

Purim Reader

Evening Prayers and

The Book of Esther

With Laws and Commentaries

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Purim Reader

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Abandonment to the Pinnacle of Hopeful Vision

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Halakhot of Purim

I. Overview

Subsequent to the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians (586 B.C.E.) the Persians defeated the Babylonians in war (538 B.C.E.) and became the ascendant power in the Middle East. The northern tribes of Israel had already been exiled by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.E. Most of the remaining remnant of Israel, essentially the tribe of Judah together with Benjamin, had been exiled from the land of Israel by the Babylonians and now lived in the huge Persian Empire. The setting of Megillat Esther is in the city of Shushan, capital of Persia, during the time period between the Babylonian exile and the Return to Zion (later during that sixth century B.C.E., perhaps 516 B.C.E.). The megilla contains an account of a major attempt during that epoch to annihilate the Jewish People, men, women and children, undertaken by Haman, chief advisor to King Ahashverosh. In a beautiful narrative it describes Esther's ascension to becoming queen, Haman's reason for his diabolic intent (the steadfast refusal of Mordekhai, a Jewish leader, to bow to him), details of the decree, and the amazing confluence of events including Queen Esther's intervention that brought about the miraculous saving of the Jewish People. Their extraordinary victory over their enemies was achieved on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar, days ever since celebrated as Purim.

II. Prior to Purim

1. On the Shabbat before Rosh Hodesh Adar, or on Rosh Hodesh Adar itself when it falls on Shabbat, we read Parashat Sheqalim. After the regular Torah reading for that day, we read about the past requirement of contributing a half-sheqel, originally toward construction of the Mishkan, and subsequently toward the service performed in it, later transposed to that of the Temple. Since Haman proposed to pay ten thousand sheqalim to the king's treasury to destroy the Jewish People, this misvah has been seen

as symbolizing our intentions to counteract the negative intentions of the enemies of the nation.

2. On the Shabbat immediately before Purim, after the regular Torah reading, we read Parashat Zakhor. This portion calls upon Israel to remember what Amaleq did to us upon our leaving Egypt, while we were traveling in the desert, fatigued and weary. Unprovoked, Amaleq perpetrated evil acts against Israel, specifically attacking the stragglers and weak, having no fear of G-d. We are told to eliminate Amaleq - understood to represent evil-doers - from the world. (On Shabbatot following Purim we read Parashat Parah and Parashat Hahodesh.)

3. Adar 13, usually the day before Purim, is Ta'anit Esther, a day commemorating the fast the Jewish People observed, according to tradition, to prompt repentance when battling their enemies. When Purim falls on Sunday, the fast is observed on the Thursday before, Adar 11.

4. From the entry of the month of Adar, anticipating the coming of Purim, to be followed by Pesah, we increase joyousness and happy events.

5. One going on a trip to where he does not expect to find a megilla, should try to take a megilla with him. If not practical, he may read the megilla from Rosh Hodesh Adar onwards, but without a berakha. Nevertheless, the other misvot of Purim should be fulfilled on Purim day.

III. Reading of the Megilla

1. Both men and women are required to read or hear the megilla read from a kosher megilla scroll twice on Purim, once at night and again during the day.

2. The misvah of reading the megilla is more properly fulfilled in the presence of a congregation in order to participate in publicizing the miracle (pirsume nissa). If one cannot come to the

synagogue or otherwise participate in a minyan, he/she may read it or hear it read individually.

3. **Berakhot:** Three blessings are recited on the megilla prior to the evening reading:

- a) Al Miqra Megilla (for the reading itself)
- b) She'asah Nissim La'abotenu (mentioning the miracles Hashem performed for our fathers)
- c) Sheheheyanu (expressing gratitude that Hashem has kept us alive to participate in this occasion).

One blessing is recited at the conclusion of the reading, Harab et Ribenu (acknowledging that it was Hashem who fought our battles).

The same blessings are recited for the daytime reading except for Sheheheyanu. If one omitted Sheheheyanu in the evening it should be recited in the day.

4. The berakhot before the reading are recited even when the megilla is being read individually (that is to say, without a minyan), whereas the berakha at the conclusion of the reading is only recited in a minyan.

5. The same berakhot are also to be recited by or for women who are reading or hearing the reading without a minyan. If ten women are hearing the reading together, although it does not constitute a 'minyan' for other rituals, it is pirsume nissa and the concluding berakha is also recited.

6. One holding a kosher megilla scroll may read along with the hazzan. One who does not have a kosher megilla scroll should not read along but listen to every word said by the hazzan and have in mind to fulfill his/her obligation. It is important the hazzan be one who enunciates each word clearly.

7. Every person who reads Hebrew should preferably have at least a printed text of the megilla in front of him/her to follow

along quietly. If one misses some of the words read by the hazzan, it is permitted to read them from the printed text and catch up providing this is only done with a minority of the megilla.

8. From the recitation of the first berakha until the conclusion of the last berakha there should be no talking or interruptions. Stamping feet during the reading is disturbing and inappropriate and should not be done. Very young children or those with noise-making toys, who will possibly create a disturbance and interfere with the fulfillment of the misvah, should not be present in the synagogue during megilla reading. If such children are in the synagogue, a baby-sitter should be provided in another area.

9. Unlike the case with the Torah, it is permissible to directly touch the megilla scroll when reading (with clean hands of course).

10. Since in the megilla the text is termed a “letter,” it is a widespread custom that as a page is read it is not immediately rolled up as is the case with a Torah scroll. At the conclusion of the reading it is rolled up before beginning the concluding blessing.

11. The time for reading the megilla in the evening begins at ‘set hakokhabim’ (the appearance of stars), the time that the fast ends. One should not eat until performing the misvah. As the day concluding with ‘set hakokhabim’ is usually Ta’anit Esther, it may be that one is hungry or thirsty. If necessary, one may have a light snack before the reading.

IV. Mahasit Hasheqel

It is customary to give a half-sheqel or half-dollar to charity for each family member before or on Purim, in commemoration of the misvah of mahasit hasheqel.

V. Mishlo'ah Manot

1. Each man and women must send a food gift composed of at least two types of food or drink that may be used for that day's festive meal to at least one person. The primary purpose of this misvah is to increase friendship between people. To some extent it may also provide for some needy.
2. It is praiseworthy to send mishlo'ah manot to many people and to send portions according to the standards of the giver, increasing harmony and amity in the nation.
3. At least the primary food gift that one sends to fulfill the misvah must be sent and received during the day of Purim.
4. The misvah is not fulfilled by sending money.
5. A mourner is required to fulfill the misvah of mishloah manot. Others do not send to the mourner but may send to a spouse or other member of the family.

VI. Matanot La'ebyonim

1. In addition to mishlo'ah manot, during the day of Purim we must give food, substance or monetary gifts to at least two poor people or their representatives.
2. If one can afford it, it is appropriate to give to many more than the minimum two poor people or their representatives.
3. On Purim, we are not very particular with the recipients of charity – “Whosoever extends his hand, we give him.”

VII. Se'udat Purim

1. Everyone must partake of a festive meal on Purim. This misvah is not fulfilled at night but only during the day.
2. As the miracle of Purim came about through festive banquets with drinking of wine, to some extent the Purim se'uda should

have such a quality, including alcoholic beverages for the adults. The Talmud states that one should become so joyous until he does not know the difference between “Cursed is Haman, blessed is Mordekhai.” Whatever interpretation is given to this statement, and there are many, it is absolutely clear that one may only drink to the extent that he does not violate a halakha and is able to recite birkat hamazon and relevant prayers with proper concentration.

VIII. Prayers

1. In the amida of Purim and in birkat hamazon we recite al hanissim followed by Bimeh Mordekhai VeEsther in their proper places as specified in all siddurim. If one forgot to recite them, he does not repeat the amida or birkat hamazon. If one remembered before having mentioned Hashem’s name in the berakha following them, he may “return” and say them at that spot and then proceed from there. One who remembered too late, but still in the amida or birkat hamazon, should insert them at the end of the amida before oseh shalom or in the harahman portion of birkat hamazon.

2. Tefillin are donned on Purim.

3. Hallel is not recited on Purim. Some Talmudic sages say the megilla takes the place of Hallel. Others say Hallel is reserved for miracles that occur in the Land of Israel (subsequent to having originally entered the land). Others explain that we did not achieve freedom on Purim to be fully “servants of the Almighty,” but remained under the rule of Ahashverosh in exile.

4. Tahanunim are not recited on Purim and Shushan Purim. There is no musaf on Purim.

5. Before arbit and in shahrit we recite Psalm 22. Here, the psalmist is in a grievous, life-threatening situation from his enemies and is ill from the troubles besetting him. He recalls G-d’s saving intervention on behalf of the nation in the past and His caring for him from birth and is able to overcome his despair with prayer that obviously leads to salvation. The Sages applied this

psalm to Haman's attempt to annihilate the Jewish People and Mordekhi and Esther's endeavors that brought salvation.

6. In arbit, the megilla is read after the amida followed by "ve'ata qadosh." In shahrit, it is read after the Torah, just before ve'ata qadosh. (The verse of "veata qadosh" is from the psalm we read on Purim (Psalm 22:4), and immediately follows the verse which the Talmud links to the halakha of reading the megilla by day and night.) On Saturday night, the blessing 'boreh me'oreh ha'esh' is recited before the reading.

7. There are three olim to the Torah on Purim. The portion read - from Parashat Beshalah - speaks of Joshua's battling and weakening Amaleq. It contains the famous scene of Moshe on the mountaintop. When his hand was raised Israel was ascendant, when lowered, Amaleq was ascendant. The Mishnah (R.H.3:8) explains this as an allegory meaning that when Bene Yisrael turn their hearts to Hashem, they are successful, otherwise they are not.

IX. General Halakhot

1. Purim is celebrated on Adar 14 in most of the world. In order to commemorate the one-day-later celebration of Shushan, where the battle continued for a second day, cities that were walled (like Shushan) when Joshua led the nation into the land of Israel (for example, Jerusalem), celebrate Purim on Adar 15.

2. It is prohibited to fast or have eulogies on Purim.

3. Public aspects of mourning are suspended for the day similarly to Shabbat. This is one of the cases where Shulhan Arukh codifies the halakha differently in two different chapters. We follow the later, lenient codification.

4. Working is permitted on Purim except in those places that have a specific custom not to work. In any event, doing business by buying and selling merchandise is permitted.

5. It is permitted to have weddings on Purim.

Insights into *M'gillat Esther*

Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik delivered this 1973 lecture. The lecture was given in Lamport Auditorium on March 14.

The *M'gillah* and the story of Purim occurred at the sunset of the glorious day of prophecy. The nation as a whole was facing the sad reality of a nonprophetic future. During the Passover story (which happened during the prophetic era), Moses, the messenger of God, received clear, exact instructions how and what to do in fulfilling his mission. But Mordekhai and Esther, also messengers of God, living in a nonprophetic age, had no clear guidelines how to implement their goal. They had to use their own initiative, imagination, and ingenuity to carry out their divinely ordained “mission impossible”: to save the nation from annihilation. This period of Esther is described as a period of *hester panim*, a time during which God seems to have hidden His Presence. All it really means is that He directs the action from the sidelines, from the shadows, without the glaring spotlights to pinpoint His involvement.

In every generation there are people whom God chooses to be His messengers, to become history makers. In the nonprophetic existence, they have to use much imagination and ingenuity to fulfill their mission. Whom does God choose? People who aren't simply individuals, but those in whom a multitude abides; individuals who contain within them a whole nation. Their role within Israel is that of the heart among the organs of the body. The heart is affected by anxiety, joy, fear, anger, and any other stresses to the body, yet it remains the hardest and strongest of all the organs. The individuals whom God chooses are those who see themselves affected by whatever happens to the nation, who cry with the pain of Israel, and rejoice at its happy moments. (By extrapolation, this is also the role of Israel among the nations, according to the *Kuzari*.) Such individuals are more than single persons; they personify a whole nation within themselves. This is the concept of *shakul k'neged shishim ribo*, of one person being equal to the whole of Israel. Just as a nation doesn't die, so these

unique individuals who represent the whole nation never really die. As long as *Am Yisrael hai*, then *David Melekh Yisrael hai v'kayam*. Haman realized that Mordekhai was such a person, and that it would be futile to kill Mordekhai alone (3:6), for Mordekhai is the embodiment of the nation Israel and the nation is the extension of Mordekhai, so only total eradication of the whole nation could erase the power of Mordekhai. Such is the stuff from which Jewish leaders are made.

