrash plays with the fact that a hymn about Shabbat does not mention Shabbat at all, but also with the fact that the Hebrew root ידה *y-d-h* of *lehodot* also is the root of the noun *vidui*, confession – not always but mostly understood as confession of sins. Psalm 92 understood this way thus depicts Shabbat as a celebration of forgiveness and renewal, a situation experienced in the past and the reason why we are alive today.

4. Ps 92 and the Kabbalistic tradition

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In the Ashkenazi traditional liturgy today Psalm 92 together with 93 appears as the 7th poetic unit before the beginning of the evening prayer (*Barechu* etc). Today's traditional introduction to the Shabbat evening service (*Kabbalat Shabbat*) contains – among other texts²⁶ – Psalms 95 – 99 (from the 4th book!), Ps 29 and the hymn *Lekha Dodi* ("Come my Beloved") ending with the words: "Enter, O bride, enter, O bride!", the bride being a metaphor for Shabbat seen as a royal bride²⁷ coming to her bridegroom – which is either *Tiferet* (splendour), God or Israel. (The meaning changes during *Lekha Dodi*.)

The rabbis in the Talmud would change into their finest garments before shabbat began and welcome Shabbat as *if* she were a queen (bShab 119a). The kabbalist mystics in Sefat took this literally, and elaborated and dramatized the idea. But the mystics in Sefat were not a unified body, they had different traditions. Rabbi Moshe Cordovero received Queen Shabbat by reciting the five kingship psalms we are studying this year, Pss 95-99,

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because the experience of God's power (kingship, *malkhut*) was understood as the lowest of ten divine emanations experienced in this world (the kabbalists called them *sefirot*). The hymn *Lekha Dodi*, composed by Cordovero's teacher Shelomo Alkabez, unifies in its nine strophes nine *sefirot* by mentioning specific words and verses describing power, foundation, majesty, endurance, beauty, justice, lovingkindness, understanding and wisdom. The refrain corresponds to the highest of the 10 *sefirot*, *keter* (crown). In today's liturgy this mystical hymn is the immediate liturgical context before Psalm 92. (Besides: It was sung in the synagogue, NOT in some fields.)

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Rabbi Isaac Luria, for whom the process of creation and redemption, and the idea of a divine spark in everything, was important, went out into the fields to watch the sun setting and Shabbat arriving in nature, then recited Psalm 29 in the synagogue, a psalm that mentions ten voices (*qolot*), symbolizing the ten words of creation. Shabbat is the day when unity prevails over fragmentation. At some point the two traditions got mixed and Ps 29 was added to the kingship psalms, so that now a unit of 6 psalms was recited, one psalm to repair the lack of spiritual awareness during

²⁵ Because of the fact that Kimchi quoted this midrash in his commentary it became most famous, but according to another Midrash (Bereshit Rabbah 22:13) Adam recites this psalm a bit later, after Cain had killed Abel, and Adam asked Cain how he was punished, and when Cain said, that he had repented and God forgave, Adam was struck by the power of repentance and recited this psalm as a part of his own return to God.

²⁶ Today's traditional Ashkenazi *Kabbalat Shabbat* section consists of: The six psalms 95-99, 29; the poem *Ana Bokoach* consisting of 7 lines; the hymn *Lekha Dodi*; Psalms 92 and 93 regarded as a unit with Ps 93 depicting the future world as a continuation of Ps 92; and a study text from the Mishna about the Shabbat lights (*Bameh Madlikin*).

²⁷ This idea is based on Shabbat 119a.

each day of the week.²⁸ The hymn *Lekha Dodi*, framed by psalms, is the bridge between profane and holy, between fragmentation and unity, so that Psalm 92, now the 7th psalm, is truly Shabbat as God's mystical presence.

5. Ps 92 and Halakhah

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A halakhic source from the 19th century defines that the recital of Ps 92 is the official beginning of Shabbat.²⁹ Even though it may not yet be dark, Shabbat can begin earlier, as Shabbat can be prolonged at its beginning and end – the kabbalists had already made use of this idea. Therefore mourners enter the service just before Ps 92. *Mizmor shir leyom hashabbat: Tov lehodot ...* will be the first words that mourners will hear in the synagogue. This experienced situation adds a new layer of meaning to the Psalm in the given moment as being words marking the end of mourning.