In the story of Purim, both Mordekhai and Esther were chosen by God to play crucial roles in saving the nation. From the time of Sarah onward, women have been on equal, or even superior, footing with men in the history-making process. However, though both play equally important roles, they are different roles. A man cannot assume a woman's role and neither should a woman play a man's role. According to Judaism, men and women are spiritually and physically different, and though their complementary roles are of equal importance, they are fundamentally unique positions. Man initiates action while woman completes it. He is the theoretician while she put it in practice. He thinks in the abstract, she in pragmatic, realistic plans. Man is often a "schlemiel"; fortunately woman is crafty.

Mordekhai was to initiate the salvation of the Jewish nation. When the evil proclamations were posted, he didn't panic. Instead, he carefully analyzed the historical developments and came to the conclusion that Esther had been selected by God to save the nation. This "theory" made all the strange facts about Vashti, the feasts, and Esther's glorious rise to royalty fit into a coherent scheme. He knew that he was to initiate the rescue but that Esther was the one to fulfill it. He had two tasks ahead of him: (1) inform Esther of the events that had transpired (4:2-9) and (2) make Esther realize that she was charged by the Almighty for this task (4:13-14). His task as a teacher and educator was to inspire Esther to accept the responsibility. Up until this point, Mordekhai was the hero, the central figure, the leader who was giving orders and attempting to inspire Esther to follow his ideas. As soon as Esther agrees to take the challenge, we notice a sudden reversal of roles: Esther becomes the more prominent character and Mordekhai is assigned a less important role. She is now the

master, giving instruction (4:16) which Mordekhai obeys submissively (4:17). After he fulfilled his task as initiator of the salvation, Esther, the woman, gains prominence as the one to actually implement the plan and use her own ingenuity to bring it to fruition. This is the cunning, the *binah y'teira* (Nida 45b) which was endowed to womankind.

In fact, Mordekhai had his own ideas about how to implement the rescue of the Jews. But it was the plan of the woman Esther that prevailed. Mordekhai wanted Esther to go immediately to the king and plead for the nation (4:8). Esther disagreed, feeling that slow, diplomatic channels were to be preferred. She made one wine party and then another, procrastinating for some seemingly unfathomable reason. However, if we delve into the personality of Ahashverosh we will understand why Esther acted the way she did, and how the realities of the situation totally excluded the possibility of following Mordekhai's plan.

The king had a paranoid fear of an insurrection against the throne. The Talmud relates that he was not the legitimate heir to the kingdom, rather the son of the steward of the royal stables. His only connection with royalty was through his wife Vashti, daughter of Belshazzar. She obviously despised him as a social climber who lacked any royal grace and dignity. There was an underground movement to overthrow the government and restore the old order, as evidenced by the assassination attempt by Bigtan and Teresh. Ahashverosh tried to "buy" the country's loyalty by making those lavish parties and inviting everyone to eat and drink and view his wealth and women. But this is all clearly the workings of a mind that feels very insecure and fears revolt. The absurd law (4:11) proclaiming death to anyone who entered the throne room without an appointment seems also to be an outgrowth of his paranoid fear of revolt or assassination. When Vashti publicly insults him, he was worried that if he should kill her this would inspire a revolution. M'mukhan (1:16-20) gave him the following brilliant analysis: "True, if you kill Vashti you may trigger off a revolt, but if you allow her to survive after publicly insulting the king, then she will serve as a model for all the women of royal blood to insult their husbands." It was the custom

in antiquity for the victor to marry the widow or daughter of the vanquished power. Thus, many of Ahashverosh's officers had married women of the old order. "If they saw that the queen was not punished for her insolence, they too would start fighting their husbands and join the underground movement to restore the old order. The way to nip that in the bud is to execute Vashti." Thus M'mukhan, whom the Talmud tells us was Haman, gained the confidence of the paranoiac king, appearing as one who loyally defended the throne. Immediately following the assassination attempt by Bigtan and Teresh, we find that Haman was appointed Prime Minister. The king was really frightened, and in his paranoia he turned to the person who had proven his loyalty M'mukhan (Haman)—and placed his faith in him.

Feeling slighted by Mordekhai, Haman decides to destroy the Jews. He plays on the king's paranoia by casting suspicion on the loyalty of the Jews. He tells the king (3:8) that the Jews are a unified nation, widely dispersed in the kingdom, with queer laws and customs. Being a strange nation, no one can guess whether they are planning a revolt. Should they decide to join the underground, their unity as well as their dispersion geographically could make the insurrection very successful. The king fell for this ploy and agreed to kill the Jews. When a paranoid lives in fear of an imaginary monster, all moral controls are abandoned. He has only one irresistible urge—to destroy. Esther understood all this very well and therefore could not agree to Mordekhai's plan of immediate action. Once Haman had succeeded in arousing in the king fear of Jewish revolt, no human power or pleading could dissuade him from destroying his imaginary enemies. In grappling with the realities of the situation it was a woman's mind, not a man's ideas, that was needed. Esther decided that the only way out would be to turn the tables on Haman and accuse him of plotting against the king. She procrastinated day after day, waiting to find a possible opening, a possible way to shatter the king's faith in his trusted Prime Minister, It seemed that only a miracle could weaken his trust and indeed a miracle happened: *Balaila hahu nad'da sh'nat ha-melekh* (6:1). This is the turning point in the whole story, the prime miracle. The most significant aspect of that night was not so much the king's new respect for Mordekhai, but

his loss of confidence in Haman. You feel the king's malicious joy in taunting Haman while ordering him to honor "Mordekhai the Jew" (6:10). Whether it was Haman's mention of the royal crown (6:8) that made the king suspect his loyalty, or his failure to reward the king's benefactor Mordekhai, or the shifting perception of the universe in the mind of this paranoiac king, it was time for Esther to plant the seeds of distrust in his mind. This is the kind of subtle *hester panim* miracle, a change of mood in the mind of a deranged king, for which we give thanks to God on Purim. The next day, when Esther charges Haman with treason, the king willingly accepts the accusation. She explains to the king that had Haman really felt concern for the better interest of the king, he would have placed the Jews in forced labor camps, thereby keeping them under surveillance in a profitable set up. "But the villain is not concerned about the threat to the king" (7:4). By proposing to arm the countryside with weapons to kill the Jews, he was really making it much easier for the revolutionary elements of the population to organize their revolution. Esther made the king believe that Haman was plotting against the throne. The king's paranoia took over where Esther's words ceased. Upon returning from the garden to find Haman on the couch where Esther was lying he screams, "Do you even plan to seduce the queen while I am in the house?" (7:8). He was so convinced of Haman's treachery that everything he did was viewed through the lenses of his paranoia. He "saw" Haman not only planning the revolt but even trying to steal the queen! This was the ultimate sign of revolt. Haman's fate was sealed. The very strategy and the fate planned for the Jews now backfired on Haman and his associates.

This was exactly what Esther had planned. Notwithstanding the end of the Prophetic era, the young girl managed to fulfill the impossible mission given her by God. Mordekhai was the initiator, inspiring her to act, but she worked out the strategy herself and, with the help of God's miracle, brought it to fruition. God's spirit descended upon her and subtly directed her actions (See Rashi's comment on 5:1). It was the Divine Spirit from its hiding place (*hester panim*) that really engineered the whole production—not by direct instructions as in

the prophetic era, but through the more delicate and subtle channels of the human mind.

Esther taught the Jewish people how to fast and how to pray (4:16). The inspired charismatic woman is superior to man in two ways: (1) applied practical action and (2) prayer. Hanah, the mother of Samuel, taught us all how to pray (*B'rakhot* 31). Though she herself can never be counted to a *minyán*, she is responsible for showing us how to confront God. While Hanah taught the individual person how to pray in a time of stress, Esther taught us how we should pray together as a nation at times of peril. It is strange that these two traits, pragmatic cunning and the ability to pray, are really opposite, and yet women excel in both. Cunning is to be found only in adults whose years of experience with life mature them to be able to correlate all the possible factors and devise a scheme of action. Immature people may be brilliant, but they cannot be policymakers. Prayer, on the other hand, is an art in which the child excels. An adult is too realistic, too cynical, too hardened by life. To truly pray you must believe the unbelievable and hope for the impossible. True prayer is also that which swells up from either total despair or complete ecstasy. The adult moderates his emotions and doesn't allow himself to "let loose" and go to the extremes of feeling. But a child gives free reign to the feelings of anger, happiness, disappointment, and joy. The child knows how to pray *mimaamakim* ("out of the depths of despair"), and also how to sing a *shir hadash* ("a new song of rejoicing"). The Jew is asked to be an adult and a child at the same time. When called upon to act as a historymaker, as a messenger of God, one must act with maturity and cunning. But when one prays, he should shed his mature sophistication and let his overwhelming enthusiasm or unlimited grief pour out to God. One must hope for the impossible or know that nothing is impossible for God. These two opposing character traits find their most perfect reconciliation in womankind, symbolized to us by Queen Esther.

Purim Ideas

Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik delivered this lecture on March 4, 1974.

The Talmud (*M'gilla* 4a), establishes the requirement for the reading of the *M'gilla* at night (Purim night) and its repetition during the day. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi quotes as a basis for this practice from the Twenty-second Psalm, which shows man in despair calling to God during the night and day. On the other hand, Rabbi Helbo in the name of Ulah quotes as a basis for this practice from the Thirtieth Psalm which expresses man's need to sing in glory to God.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi identifies the reading of the *M'gilla* with petitioning of God from the depth of misery. Rabbi Helbo identifies the *M'gilla* reading with a total thanksgiving to the Almighty. Its recitation is a jubilant expression of praise of God. In fact, both of these elements are found in the *M'gilla*. On the one hand the *M'gilla* represents the cries and supplications of distressed man before his creator. On the other hand, the *M'gilla* is also the expression of praise and song to God for redeeming His people.

Dialectical Character

The dialectical character of the *M'gilla* is also found within the Purim experience. It is well known that Purim is a day of gaiety and celebration. However, Purim also includes an element of prayer. It is a day of deep meditation. *Hazal*, aware of the difficulty of being involved in both elements of Purim simultaneously, instituted the Fast of Esther on the day preceding Purim. The Fast of Esther became the day of supplication and prayer, while Purim day became the day of celebration and thanksgiving. Yet, the Fast of Esther is an intrinsic part of the Purim experience and not an unrelated addendum.

In what metaphysical phenomenon is the dialectical aspect of Purim found? It is found in the human experience. Man is a

frightened being, not in the psychological sense, but rather in the ontological and metaphysical sense. Man is a creature full of anxiety who, unlike the animal, lives not only in the perceptual reality—the present—but also experiences the realities of memory and anticipation.

Man's Fear

The reality of anticipation has man looking toward the future—his uncertainty breeds fright. The reality of anticipation leaves man in a constant state of need. Man cannot judge his state by his present circumstances alone, hence man always finds a constant need for and purpose in prayer. The uncertainty inherent in the human experience is reflected even in the prayer of thanksgiving—*Hallel*. *Hallel* is comprised of glorious praise for God, as reflected by Psalm 114 (*B'tzeit Yisrael*)—a psalm of praise to the Almighty for redeeming Israel from Egypt. Yet *Hallel* also includes fervent petitioning for Divine benevolence and protection as reflected by the *Ana Ha-Shem*! Please, God, save us!

Similarly Purim is also dual in character. The miracle of a doomed people being saved merited song and praise. However prayer and petitions were also in order since circumstances can change quickly. Ahashverosh was liable to do away with Esther as he did with Vashti. The duality of Purim is based, then, on man's vulnerability.

Vulnerability of man is not simply a tragic truth but rather an ethical postulate. It gives rise to modesty and humility in man. How can a man rich in accomplishments, successful in all endeavors, be expected to be humble? How can he suppress his arrogance toward those who have failed in life?

The answer lies in man's vulnerability to change. Suddenly, without reason, a man can be cast down from the throne of success to the pit of despair. Man's vulnerability serves as a cathartic and ennobling factor. Humility then is the expression of man's awareness of his vulnerability.

Indeed the whole Purim miracle was possible because Mordekhai was aware of his nation's weakness. Had Mordekhai allowed arrogance to overcome him and tell everyone that he was

the uncle of the queen, the miracle of Purim might not have taken place.

Reflected in Halakhah

The concept of man's vulnerability is reflected in halakhah as well. The numerous laws of safety in the Torah stem from the halakhic awareness that man cannot master his own fate. The concept of "making a fence around the Torah" through rabbinical ordinances, is also based on man's susceptibility toward failure on the spiritual level. It is man's vulnerability which allows sinful man to stand before his creator in judgment. God, aware of all the forces to which man is exposed, approaches man with a spirit of forgiveness.

Man's exposure to fate, however, is not viewed as tragic or accidental in the eyes of the halakhah. Unlike the Greeks, who felt that fate was the source of human tragedy, Judaism feels that fate has order and purpose.

The purpose of fate is usually above human comprehension. At times, however, man can see in retrospect the hand of God guiding fate. In analyzing an experience, man cannot ask why something occurred but he can ask what is to be derived from the experience.

Four Conclusions

What then is the message of the Purim experience? Purim leaves us with four conclusions. Firstly, man discovered that "all men are deceitful." Man, created in the image of God, can replace his divinity with total evil. Haman awakened the Jews to the fact that man can link up with Satan and become a total sinner, devoid of any divine spark. The concept of man-Satan is called by the Torah "Amalek". Amalek represent the incarnation of total evil in man. Amalek can be encountered in every generation. Hitler and Stalin represent in our generation the man-Satan. Amalek's destruction will only be realized in Messianic time.

The second message of the Purim experience is that Amalek's hatred extends to everyone. His primary pre-occupation, however, is with the Jews. In causing suffering to the Jews he

finds his greatest satisfaction. The origin of his hate is clouded under many names—social reform, economic reform or religious necessity—however the hate is senseless and arbitrary. The Jews of Persia were awakened to the fact that someone hated them. The mere existence of the Jews disturbs the man-Satan.

The third conclusion of the Persian experience is that the hate of Amalek is all-embracing. All Jews, religious or assimilated, are hated by Amalek. At the time of the Purim drama many Jews were prominent citizens in Persia. Twelve thousand Jews were invited by Ahashverosh to his party. Haman hated all Jews and wanted all destroyed. The decentralized Jews were awakened to realize that they all share a common destiny. Though the Jews were divided by geographical boundaries, separated by language, and enjoying different lifestyles, they were all included within Haman's evil plans.

Inspiring Message

There is also an inspiring message arising out of the Purim story. Whenever Amalek rises against man, he is met in battle by a messenger of God. Just as Mordekhai and Esther rose up to defeat Haman, so too in all such moments of crisis man is used as an agent to implement God's scheme. In the Talmud (*Sanhedrin 99a*) Rabbi Hillel states "Israel has no Messiah, for they enjoyed him in the days of Hizkiah." Rabbi Yosef said "May God forgive him". This exchange may be understood in the following terms. Rabbi Hillel envisioned the redemption of Israel as possibly without a human emissary of God.

Rabbi Yosef viewed such an outlook as bordering an heresy, and hence prayed that Rabbi Hillel might be forgiven. Intrinsic to the redemption process is the participation of a human redeemer. A titanic confrontation between the messenger of God and man-Satan must take place in order for redemption to occur.

Why though is this struggle a necessary element in the redemption process; as manifested clearly in our redemption from Egypt? The Jewish experience in Egypt underlies the morality of the Jew. The Jewish morality is a unique ethical code. It expresses itself in a warm and tender approach to man.

Tender Nature

This tender nature of the Jew is captured best in the word *rahmanut* which means love and sympathy. The word *rahmanut* is derived from the word *rahaman*, the possessor of love and compassion. The word *rahaman* carries with it a different meaning than the word *m'raheim* which means one who exercises love and sympathy. A *m'raheim* has the capacity to love or not to love to sympathize or not to sympathize.

A *rahaman* is compelled by his nature to be compassionate. He has no choice but to love. This quality of *rahmanut* describes the Jewish morality. The Jew has not only the capacity to love, but has the need to love.

How did the Jews acquire this trait of *rahmanut*? The Egypt experience internalized the trait of *rahmanut* within the Jewish people. Only an encounter with man-Satan can instill in man the capacity of *rahmanut*. The encounter of Egypt sufficed for the first commonwealth, but was revived once again through the Purim experience.

Why God's Name Doesn't Appear in The Book of Esther

The following was published for Purim on Feb 22, 1991 in Efrat, Israel by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin.

One of the strongest questions we can ask about Purim is why God's name doesn't appear anywhere in the Book of Esther. After all, the Megillah (Scroll of Esther) - in addition to being one of the 24 Books of the Bible - is a work that burns with the question of Jewish survival. Haman wants to destroy the Jewish people because Mordekhai is the lone man who refuses to bow down to him. And why does Mordekhai refuse? He is committed to the Jewish tradition which insisted - from the earliest time of our first Patriarch Abraham - that Jews bow down only to God. And Haman finds Mordekhai's refusal a thorn in his glory. This means that in the drama of Purim we are presented with a struggle between a representative of the One God, and a representative of the belief in ultimate earthly power. When Haman makes his general appeal of the necessity to annihilate a certain people scattered and dispersed among the provinces in the kingdom, whose laws are different from others, he is publicly announcing his goal to destroy the laws the One God commanded Moses. Thus the entire story of the Book of Esther begins because of one Jew's refusal to weaken his total commitment to God. If, therefore, God is truly at the center of this Book, how ironic it is that His name never appears!

The traditional answer given is that concealing the name of God is intentional, a subtle way for the Torah to teach another aspect of God's existence, a God whose ways are hidden and invisible. During other Biblical moments the hand of God is visible as He issues commands and directs the words of prophets and kings. When the events call for a miracle, like the time when the Israelites are pursued by an army of Egyptian charioteers, God splits the Red Sea.

But back in Persia with Esther and Mordekhai, the intervention of the divine requires a discerning eye. The teaching of the Book of Esther is that God appears in history not only through the fire and thunder of Sinai, but also as the invisible source behind a particular pattern to seemingly random events.

The characters in the stage of history may even themselves not necessarily be aware of how their roles will help determine the fate of the Jewish people. Since there is no prophecy outside the land of Israel, God moves from one who speaks through the prophets lips to a shadowy presence behind the scenes — but nevertheless even the Hidden God guarantees the destruction of Haman and the evil he represents in his relentless pursuit of the Jews and their values.

Let us look at the Purim story from a religious perspective. At first it looks like another major ball, the king of a great empire displaying his vast wealth and power, a celebration that will last for 180 days. Ahashverosh had much to be proud of. It's not easy to hold onto an empire of 127 nations. His reign is perfect, but then a blotch appears on his spotless kingdom. Queen Vashti, perhaps the most beautiful woman in the kingdom, refuses to appear before the assembled, an action which undermines everything Ahashverosh has been celebrating for half a year. What good are 127 nations if his own wife defies him? Enraged, he seeks advice from his advisors. They recommend death, an act that restores the king's power.

With Vashti's death, the wheels start turning. A new queen must be found, and out of the entire kingdom fate points toward a Jewish girl named Hadassah (Esther). Joining the royal court, it's not surprising that her uncle Mordekhai will be in the right place at the right time to overhear a plot against the king's life. Though it's recorded in the royal chronicles, it won't become a turn in the plot until the night the king can't sleep and Haman comes knocking on the king's door with his plan to hang Mordekhai on the gallows. This proves to be disastrous timing on Human's part, because from that moment on, the tables turn on him completely.

Now it's apparent that behind the scenes God has arranged everything to insure Haman's downfall. Even the gallows he prepared for Mordekhai will eventually be used for him. Except one point! When it becomes clear that Haman wants to kill the Jews, Mordekhai rends his garments, and lets Esther know she must approach the king and plead for mercy, but this request throws her into a terrible quandary. The king hasn't called in more than 30 days. If she enters his chambers without being called, she risks death unless the king raises his golden scepter.

Unmoved, Mordekhai sends a second message, "For if you do indeed maintain silence at this time, enlargement and deliverance will arise to the Jews from another place; but you and your father's house will perish: and who knows whether for a time such as this you reached the royal position?" [Esther 4~14]

If what we've been saying about God's invisible presence is true, why doesn't God simply arrange that Ahashverosh would call for her this night, just as he calls for the chronicles to be read to him on the very night that Haman shows up in the court. In line with everything else, God could have managed this without any difficulty.

And precisely because God does not intervene at the moment when Esther has to risk her life leads us to conclude that God guides the events of the world to a certain point. But in the end there has to be 'mesirat nefesh,' the willingness to take the final step, to risk one's life for the sake of God. Esther has to make the most difficult choice of all, she has to decide if she's willing to risk her life to save her people. It's not easy. At first she looks for a way out, but in the end. Esther triumphs over her fears.

This dilemma is the critical moment of the book of Esther - the heart of the message. For the redemption of the Jews God will set up many things, but in the end if we're asked for 'mesirat nefesh' and we avoid putting our lives on the line, we won't be saved. In the final analysis, we must be willing to risk even death in order to attempt to redeem ourselves.

The Talmud connects Purim with Passover. Even though God performs one miracle after another in Egypt, Pharaoh stubbornly refuses to let Moses' people go –until the last plague. And what's radically different about the killing of the first born sons is that the Jews had to take a distinct risk in heeding Gd's command to sacrifice a lamb and smear blood on their doorposts. Since this lamb was an Egyptian god, there must have been those who argued it would be safer to find a substitute, perhaps another animal, rather than risk the wrath of the Egyptians. But the Jews defied Egyptian law, and followed God's command. At that moment, they joined in the miracle - for them it was 'mesirat nefesh' and they were saved.

The absence of God's name in Megillat Esther - not only directs us toward a way to discern invisible patterns in the unfolding of our history: it also reminds us that we must do our acting as well if our people are to be saved. The last effort, the final leap, must be taken on our own. Without 'mesirat nefesh,' there is no redemption. A journey of two thousand years ends only when we take the final step. One who acts himself in order to be purified is helped from on High.

Some Serious Aspects of Hag Purim

Adar is a month of joy and frivolity. We drink, we laugh, we celebrate the holiday of Purim. Yet, one who avoids the serious implications of the holiday flirts with danger and may pay a heavy price for his avoidance. Nowadays, as then, evil is no playful thing, and is very much an item on the world agenda. People in positions of power who call for the destruction of Israel must be taken seriously as perpetrators of evil, as was *Haman* in Persia. Indeed, *Megillat Esther* is a profound reminder of the radical evil that lurks in the hearts of men and the extent of one man's perfidious intentions. The *Megilla* must be studied, absorbed and digested to understand this evil, and more significantly, to learn how to react.

Evil has many faces. There is, for example, the historical aspect of evil, which deals with the most evil men and events in history. There is as well, a theological dimension to evil, which raises the question: how could *Bore Olam* allow such evil in the world that He benevolently created and supervises. In addition, there is a psychological side to evil, where the student of evil attempts to understand the inner workings of the satanic mind.