6. Ps 92 liturgically performed

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A traditional synagogue may use instruments for *Kabbalat Shabbat* but won't use instruments for Psalm 92 and everything that follows, as instruments are not used on Shabbat in orthodoxy and many Conservative or Masorti synagogues. In some congregations Psalm 92 may therefore be experienced as a marker of a difference. In most traditional synagogues no instruments would be used anyway, and in Progressive congregations they can be used throughout the whole service (classically the organ, today all kinds of instruments), but Psalm 92 may still mark a difference by the choice of melody or the performance style. Ps 92 may be read, chanted or sung; if the last, a variety of melodies may be chosen. It may be used as a whole or in parts, aloud, mumbled or in silence – this is mostly the decision of the leader of prayer in the given moment (or a preparation team).

According to the Western European cantorial tradition Ps 92 is chanted in a mode reminiscent of the major.³⁰ A well know version of this tradition is the German Liberal tradition where Ps 92 is chanted as a majestic dialogue between cantor and choir with organ. The melody is majestic, proud, worthy of the presence of a queen.

According to the Eastern European cantorial tradition, however, Ps 92 is chanted in a mode reminiscent of the minor,³¹ a mode that marks festive moments and is for example also used for Kid-dush (the blessing of wine on Friday evening). This style of reciting Ps 92 sounds then rather careful and fragile. Some congregations use the headline of this psalm or one verse (for example *Mah Gadlu ...*) as a congregational sing-along.³² This style of performance stresses the communal aspect of Shabbat.

When experienced in the service, Ps 92 thus presents Queen Shabbat majestic, meditative, silent or as a community united in song.

²⁸ By this the additional soul for Shabbat is created. The Kabbalists liked *gematria*: The numerical values of the first letters of each of these psalms add up to 430 which is the same numerical value as the Hebrew letters of the word נפש *nefesh* "soul" and the total number of words in these 6 psalms is 702, the numerical value of שבת *Shabbat*. The psalms contain 65 verses, which is the numerical value of אדני *adonai* "my Lord", which is used to replace the name of God.

²⁹ Mishnah Berurah 173:31.

³⁰ The mode or *steyger* is in cantorial studies called "*Adonai Malach*".

³¹ The mode is in cantorial studies called "*Magen Avot*".

³² Usually the melodies used are based on the *nusach* of the Eastern European tradition (as this is the common tradition in USA, Israel and most of the world), or else the tunes are not based on traditional musical conventions at all.

7. Ps 92 homiletically

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In a sermon in the 1950s – it was part of a sermon series on the Friday evening liturgy that ran over a year - the South African Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz explained the meaning of Ps 92 for his congregation as follows:

“It is called a Sabbath Psalm not because it sings of the Sabbath and extols its virtues, but because it represents the kind of thoughts which are liable to enter and possess the thoughts of that person who observes the Sabbath in its true spirit. ... Just as of the enslaved children of Israel in Egypt, it is recorded that they rejected the vision of the redemption *קשה ומעבודה קשה* ‘from the shortness of spirit which comes from hard labour,’ so to-day, even though it be not ‘hard labour,’ it takes man away from the contemplation of things of the spirit. He sees only that which is before his eyes. He has not the time, and if he had the time he has not the inclination, for contemplation of things *sub specie aeternitatis*, under the aspect of eternity. It is only when the Sabbath comes, and he is relieved of material cares, when he makes of the day a day of recreation that in the serenity and tranquil peace of that blessed day he can give himself over to meditation and contemplation. It is then that he can sing of the greatness of God and of the ultimate triumph of right and justice. It is then that he can declare that the Lord is upright, that there is no iniquity in him. He can attune himself to the spirit of God and enter into communion with him, and spiritually refreshed and strengthened in his faith, face the future with confidence and trust. Therein much more than in the enforced abstention from work lies the true value of the Sabbath of the Lord.”³³

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Does study enhance the experience of prayer? Or is the mantra of the words the most important experience? Can we learn something from *Mizmor shir leyom hashabbat* about shabbat, about our lives?

³³ Louis I. Rabinowitz, *Sabbath Light: Sermons on the Sabbath Evening Service*, Johannesburg: Fieldhill Publishing, 1958, pp. 77-78.