Our concern here is not with the history of evil, nor with its theological implications. Rather, we would like to approach the *Megilla* psychologically – trying to penetrate the emotional depths and states of mind of the main characters– emphasizing the evil of *Haman*, though not limiting our analysis to his twisted, perverse perspective. First, we will concentrate on the psychological traits of those who brought about this near tragedy, and then focus on those who accomplished the last minute heroics that pulled the iron out of the fire. We start with the King of Persia.

What sort of person was *Ahashverosh*? Was he strong and powerful or silly and weak? Did he feel as secure as the Rock of Gibraltar or as insecure as a young teenager on his first date – not really sure what to say or what to do? Rabbi Soloveitchik has suggested that King *Ahashverosh* was the latter: fearful, insecure, and even paranoid. The Rav brings a whole host of textual evidence to support this psychological claim. For example, the

Rav asks, what King establishes a policy of immediate death to all those who enter the King's chambers, unless the King happens to point his royal scepter in their direction? (See 4:11) Paranoia at its best. Indeed, *Haman* knew how to portray the Jews, as a scattered enemy, disloyal to the pronouncements of the throne— yet united (*Am Ehad*), and thus more threatening - to convince the King that for self- protection, he best do away with them (3:8). The fearful king readily agrees.

And what about *Haman*? How are we to explain this crazed, irrational hatred that possessed him? What sort of man seeks to obliterate every vestige of a people who did him no harm? To kill every man, woman and child is to strike at the core of human decency. It is satanic— anti-Selem Elokim— behavior at its worst. Truth to tell, *Haman* was not the first to engage in such demonic, humanly perverse, behavior; witness his ancestor Amalek. Nor was he the last: Hitler must have been a close relative! We need to probe and ask, what are the underlying psychological causes that motivate such hatred? From what deep recesses does the he who hates draw his energy to hate? We submit that “ego” is not sufficient to explain the behavior of one who reaches to the depths of hell to find models for his actions. Certainly, there were no economic or religious reasons for this hatred, as has been the case throughout history; nor were the Jews a political or military threat. Why did *Haman*— why does the world— hate the Jews so intensely? Why are we the victims of the world's longest and most intense hatred? It boggles the mind. Satre's masterful essay, “Anti Semite and Jew,” is a penetrating exploration of the psychological underpinnings of such hatred and such behavior. To understand *Haman* psychologically- the depths of evil- Satre would be a good first step.

Now, however, we must turn our attention to Esther – the central personality of the *Megilla*. We may begin by asking: Why is she so important? Wherein do we find her greatness? Why do we celebrate this holiday, with her as the pivotal character? Or to pinpoint the issue: Why is the *Megilla* known as *Megillat Esther*, and not *Megillat Mordekhai*? Only a close analysis of the text will reveal what kind of person she was and what kind of person she

has to become. In this, we will discover the essence of her greatness.

As is clear from the early chapters of the *Megilla*, Esther plays no role whatsoever in the opening narrative. She is introduced to us, almost parenthetically –though anticipatorily – as the niece of Mordekhai, the more prominent personality. The text first reveals her as *Hadasa*, but quickly records a name change. What is the significance of this change from the Hebrew *Hadasa* to the Babylonian/pagan name Esther (2:7)? Could this change in name reflect a change in her destiny or a change in her own self-perception? Perhaps this change indicates a change in the role she will play in the narrative. As the events unfold, these questions will be answered.

Further, note the word “vatilakah” in 2:8. The word tells us much about Esther’s character. At this point, she is a young, naïve woman and is thus “passively” taken to the King’s palace – involuntarily. Yet, the impression she makes is profound. All are appreciative of her gentle demeanor; she finds favor in their eyes (2:9,15,17). *Hesed*, the quintessential Jewish characteristic, is her defining feature. Verse 12, in addition, tells the reader something striking about Esther: although absolute authority was given to all of the women to request and receive whatever they desire – she chooses nothing. Esther follows instructions – whatever Hegai says, she does: passive and obedient. And, of course, she follows the clear cut instructions of Mordekhai – unquestioningly (2:10). A certain naiveté, modesty and innocence characterize her every step. These character traits deeply impress the King as well. How could they not? Her lack of assertiveness makes the insecure King feel secure; her non-concern with power makes *Ahashverosh* feel more powerful. He is carried away by her *Hen* and *Hesed*, and responds with a *Hanaha* – an act of kindness to his subjects. She turns him, at least for the moment, into a better person. The King loves her, trusts her and needs her.

Years pass and all is well, or so we think. Mordekhai feels secure enough to challenge the power of *Haman* and the power of his office. Yet, events take a turn for the worst. Mordekhai does not really understand the corridors of power, nor really understand

Haman's ego needs or the King's insecurity. *Haman* does, and therefore plays upon this insecurity to secure the King's consent for his evil intention. The evil decree is agreed upon and proclaimed. Chapter 4 verse 1 records Mordekhai's intense involvement in all these happenings and surprisingly notes Esther's complete absence from all these events. His reaction: panic and mourning. He screams the bitter cry of defeat. Further in his depressed state he commands Esther to beg and plead for her nation. But now he is told that her distance is self-protective (4:11). After her initial response, however, there is a perceptible change in personality. No longer do we see the innocent, naïve, withdrawn demeanor of *Hadasa* – she becomes Queen Esther.

Mordekhai speaks in desperate tones. He sees only darkness ahead for his people. Esther perceives more profoundly, at this point, the needs of the hour. Wild desperate pleas of mercy would fail to turn the cold, cruel heart of *Haman* and the same for the insecure, paranoid king. Esther, however, understands her husband well. Because she has not been summoned to the King for thirty days, her wild entry into the King's presence could only mean death, nothing positive could result. Thus, Esther thinks craftily and pragmatically. A plan must be formulated, rooted in the King's insecurity and need for attention, taking into account *Haman's* arrogance and need for power.

Queen Esther understands her responsibility; the historical role given to her has now become clear. All past events are fully understood in light of the present crisis. But given her understanding of the events as they have unfolded and her uncanny insight into human nature, she knows that Mordekhai's impetuous plan of action is off the mark; her more deliberate formulation begins to take shape. The Queen's command of the situation is total. Now she takes charge and instructs Mordekhai what he must do, while she is galvanized into action. A transition indeed!! The follower becomes the leader, while the leader becomes the follower.

Hadasa has changed. The woman who requested nothing in her first visit to the King, now dresses regally. Her physical appearance will play a role in turning the tide against *Haman*, as

does her “Hen” – graciousness. *Ahashverosh*, upon seeing his Queen is transfixed and is willing to give her half of his Kingdom. No, all she requests is for the King and *Haman* to attend the next day’s party -thereby empowering *Haman*. Note how he reflects upon this attention. “Esther, the Queen, brought no one else to the party with the King but me. And tomorrow I am invited with the King”. (5:10). But this invitation with *Haman* must have deepened the King’s insecurity. He must have thought, “Why is she inviting *Haman* to this private party? Is a coup in the making?” The plot thickens. The pieces are all in place – even *Harbona* is properly instructed to play his role.

At the precise moment, once the King has had his fill and is feeling particularly happy with his Queen – offering her once again half the throne – Esther begs for her life, pointing her accusing finger at *Haman*. *Ahashverosh* is enraged, while *Haman*, half drunk and not totally aware of what’s happening, falls on the Queen’s coach. *Harbona*, perfectly placed, feeds the King the right line. *Haman* and his sons are hung. But the now, very aggressive Queen, is not yet finished. *Haman*’s sons must be publicly displayed, while another day is given to the Jews – *Lehinakem Meoyvehem* – to seek revenge from their enemies.

At this point, Mordekhai plays no role at all. Esther has become a powerful person, craftily using her position and womanly charm to save her people. Note how impressed the King is with her “Hen and Hesed” - not only at the beginning of their relationship, but years later. (As Esther expresses in 8:5 and the King must have agreed – she puts the right words in his mouth, mind and heart). Esther uses this to turn the King against *Haman*, thereby saving her people. That which was at one point innocent and natural was turned into a political tool to influence events.

Esther has become another person. From the shy, quiet, innocent, and naïve woman we met at the beginning of the *Megilla*, she has become – had to become – a player in the game of political intrigue. Queen Esther has become a powerful, charismatic personality. She takes all the necessary steps of dealing with *Haman*’s family, and all others who rise up against the Jews. Further, the *Megilla* in 9:29, emphasizes that Esther the

Queen (mentioned first) writes the narrative of events. She maintains power, not Mordekhai. She is Esther the Queen, while he is characterized as “Mordekhai the Jew.”

This dramatic change in personality was not simple, nor easy. It would have been much simpler and easier to remain under the wings of a protective uncle, passively accepting the events as they unfolded. She chose a different path. When destiny called, she answered – no matter what the price – to act on behalf of her people. Esther is praised by our tradition, not only for the role she played in saving the Jewish people, but for the self change she engineered and endured for the sake of *Am Yisrael*. Evil, once again, is temporarily defeated. We thank *Bore Olam* for such self-sacrificing people.

Psalm 22

From the Depths of Divine Abandonment to the Pinnacle of Hopeful Vision¹

The goal of this paper is to analyze the relationship between the superscription of Psalm 22 (the heading at v. 1) and its body. A proper understanding of the superscription will illuminate many of the otherwise unclear phrases in the psalm and will provide a better sense of its meaning. We will first review the psalm's structure and basic themes, and point out several aspects of its form, including word counts and recurring words and phrases.

Structure and Theme

Psalm 22 divides into two main sections: vv. 2-22, in which the psalmist complains that God has abandoned him in his time of trouble and vv. 23-32, in which he commits himself to praise God publicly. While feeling abandoned by God (vv. 2-3), he recalls God's past closeness to his ancestors who were rescued by Him and were not embarrassed by their belief in Him (vv. 4-6). Unlike his ancestors, he is not being saved from his enemies; on the contrary, he is scorned and mocked. He feels himself "a worm and not a man" who is the "derision of everyone" (v. 7), put to shame by all who see him. They speak about him, shake their heads at him and mock him with the implied thought, "Look at that fool, he trusts that God will save him" (v. 9). Yet, he still tells God that he has depended on and trusted in Him from the moment he was born (vv. 10-11).

Furthermore, the psalmist prays to be saved (v. 12) from his powerful enemies (presumably the political and religious authorities), who are like powerful animals that have surrounded him and are about to devour him (vv. 13-14). He is infirmed, weak, "poured out like water," melting away, dry, and on the

¹ This is a modified version of a longer article to be published soon in an academic journal.

verge of death (v. 15-16). Certain that he will soon die, his enemies have begun casting lots to divvy up his clothing (vv. 17-19). He pleads with God to save him from the “sword,” i.e., those who want to murder him outright (vv. 20-22).

In the second section, he declares his intention to praise God’s name to his brethren, prompting them to realize that God does indeed respond to the prayer of those who suffer (vv. 23-27).

That idea will spread around the world, as people experience it in their own lives and it becomes a part of the world’s spiritual legacy (vv. 28-30). Future generations will adopt the notion of a God who hears prayers and saves the petitioners (vv. 31-32). The implication appears to be that he is confident that God will ultimately save him.

Section 1 (vv. 2-22) can be further divided into two subsections: 1a (vv. 2-11) is a prayer about the psalmist’s abandonment by God contrasted with His past closeness while 1b (vv. 12-22) describes the current danger he is in, surrounded by his adversaries. Section 1a (vv. 2-11) alternates between outright complaint and remembrance of God’s help in the past. Vv. 2-3 contain the opening complaint of abandonment despite his repeated calls for help; vv. 4-6 recall how God answered the cries of his ancestors. V. 6 ends with וְלֹא בָּשׁוּ – “they were not disappointed.” This contrasts with vv. 7-9 where the psalmist feels disappointed because he has *not* been answered and this causes others to deride him. Vv. 10-11 recall that God has been his savior since his birth and so he reconfirms his commitment to rely on His help. Section 1b (vv. 12-22) repeatedly uses animal imagery to describe the psalmist’s predicament and this imagery virtually holds the subsection together and also connects it with both the superscription and section 1a, as we shall see shortly.

Other significant aspects of the Psalm’s structure are the refrain-like repetitions and central words, i.e. the words that appear at the center of the two sections and the subsections indicated above. The root רחק appears three times in section 1. In v. 2, it is used to express God’s current distance from the psalmist. In vv. 12 and 20 (i.e. the beginning and end of section 1b, which is the center and end of section 1), it is used as part of the phrase אֵל תִּרְחַק that forms the plea to reverse the current situation. This

root is not just a recurring word but is strategically located at the beginning, middle, and end of Section 1, thus highlighting that God's distance is the major theme of this section.

V. 3 continues the opening of section 1 with the words, אָקְרָא יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָא תַעֲנֶנּוּ – “I call daily and you do not answer.” Section 1 ends with the words וּמִקְרָנֵי רְמִים עָנִיתַנִּי – “from the horns of rams you have answered me” (v. 22). The root עני thus forms another “envelope” around the first section, which begins with the pessimistic view that God has chosen not to answer him and ends with optimistic hope that He will answer. Although understanding עָנִיתַנִּי as “you have answered me” makes a nice counterpart to “you have not answered me,” to form an inclusion, such usage seems awkward. A perfect tense does not sit well at the end of a sequence of imperatives. We prefer to take עָנִיתַנִּי as expressing a hope, an interpretation that fits better with the imperatives - viz., “may you answer me,” or “please answer me.”

In ascertaining the central words of a psalm it is important to remember that the superscripture can be considered either as distinct from the psalm or as part of it, a matter we have demonstrated elsewhere. We will consider the central words counted in both ways significant. Without the superscripture, the central word of this text is אָסַפֵּר² of verse 18, “אָסַפֵּר כָּל עַצְמוֹתַי - I take the count of all my bones.” The center of the psalm thus places us at the moment of the psalmist's most extreme fear when he worries for his physical survival.

Usually, the word אָסַפֵּר in the *piel* form means, “to tell, to recount” but here it apparently means simply “to count.” This unusual usage connects with the next occurrences of the root סַפַּר in this psalm, also in *piel* form, in vv. 23 and 31. Interestingly, the word אָסַפְרָה begins section 2 (v. 23) and the word יִסַּפֵּר occurs towards the end of that section (v. 31), thus forming an envelope around that section. The center word of the text, אָסַפֵּר, has the

² This word is also the 130th word of the text from the beginning, including superscripture. For the significance of this number see Rabbi Shamah's article: *On Number Symbolism in the Torah From the Work of Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon*. For the use of word counts see: Ronald Benun, “Evil and the Disruption of Order: A Structural Analysis of the Acrostics in the First Book of Psalms,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 6 Article 5 (2006).

prophet describing a difficult point in his life. He counts his limbs to make sure they are all fine. In contrast, in the second section the verb is used as part of the psalmist's praise of God for saving him. His recounting of his situation and how God helped him will cause a worldwide recognition of God which will extend to future generations. The use of the same words (and the unusual *piel* form!) links the depth of despair in section 1 with the praise in section 2, underscoring the hope for a complete reversal of the psalmist's situation from distress to giving thanks.

Section 2 describes many groups of people praising God beginning with himself, “אַסְפְּרָה שְׁמִי” (v. 23). The groups progress from a small clan of brothers – לְאֶחָי (v. 23), to a congregation of those who fear God or Israelites – קָהָל (v. 23), הַיְהוָה, יִרְאֵי יְהוָה, זָרַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, זָרַע יַעֲקֹב, יִרְאֵי יְהוָה (v. 24), קָהָל רַב, יִרְאֵי (v. 26), דְרָשׁוּ (v. 27), to the entire world – כָּל מְשֻׁפְּחוֹת גּוֹיִם, כָּל אֶפְסֵי אָרֶץ (v. 28), the healthy – כָּל דְּשָׁנֵי אָרֶץ, and the sick – כָּל יוֹרְדֵי עַפְרָה וְנִפְשׁוּ לָא (v. 30). The section ends with the next generation praising God – זָרַע יַעֲבֹדֶנּוּ (v. 31). This progression holds this section together as a literary unit.

Superscripture

The psalm's superscripture is unique. The noun אֵילַת (“doe”) and its modifying noun הַשָּׁחַר (“of the morning”) are especially puzzling. The Targum translates, קוֹרְבַּן תְּדִירָא דְקָרִיצְתָא, “for the strength of the daily morning sacrifice.” The Septuagint translates: “concerning the help that comes in the morning.” These translations understand אֵילַת as “strength” or “help,” based on the meaning of a similar word, “אֵילוֹתֵי” in v. 20.³ Ibn Ezra explains that it refers to someone experiencing the power of a sunrise. His preferred explanation is that אֵילַת has a similar sense to that in Prov. 5:19, viewing it as introducing a song with a beautiful melody like a love song. Rashi considers it to be the name of a musical instrument. Radak mentions the possibility that אֵילַת is the name of a morning star that is mentioned in the Talmud (JT Ber 2a, JT Yom 40b). His preferred interpretation is that אֵילַת

³ See also Ps. 88:5.

refers to the Israelites who are compared to a deer in Shir. 2:7 and 3:5, while השחר describes Israel's beauty as in Shir. 6:10.

Modern commentators mostly repeat these interpretations. There are, however, some exceptions. One suggests that the association of *deer* with the sun-god might shed light on this superscription. More recently, Claissé-Ward appears to suggest that a midrashic tale of a deer saving David from a lion may be the backdrop for the superscription.⁴ None of these explanations, traditional and modern, significantly relate to the contents of the psalm.

We propose that the אֵילַת of the superscription is related to the אֵילַת of Jer. 14:5. Only three verses in the Bible, Jer. 14:5, Ps. 22:1, and Prov. 5:19, contain the precise form of this word (that is as אֵילַת in contrast to אֵיל, אֵילָה, and אֵילוֹת). The latter appears to have little connection with either of the first two verses, but Jer. 14:5 and Ps. 22:1 offer considerable intertextual play.

A number of superscriptions in Psalms refer to well-known historical incidents that provide a setting for the rest of the psalm. Many refer to incidents in the life of David as recounted in Samuel 1 and 2 and Kings 1 and 2 (Pss. 9, 18, 34, 51, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, and 142). In the superscription of Psalm 22 the words אֵילַת השחר על function in a similar manner, albeit not as a reference to a particular time or event, but to a specific pericope in Jeremiah.

Jer. 14:5 reads, כִּי גַם אֵילַת בְּשָׂדָה יִלְדָה וְעִזּוֹב כִּי לֹא הָיָה דְּשָׁא – “Even the hind in the field forsakes her newborn fawn because there is no grass.” In the first four verses of that chapter, Jeremiah informs us of a prophecy he received regarding the drought and the sad events that it causes. In verse 5, he describes a situation that is so bad that, after giving birth, even the hind in the field is forced to abandon her newborn fawn because of a lack of water and grazing. The imagery is devastating. The delicate newborn fawn, which seeks its mother, alone and terrified, hungry and thirsty, is abandoned and unprotected from the hungry predators that at any moment might attack and kill it. Dawn - שחר - may be

⁴ Nancy de Claissé-Ward, “An Intertextual Reading of Psalms 22, 23, and 24,” in Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller, *The Book of Psalms. Composition and Reception*. SVT 99 (2005), pp. 147-48.

the moment when the fawn would be most vulnerable to predators, at the beginning of their daily stalking.⁵

In Psalm 22, the psalmist's sorrowful awareness of the details of abandonment from the Jeremiah context is the backdrop to his prayer to God. This adds depth to his petition, making it more effective in requesting God's compassion. Like the abandoned newborn fawn who presumably fears the predators of the new day, so the prophet feels abandoned by God and is alone to face the predators that surround him. This association provides a frame of reference for the rest of the psalm. In fact, much of the phrasing in this psalm and in the next three psalms make reference to Jer. 14.

In the opening words of the prayer, "אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי לָמָּה עָזַבְתָּנִי – my God, my God, why have you *forsaken* me,"⁶ the psalmist uses the same root (עזב) that described the abandoned fawn, "אֵילַת וְעִזּוֹב בַּשָּׂדֶה יִלְדֶה – the hind in the field *forsakes* her new-born."⁷ The double invocation of God, אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי, uncommon in the Bible, conveys the extreme urgency of the sufferer's situation.⁸ The word אֵילַת consists of the first three letters of the word אֵילַת; perhaps they are used purposely to emphasize or play on אֵילַת and evoke the imagery of the abandoned fawn. Later in the psalm,

⁵ Stalking is done by lions at all times. However, the peak times are dawn and dusk when they have an advantage of excellent low-light vision. Another possibility is that the doe only noticed the lack of food at the light of the dawn at which point she abandoned her fawn.

Interestingly, note Ps. 63:2 where the seldom-used phrase אֱלֹהֵי אֶתָּה (Ps. 22:2) is written in conjunction with שָׁחַר and the lack of water – אֱלֹהֵי אֶתָּה אֲשַׁחֲרֶךָ צָמָאָה – לֵךְ נִפְשִׁי כִּמָּה לֵךְ בְּשָׂרִי בְּאֶרֶץ צִיָּה וְעֵינַי בְּלִי מַיִם שָׁחַר ("to seek") and the noun "dawn" is that the person who seeks diligently arises early to do so.

⁶ Jer. 14:8-9 similarly use לָמָּה to ask why God acts like a stranger who abandons the nation.

⁷ The psalmist here has hope even though Jer. 14:11-12, 15:1 portrays a situation where there is no hope and where even God says there is no point in praying. See the discussion of קוֹה in: Benun, "Evil and the Disruption of Order: A Structural Analysis of the Acrostics in the First Book of Psalms," pp. 11f.

⁸ A double call to G-d occurs elsewhere only one other time, in Ex. 34:6 as YHVH YHVH. In fact, the word אֱלֹהֵי occurs only 12 times in the Bible, 10 of them in Psalms.

God is invoked with the word “אָנִלוּתִי – my strength” (v. 20) which also contains the same letters of and plays off of אִלָּת. (See more on this below.) The effect, however, is this: the fawn in Jeremiah has been abandoned by the אִלָּת, while the psalmist has been abandoned by אֱלֹהֵי.

The phrase דְּבַרֵי שִׁאֲגָתִי (v. 2b), literally, “words of my roar,” combines an animal sound (שִׁאֲגָתִי) with a term denoting human communication (דְּבַרֵי). While שִׁאֲגָה is used a number of times in the Bible to refer to human crying,⁹ this is the only instance when it is joined with “words.” The point here is that by combining the animal and the human, the psalmist equates himself with the abandoned fawn; the words of his prayer are equivalent to the fawn’s cry.¹⁰ It is tempting to say that the sounds of the words - “ehlee ehlee” - convey the sound that the fawn would make when crying out for its mother.¹¹ From the point of view of the structure of the psalm, שִׁאֲגָתִי ironically anticipates שִׁאֲגָה of v. 14, because the latter is used of the animals who threaten him. (Such irony of comparing hunter and hunted with lions is found elsewhere in psalms: 7:16; 31:5; 35:7; 57:7).¹²

The central words of section 1a are תּוֹלַעַת וְלֹא אִישׁ (v. 7). With them, the psalmist expresses his feeling of powerlessness and denigration by comparing himself to a worm. First, he had felt he had been reduced to the level of the animals that surround and

⁹ For example, Ps. 32:3, 74:4.

¹⁰ Of course the fawn does not “roar.” Yet the prophet wanted to express the power contained in his complaint to God. The word “moan” or “bleat” would not have accomplished that for him. Once the prophet uses animal imagery in this psalm, he “amplified” the fawn’s bleats to his roar. Interestingly, adult deer make a sound that is described as a roar. For a sample of such a sound, visit http://www.deer-uk.com/Red_roaring.wav.

¹¹ See <http://www.sonic.net/dana/fawns/sound.html> for description of a fawn sound and http://www.allpredatorcalls.com/New_Folder/FP%20Sounds/255voice.wav for the actual sound.

¹² See Brent A. Strawn, *What is Stronger than a Lion?. Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 212 (Fribourg/Gottingen: Acedmica Press/Vandehoeck & Ruprecht, 205), pp. 54. Strawn also discusses another possibility (after emendation) at Isa 38:13, also using שִׁאֲגָה.

threaten him. Now he is taken even lower, equated to a defenseless worm.

This psalm, especially section 1b, contains a remarkable number of animal references. The enemies are called bulls (v. 13), roaring lions (vv. 14, 17, 22), dogs (vv. 17, 21), and wild oxen (v. 22). Some of these terms are repeated and, in fact, they appear in chiasmic order:

(v. 13) סָבְבוּנִי פָּרִים רַבִּים אֲבִירֵי בָשָׁן פִּתְרוּנִי :	A
(v. 14) פָּצוּ עָלַי פִּיהֶם אַרְיֵה טֹרֵף וְשֹׁאֵג :	B
כִּי סָבְבוּנִי פְּלָבִים עֲדַת מְרַעִים הַקִּיפוּנִי	C
(v. 17) כָּאֲרִי יָדִי וְרִגְלֵי :	B
(v. 21) הַצִּילָה מִחֶרֶב נַפְשִׁי מִיַּד פְּלָב יַחֲדִתָּנִי :	C
הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי מִפִּי אַרְיֵה	B
(v. 22) וּמִקֶּרְנֵי רַמִּים עֲנִיתָנִי :	A

Whatever might be the correct way to interpret the odd expression involving **כָּאֲרִי יָדִי וְרִגְלֵי** at the end of v. 17, the meaning of “lion” does not disrupt the chiasm of the sequence of animal names, because **כָּאֲרִי** occupies the midpoint.

Bulls and oxen, which form the outermost element of the chiasm, are essentially the same animal, even if they might be used for different purposes. Lions and dogs then alternate in between. All of these animal references extend the metaphor inferred from the superscription. The psalmist is like a helpless fawn or a powerless worm encountering the dangers of wild animals all around him.¹³ The threat is heightened when we compare section 1a with section 1b. The central words of section 1a are the psalmist’s comparison of himself to a worm. They contrast with the center of the chiasm describing the enemy like a lion. He is small and powerless while his enemies are mighty and ferocious, like the kings of the jungle. He is so insignificant that his enemies ought to have no interest in him.

¹³ In this psalm, there are three places where the psalmist uses the metaphor of lions to describe his enemies. Interestingly, in all of the times “lion” is used in Psalms, the word describes the psalmist’s enemies. Jeremiah is the only other biblical book to use the word “lion” to describe the prophet’s personal enemies. Although, Zephaniah and Ezekiel (in chapters that are dependent on each other) indeed use the word “lions” to refer to enemies of prophets in Jerusalem, they do not use the word to describe their enemies specifically. The occurrences in the book of Jeremiah are the only ones to use “lion” in this way.

To understand the symbolism of the animals and particularly the phrase קַרְנֵי רְמִים “horns of oxen,” it is useful to refer to Ps. 75. In that psalm, upraised horns are applied to haughty people:

To boastful men I say, ‘Do not boast!’ to the wicked, ‘Do not raise (תְּרִימוּ) your horns (קַרְנֵי)!’ Do not raise (תְּרִימוּ) your horns (קַרְנֵי) up high (לְמַרוֹם) and talk down to people (vv. 5-6).¹⁴ All the horns of the wicked I will cut; but the horns (קַרְנֵי) of the righteous shall be uplifted (תְּרוֹמְמֶנָה) (v. 11).

Even though oxen are not mentioned in these verses, the verb to raise (תְּרִימוּ) echoes the word oxen (רְמִים) of our psalm. Raised oxen horns that threaten the psalmist refer to the boastful political or religious authorities who are his enemies. The spelling רְמִים is not the historical spelling. The more natural meaning for the word spelled this way would be “high” (or “haughty”). Perhaps the *aleph* of the more correct spelling רְאִמִים is deliberately omitted to make the reference to the haughty enemies more obvious.

The psalm makes another allusion to the abandoned fawn in vv. 10-11: כִּי אֶתָּה גֹחִי מִבֶּטֶן מִבְּטִיחִי עַל שְׁדֵי אִמִּי, עָלִינָה הַשְּׁלֶכֶתִי - “You drew me from the womb, made me secure at my mother’s breast. I became Your charge at birth; from my mother’s womb You have been my God.” The psalmist recalls how God has taken care of him since his birth implying that He should continue to do so. God has now abandoned him just as the doe abandoned her newborn fawn.

At the end of v. 11, after the birthing imagery, the psalmist again uses אֱלִי, recalling that same word in v. 2 and the similarly sounding אֱזִילָת in the superscription. In v. 11, he calls God אֱלִי while remembering how God took care of him at birth and was his

¹⁴ The phrase בְּצַנָּאר עֵתֶק (lit. arrogant neck) might also be translated “with their nose in the air.”

¹⁵ For similar usage of גֹּחִי see Mic. 4:10 and Job 38:8.

personal guardian, like a parent.¹⁶ This contrasts with the fawn abandoned by its mother. It also contrasts with his own current feeling of abandonment, calling out to God to once again be אֱלִי. The repetition of אֱלִי in vv. 1 and 11 and their play on אֱלִית, not only form an envelope around section 1a, but also force us to compare the two contrasting scenarios: God’s care of the psalmist from birth vs. His current abandonment of him.

The word אֱלִיתִי – “my strength” (v. 20) – is another play on אֱלִי,¹⁷ and is an almost exact repetition of the word אֱלִית in the superscripture. אֱלִית is an unusual word for strength.¹⁸ The psalmist seems to have chosen this odd word because it is similar to the word אֱלִית, meaning doe, so that he could create another link between the doe and God. This again creates a contrast in our minds between God’s presence and strength in general, and the psalmist’s current feeling of being abandoned by God similar to the fawn’s case. The psalmist is hinting that God, who was his strength from birth but has now forsaken him, is just like the doe that gave birth to her fawn but then left it to die. The very word which the psalmist uses to call God “my strength,” also intimates that he thinks of God as “my doe,” my parent who has deserted me. This is the closest the prophet gets to explicitly calling God his parent who abandoned him and who should therefore return to him.

אֱלִי is a “poetic” word that only appears in poetic passages. It occurs in seven more psalms, Ex. 15:2, and Isa. 44:17. At six verses, we have the statement “You are my God,” with the pronoun אַתָּה (you) either before or after אֱלִי.¹⁹ Of particular interest, because it falls in neatly with the God-as-parent-motive,

¹⁶ Note the use of the word אבי in Psalm 27:9,10 - כִּי אָבִי וְאִמִּי עָזְבוּנִי וַיהוָה יִאֶסְפֵנִי - which is preceded in the previous verse by - וְנֶאֱלַם תִּעַזְבוּנִי אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעֵי - another example of the prophet seeing Hashem as his parent. (Ps. 22:5 is the first of 13 psalms containing the word father - בְּךָ בָטְחוּ אֲבוֹתַי - perhaps this is more than coincidental, more investigation is necessary here.)

¹⁷ The first three letters of אֱלִיתִי are the same as the letters of אֱלִי. The full word is even more similar to the phrase אֱלִי אַתָּה (v. 11) with which it also shares the letter “ת.”

¹⁸ This form occurs only once in the Bible. The root noun אֱלִית only appears again in Ps. 88:5.

¹⁹ Isa. 44:17, Pss. 22:11, 63:2, 89:27, 118:28, 140:7.

is the phrasing of Ps. 89:27 where אֱלֹהִים is equated with father הוא וְיִקְרָאֵנִי אָבִי אֱתָהּ אֱלֹהִים. He shall cry out to me “Thou art my Father, my God,” where the latter three words are lexically, but not grammatically, a masculine counterpart of Ps. 22:11 אָמֵן אֱלֹהִים אֱתָהּ.²⁰

The words אֱלֹהִים, אֱלֹהִים, and אֱלֹהִים, recur at key points in our psalm. They function as a refrain with variations and form the backbone of section 1. These words occur at the beginning of the psalm as אֱלֹהִים (v. 1) and אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהִים (v. 2), at the end of section 1a as אֱלֹהִים (v. 11) and towards the end of section 1b as אֱלֹהִים (v. 20).

Verses 1 and 2:

(א) לְמַנְצֵחַ עַל אֱלֹהִים הַשָּׁחַר מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד :
 (ב) אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהִים לָמָּה עֲזַבְתָּנִי רְחוֹק מִיִּשְׁוּעָתִי דְבַרְכֵי שְׁאֵגֹתִי :

Verses 11 and 12:

(יא) עָלִיד הַשְּׁלֵכְתִי מֵרְחֹם מִבֶּטֶן אָמֵן אֱלֹהִים אֱתָהּ :
 (יב) אֵל תִּרְחַק מִמֶּנִּי כִּי צָרָה קְרוּבָה כִּי אֵין עֲזָר :

Verse 20:

(כ) וְאֱתָהּ יְהִי אֵל תִּרְחַק אֱלֹהִים לְעֲזָרְתִּי חוֹשֶׁה :

Each occurrence of אֱלֹהִים or אֱלֹהִים in the psalm is adjacent to a complaint that God is far away, רְחוֹק. The words אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהִים in v. 2 are immediately followed by the question לָמָּה עֲזַבְתָּנִי רְחוֹק. The words אֱלֹהִים אֱתָהּ in v. 11 are immediately followed by a prayer, אֵל תִּרְחַק in the next verse. In v. 20, אֱלֹהִים is expanded to אֱלֹהִים “my strength” and the words אֵל תִּרְחַק now precede it. This is a direct play on vv. 11-12. It should be noted that the second occurrence of this juxtaposed pair occurs in the last verse of 1a and the first verse of 1b, i.e. when vv. 2-22 are taken as a single section, אֱלֹהִים and אֵל תִּרְחַק sit at the very center.

We are now in a position to see what happens when we trace the progression from one occurrence of these key words to the next. In the first verses of the psalm, the psalmist addresses God with the uncommon term אֱלֹהִים. God is now distant but the psalmist makes no plea to have God come closer. He is just describing his dire situation. Note that even though the psalmist

²⁰ Note Ex. 15:2 where אֱלֹהִים is in parallel with אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי “God of my father,” as well as the use of אֱלֹהִים in the descriptions of God as protector in Ps. 18:3. We intend to return to this theme in another paper.

describes God as distant, he still considers Him close enough to address directly.

The second iteration of the refrain spans the seam between sections 1a and 1b thus connecting the sections and affirms that God is indeed the sole true Power. It also extends the idea back to the moment of his birth. This section makes the first plea of the psalm, “do not be distant.”

The third and final iteration of the refrain is the fullest and most explicit. It contains God’s proper name, YHVH, and expands the word אֱלֹהֵי to אֱלֹהֵי. Even the plea is amplified. The positive “come quickly to my aid” has been added to the negative “do not be distant.” The psalmist’s confidence builds as the psalm progresses. By the time he reaches section 2, he envisions what he will do when he is saved. The repeated words help us notice this progression.

Sections 1a and 2 both close with the idea of birth, Section 1a (vv. 10-11) with the birth of the psalmist, section 2 (vv. 31-32) with the birth of the nation’s next generation, עַם נוֹלָד. Just as God supported the psalmist from the moment of birth, the future generations will be aware of a supportive God. The positive connotations of these two births contrasts with the tragic events symbolized by the birth and abandonment of the fawn alluded to at the beginning of the psalm. The psalmist prays that his current feeling of abandonment will change for the better and the generations to be born will feel God’s justice and interventions.

Jeremiah Context

Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon has demonstrated that Jeremiah was the primary author of Psalms. Such linkage has a venerable history. It can also be traced to the very beginnings of modern biblical scholarship. The linkage depends on many points of similarity in content, diction and style. Ps. 22 has a number of points of contact with the drought of Jer. 14.

A notable feature of the book of Jeremiah is the selection from the womb. In Jer. 1:5 God is quoted as saying, בְּטֶרֶם אֶצְרְךָ בְּבֶטֶן יְדַעְתִּיךָ וּבְטֶרֶם תֵּצֵא מִרְחֶם הַקֶּדֶשׁ תִּינַח - “Before I created you in the womb, I selected you; Before you were born, I consecrated

you.”²¹ God has designated Jeremiah from birth and has been close by his side. But now, Jeremiah feels that God has abandoned him in his time of distress. In 22:10-11, the psalmist says, כִּי אֶתָּה עָלִיד הַשְּׁלֶכֶתִי מֵרְחֹם מִבֶּטֶן מִבְּטִיחִי עַל שְׂדֵי אִמִּי אֶתָּה אִמִּי אֵלַי אֶתָּה. The sentiment is the same: the relationship between the human protagonist and God goes back to the womb.

Ps. 22:11 uses the word הַשְּׁלֶכֶתִי – “I was cast.” A parallel verse at Ps. 71:6 uses נִסְמַכְתִּי - I was dependent.

11:22 עָלִיד הַשְּׁלֶכֶתִי מֵרְחֹם מִבֶּטֶן אִמִּי אֵלַי אֶתָּה

6:71 עָלִיד נִסְמַכְתִּי מִבֶּטֶן מִמְעֵי אִמִּי אֶתָּה גֹזֵי

נִסְמַכְתִּי seems to fit in more smoothly than הַשְּׁלֶכֶתִי, which almost always has a negative connotation.²³ Why is הַשְּׁלֶכֶתִי used in this psalm? It resonates with the theme of the abandoned (cast aside) foal introduced in the superscription.²⁴ The psalmist uses that word because he is feeling abandoned like the fawn. See a similar usage in Ezek. 16:5, וַתִּשְׁלַחֲנִי אֶל פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה בְּגַעַל נִפְשֶׁךָ בְּיוֹם הַלְדֹת אֶתְּךָ – “On the day you were born, you were left lying, rejected, in the open field.” The psalmist imagines that he was cast out at birth with nobody but God to take care of him. הַשְּׁלֶכֶתִי connotes a stronger dependency than נִסְמַכְתִּי, as if his parents abandoned him

²¹ The words בֶּטֶן and רְחֹם occur together in a verse only six times throughout the Bible: the above two verses, and Ps. 58:4, Isa. 46:3, Job 3:11, and 31:15. “Knowing (יָדַעְתִּיךָ)” is used here in the sense of being close to, interested in, and caring for as in Ex. 33:12, 17.

²² The meaning of גֹּזֵי is the one who cut the umbilical cord separating him from the insides - מִמְעֵי - of his mother. In other words, God is the one who delivered him.

²³ Could the verb שלך have the specialized meaning of English “throw” as “to give birth to,” (horses, etc.), “create” (potters)? For the former see *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam Webster, 2003), p. 1303, col. b, meanings 15 and 5 respectively.

²⁴ The root שלך in the *hofal* form also appears in Jer. 14:16. That verse also uses וְשָׁכַכְתִּי which occurs in Ps. 22:15. Although these words are not very rare, their presence in these psalms that are connected in other ways serves to strengthen the overall connection.

Interestingly, the roots שפך and שלך also occur in connection with Joseph and his brothers at Gen. 37:20, 22, and 24. The scene where his brothers cast Joseph into the pit has similarities to Psalm 22. He is indeed surrounded by his “enemies” who mock him and take his garment. Just as the psalmist in Ps. 22 uses the metaphor of the wild animals that surround him, Joseph is said to have been devoured by a wild animal.

and dropped him at God's doorstep. God has been there for him since birth, but now the psalmist once again feels abandoned like the foal because God is far away.

In Ps. 22:16, the psalmist describes himself in a state of weakness because of the surrounding enemies and compares his situation to one who lacks water.²⁵ **יָבֵשׁ כַּחֲרֹשׁ כִּחֵי וְלִשׁוֹנִי מִדְּבָק** – “My vigor is dry like a shard, my tongue cleaves to my palate.” These words are often understood as symptoms of an illness, but assuming Jer. 14:1-6 as the backdrop a simpler explanation emerges: the psalmist's condition, metaphorical or otherwise, is the result of drought. The famine also allows us to explain the subsequent references to eating. Ps. 22:27 is a prayer for food, **יֵאָכְלוּ עֲנָוִים וְיִשְׂבְּעוּ** – “let the lowly eat and be satisfied.” Those who lack food because of the famine should receive enough to satiate themselves. Ps. 22:30 continues, **אָכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ כָּל דְּשָׁנִי** – “All those in full vigor shall eat and prostrate themselves; all those at death's door, whose spirits flag, shall bend the knee before Him.”²⁶ Those who were at the edge of death because of famine will now eat and thank God in prayer and prostration.

Both the psalmist and the prophet are addressing the issue of God listening to prayer. In Jer. 14:11-12, God specifically tells Jeremiah not pray to Him because He will not listen (This theme continues in Jer. 15:1). Nevertheless, Jeremiah continues to pray in vv. 19-22. And ultimately that prayer is answered. In Ps. 22, the psalmist feels abandoned or claims to have been abandoned. Nevertheless, Ps. 22:25 emphasizes that God did listen when the lowly cried out, **כִּי לֹא בָזָה וְלֹא שָׁקַץ עֲנוֹת עֲנִי וְלֹא הִסְתִּיר פְּנָיו מִמֶּנּוּ** - **וּבְשׁוּעוֹ אֱלֹהֵי שְׁמַע** – “For He did not scorn, He did not spurn the plea

²⁵ The connection between the imagery of a tongue sticking to the palate and a time of drought and famine is also seen in Lam. 4:4, “The tongue of the suckling clings to its palate for thirst, little children beg for bread, none gives them a morsel.”

²⁶ **חַיָּה לֹא חַיָּה** in this verse is similar to **חַי לִבְבָבְכֶם לַעַד** in v. 27. In both cases the verb **חַי** means not just to live but to be healthy. See also Ps. 119:25, **דְּבַקָה לְעָפָר נַפְשִׁי**, - **חַיִּי כְדִבְרֶיךָ** - “My soul clings to the dust, revive me in accordance with Your word.” Rabbi Sassoon explains that this verse refers to illness. Notice how similar Ps. 119:25 is to the end of Ps. 22:30, **כָּל יוֹרְדֵי עָפָר וְנִפְשׁוּ לֹא חַיָּה**.

of the lowly; He did not hide His face from him, when he cried out to Him, He listened.”

Another example of similar language between Jer. 14:17 and Ps. 22:3 is their descriptions of ceaseless praying and crying:

Ps. 22:3 אֱלֹהֵי אֲקַרְא יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה וְלֹא תִעַנֶּה וְלַיְלָה וְלֹא דַמְיָה לִי :
Jer. 14:17 וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם אֶת הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה תִּרְדְּנָה עֵינֵי דַמְעָה לַיְלָה וְיוֹמָם
וְאֵל תְּדַמְיָנָה

Although the pair יוֹמָם and לַיְלָה (day and night) is common, connecting it with the root דרם only occurs in these two verses. This is stylistic similarity that reflects the connection between Ps. 22 and Jer. 14.

Jer. 14:7 is a request to God, עֲשֵׂה לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ – “Act for the sake of Your name.”²⁷ Each of these words takes on special significance in Ps. 22.²⁸ The word עֲשֵׂה is repeated at the end of Jer. 14 אֵלֶּה כָּל אֵלֶּה כִּי אַתָּה עָשִׂיתָ אֶת כָּל אֵלֶּה – “For You have made all these things” (v. 22), though in a different sense. Significantly, Ps. 22 ends with almost exactly the same phrase כִּי עֲשֵׂה. In both cases, the normally transitive verb is used without a direct object.

The phrase לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ recurs shortly after Ps. 22 in Ps. 23:3, לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ יְהוָה, and in 25:11, נִפְשֵׁי יִשׁוּבֵב יִנְחֲנִי בְּמַעְגְלֵי צַדִּיק לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ יְהוָה.²⁹ Although this exact phrase does not occur in Ps. 22, a similar idea is expressed by the words אֲסַפְּרָה שְׁמֶךָ and the contents of Section 2 in which the psalmist promises to praise God’s name publicly if He will only save him. Section 2 is arguably the psalmist’s most elaborate expression of gratitude to God for saving him in the entire book. It presents a detailed program through which he will cause God’s name to be exalted and is thus an extended elaboration on the idea of לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ.

Ps. 22 also has many connections to other chapters of Jeremiah, most notably Jer. 20. In Ps. 22:13-17, the psalmist’s enemies surround and torment him. These predators are about to

²⁷ The words לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ used as an argument to gain divine intercession occur only in two places outside of Psalms, both are in Jeremiah 14 (vv. 7 and 21).

²⁸ Section 2 begins with the psalmist promising to proclaim God’s name, אֲסַפְּרָה שְׁמֶךָ. As noted above, the end of the section repeats the verb סַפַּר saying that the future generation will proclaim God’s fame and tell of His beneficence כִּי עָשִׂה – “for He has acted” (v. 31). The opening and closing of section 2 pick up on two key words from Jer. 14:7 – שְׁמֶךָ and עֲשֵׂה.

²⁹ לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ are the center words of Ps. 25 without superscripture.

maul and devour him. This is strikingly similar to Jeremiah's experience in Jer. 20:1-3 when a temple functionary (who was also a priest and a prophet), פֶּשְׁחוּר בֶּן אֶמֶר, struck Jeremiah and had him placed in the מַהֲפָקֶת (usually translated as stocks) until the next morning. Jeremiah coins a name for him, calling him מְגוֹר מִסָּבִיב - "terror all around." Jeremiah uses the same phrase to describe his own plight later in the same chapter at v. 10, כִּי שָׁמַעְתִּי דְבַת רַבִּים מְגוֹר מִסָּבִיב הִגִּידוּ וְנִגִּידוּ כָּל אֲנוֹשׁ שְׁלוֹמִי שֶׁמְרִי צִלְעֵי אוֹלֵי יַפְתָּה - "I heard the whispers of the crowd—Terror all around: 'Inform! Let us inform against him!'" All my [supposed] friends are waiting for me to stumble: "Perhaps he can be entrapped, And we can prevail against him And take our vengeance on him." Jeremiah's experience is that the people surrounding him are plotting to destroy him. This is very similar to the psalmist's statement that he is surrounded by lions, bulls, and dogs that wait to pounce on and devour him, סָבְבוּנִי פָרִים רַבִּים (v. 13) and סָבְבוּנִי כְּלָבִים עֲדַת מְרַעִים הַקִּיפוּנִי (v. 17). Indeed, the concentric arrangement of the animals that threaten the psalmist may be thought of as reminiscent of the yoke of the stocks surrounding Jeremiah's neck.³⁰

Ps. 22:9 quotes either the mockers deriding the psalmist or the psalmist reciting words of encouragement to rely on God, גַּל בּוֹ - "Let him commit himself to the LORD; let Him rescue him, let Him save him, for He is pleased with him."³¹ Jer. 20:12 uses a similar sounding word in a similar usage, כִּי אֶלְיָךְ גַּלִּיתִי אֶת רִיבִי - "For I lay out my case before you." Both verbs are attached to the preposition אֶל and in both cases God is the object of the preposition. Even though these words are from different roots (גַּל is from גָּלַל and גַּלִּיתִי is from גָּלָה), they sound alike and both express full reliance on God.

Interestingly, both of these occurrences of גַּל and גַּלִּיתִי are followed by a reference to the prophet's birth. In Psalms 22, it is followed by reference to God as the one who had taken him out of

³⁰ For a discussion of the nature of the "stocks" in Jeremiah, see Holloday, ad. loc.

³¹ The commentators, both classical and modern fall into two camps regarding who is saying these words: a) the tormentors mocking the psalmist or b) the psalmist (Rashi, Radaq and Ibn Ezra).

the womb while in Jer. 20:14, the prophet then makes reference to his birth. Although the reference is extremely negative, the fact that these two ideas occur in succession is remarkable.

Psalms 22	Jeremiah 20
(ז) וְאָנֹכִי תוֹלַעַת וְלֹא אִישׁ חֲרַפְתִּי אָדָם וּבְזוּי עָם : (ח) כָּל רֹאֵי יִלְעָגוּ לִי יַפְטִירוּ בְּשֹׁפֶה יִנְיְעוּ רֹאשׁ :	(ז) פְּתִיתֵנִי יְדֹד וְאָפַת חֲזַקְתֵּנִי וַתּוֹכְלֵ הַיִּיתִי לְשֹׁחֵק כָּל הַיּוֹם כְּלֵה לַעֲגֵ לִי : (ח) כִּי מִדֵּי אֲדַבֵּר אֲזַעֵק חֶמְס וְשֹׁד אֶקְרָא כִּי הִזָּה דָּבַר יְדֹד לִי לְחֹרְפָה וּלְקֶלֶס כָּל הַיּוֹם :
(ט) אֵל יְהוָה יִפְלְטֵהוּ יַצִּילֵהוּ כִּי חָפֵץ בּוֹ :	
(י) כִּי אֶתָּה גֹחִי מִבֶּטֶן מִבְּטִיחִי עַל שְׁדֵי אֲמִי : (יא) עָלִינָה הַשְּׁלֹכְתִי מִרְחֹם מִבֶּטֶן אֲמִי אֵלֵי אֶתָּה :	
(יב) אֵל תִּרְחַק מִמֶּנִּי כִּי צָרָה קְרוּבָה כִּי אֵין עֹזָר : (יג) סִבְבוּנֵי פְרִים רַבִּים אֲבִירִי בְּשֹׁן כְּתֻרוּנִי : (יד) פָּצוּ עָלַי פִּיהֶם אֲרִיֶּה טֹרֵף וְשֹׁאֵג : (טו) כַּפַּיִם נִשְׁפַּכְתִּי וְהִתְפָּרְדּוּ כָּל עֲצֻמוֹתַי הִזָּה לִבִּי בְּדוֹגָה נִמְס בְּתוֹךְ מַעֵי : (טז) יָבֵשׁ כַּחֲרֹשׁ כַּחֲזִי וּלְשׁוֹנֵי מִדְּבַק מִלְּקוֹחֵי וְלַעֲפָר מוֹת תִּשְׁפָּתֵנִי :	(ט) וְאָמַרְתִּי לֹא אֲזַכְרֶנּוּ וְלֹא אֲדַבֵּר עוֹד בְּשִׁמּוֹ וְהִזָּה בְּלִבִּי כָּאֵשׁ בַּעֲרַת עֵצָר בַּעֲצֻמוֹתַי וְנִלְאִיתִי כְּלֵכֶל וְלֹא אוֹכֵל : (י) כִּי שָׁמַעְתִּי דְבַת רַבִּים מְגוֹר מִסְּבִיב הִגִּידוּ וְנִגְיִדְנּוּ כֹל אֲנֹשׁ שְׁלוֹמִי שָׁמְרִי צֹלְעֵי אוֹרְלִי יִפְתָּה וְנוֹכְלָה לוֹ וְנִקְחָה נִקְמַתְנִי מִמֶּנּוּ : (יא) וַיִּדְוֹד אוֹתִי כְּגִבּוֹר עָרִיץ עַל כֵּן רָדַפְנִי וּכְשָׁלוּ וְלֹא יָכֹלוּ בִּשְׂוֹ מֵאֵד כִּי לֹא הִשְׁכִּילוּ כְּלַמַּת עוֹלָם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח :
	(יב) וַיִּדְוֹד צְבָאוֹת בַּחַן צִדִּיק רֵאָה כְּלִיּוֹת וְלֵב אֶרְאָה נִקְמַתְךָ מֵהֶם כִּי אֵלֶיךָ גִּלִּיתִי אֶת רִיבִי :
(יז) כִּי סִבְבוּנֵי כְּלָבִים עֲדַת מְרַעִים הַקִּיפוּנִי כְּאֲרִי יָדִי וְרַגְלִי :	(יג) שִׁירוּ לִידְוֹד הַלְלוּ אֶת יְדֹד כִּי הֲצִיל אֶת נַפְשׁ אֲבִיוֹן מִיַּד מְרַעִים :
	(יד) אֲרוּר הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִלְדַתִּי בּוֹ יוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִלְדַתֵּנִי אֲמִי אֵל יְהִי בְרוּךְ :

Additionally, both contexts use the roots לעג (Jer. 20:7, Ps. 22:8), חרפ (Jer. 20:8, Ps. 22:7),³² and the word מרעים (Jer. 20:13 and Ps. 22:17). Taken together, all of the similarities between these two chapters suggest that the writer of Ps. 22 used Jer. 20 as

³² Notice that Ps. 22 reverses the order of these words compared to Jer. 20.

a secondary backdrop. Furthermore, the psalmist's reference to Jeremiah's placement in the *מִהַפְּכָת* in order to express his own feeling of being surrounded by enemies is a further indication that the author of this psalm may be Jeremiah himself. The enemies throughout Ps. 22 can now be better identified as the false prophets who constantly torment Jeremiah. Pashhur is himself a member of the false prophets, see Jer. 20:6. Jeremiah rails against the false prophets in Jer. 14:14-16, a context closely connected with Ps. 22, as seen above.³³

The connection to Jer. 20 may shed light on a difficult phrase in Ps. 22:17c: “כַּאֲרֵי יָדַי וְרַגְלָי – like a lion, my hands and my feet.” The missing verb is not necessarily a problem since, as in many cases of Biblical poetry, the verb from one colon may apply to the next one. But how does the verb of the previous colon, “הִקְיִפְנֵנִי – surrounded me” fit with the last colon? How can a lion surround anything and what is the connection to hands and feet?

Many psalms juxtapose threats of being surrounded by lions with being tied up. Ps. 10:9 compares the enemy with a net to a hidden lion ready to attack. Ps. 17:11-12 similarly says that the enemies “hem in our feet from every side” and compares them to a lion waiting for its prey. Ps. 57:5-7 once again describes threatening lions all around followed by mention of the net set out to catch his feet.³⁴ These parallel texts help to fill in the missing verb in Ps. 22:17 by linking the imagery of the lion with having one's feet ensnared.

By identifying the psalmist with Jeremiah, and associating the psalm with a specific incident in his life, we can better explain this difficult verse. In Jer. 20:3, the prophet describes how Pashhur placed him in a *מִהַפְּכָת*. Although the precise description of this instrument of torture or interment is not known, we can presume that Jeremiah was bound so that he could not move. (Perhaps it is called *מִהַפְּכָת* because the individual is partially

³³ Another context concerning false prophets is Jer. 23:9-40. Interestingly, Jer. 23:27-28 uses the verb *יִסְפְּרוּ* to refer to telling false prophecies, the same verb used in Ps. 22:23 and 32 to refer to the praise the psalmist will give to God as indicated above.

³⁴ See also Ps. 35:7 (nets) and 17 (lions).

turned over.) We can thus identify Pashhur with the אָרִי and so יָדֵי וְרַגְלָי would refer to the binding of Jeremiah's hands and feet. The colon can thus be translated as, "the lion (a reference to Pashhur) [tied] my hands and feet" where tied is an extension of "surrounded me" from the previous colon.

We have attempted to demonstrate how understanding Psalm 22's superscription illuminates many of the otherwise unclear phrases in the psalm and provides a better sense of its meaning. Many scholars have failed to recognize the importance of superscriptions in psalms, claiming that they were added as part of a later editing process. But this psalm is not the only one whose superscription informs on its content; on the contrary, Psalm 22 is not the exception, but rather the rule. This process is demonstrated more extensively in our forthcoming commentaries on the בְּנֵי קִרְחַ, אֶסָּף, and מִכְתָּם psalms.

Megillat Esther Points of Discussion

Perek Aleph

1. Ahashverosh made a party for 180 days while his Queen Vashti, had her own separate party. What could be the real purpose for such a party for Ahashverosh and for what purpose did Vashti make her party?
2. Ahashverosh made two parties - one for the officials of the kingdom and one for the common people in Shushan. What could possibly be the motivation behind making both parties.
3. In the proclamation sent throughout the empire to each household one of the decrees was that the language spoken in the home must be that of the husband. What is it about language that makes it such a crucial factor?

Perek Bet

4. Did Esther want to be selected as Queen? Bring an indication from the text.
5. How is it possible that Mordekhai overheard the plot to kill the King without being noticed by the conspirators?
6. The text tells us that Mordekhai always sat at the king's gate. What does the "King's Gate" symbolize and what does that tell us about Mordekhai?

Perek Gimel

7. If Haman was angry with Mordekhai only, what made him want to destroy all Jews?

8. Haman convinced Ahashverosh that the Jews should be destroyed. Describe his arguments. How does this relate to anti-Semitic tactics throughout history.

9. If Haman convinced Ahashverosh that the Jews were a threat to the Kingdom, why did he pay Ahashverosh for the privilege of killing the Jews?

10. Rather than pick an appropriate day, Haman drew lots. What does this indicate about Haman's beliefs?

11. The megillah indicates that, after the decree, the city of Shushan was "bewildered." Explain this reaction.

Perek Dalet

12. When Mordechai heard of the plan to destroy the Jews, he reacted in what became the classic Jewish way - he rent his garments, put on a sackcloth with ashes, and cried. How do these symbolize the emotions that he felt?

13. The Megila states that there was a rule that if one called upon the king without being summoned, he could be put to death. What does this reflect about that society.

14. The Jews of Shushan fasted in their time of distress. What is the explanation of this practice.

Perek Hey

15. Why didn't Esther tell Ahashverosh of the terrible plot against the Jews immediately? Why did she organize a series of parties?

16. What reason could Esther have had for inviting Haman to the party she made for the king?

17. What do we learn about Haman's personality and character from Chapter 5?

18. After his boastful account, Haman said that all the glory does not outweigh his unhappy feelings when he sees Mordekhai. What does this indicate about Haman's personality?

Perek Vav

19. When Ahashverosh couldn't sleep one night, he ordered the book of records be read to him. What was his purpose?

20. How was it that Mordekhai was never previously rewarded for his act of saving the king's life?

21. Haman's response to Ahashverosh's question of how to honor someone was a description of kingly treatment. Since Haman thought this would be for himself, was he not obviously overreaching in expressing his ambition to the king?

22. What could have been the historical background to prompt Zeresh to say to Haman at this time that "If Mordekhai is Yehudi, you will surely fail before him?"

Perek Zayin

23. Esther tells Ahashverosh that the Jews were not even "sold as slaves" in Haman's plot. What was her intention in mentioning this?

24. When Ahashverosh heard that Haman was the perpetrator of the plot against the Jews he immediately went outside. What does this indicate?

25. When Ahashverosh returned inside, he thought Haman was trying to seduce Esther. Does this reveal anything further about the personality of Ahashverosh and his relationship with Haman?

26. The King's anger was abated when Haman was hanged on the gallows he prepared for Mordekhai. What exactly was the king angry about?

Perek Het

27. What is the nature of the reasons Esther used to convince Ahashverosh to help save the Jews?

28. It was necessary to make another royal decree to save the Jews as the first decree could not be canceled. Why was it that the king could not simply cancel a royal decree?

29. The new decree gave Jews the right to fight on Adar 13 "against their enemies." Without the decree would they not have fought back?

Perek Tet

30. Chapter 9 verses 2-5 indicates that the Jews defeated their enemies partly because of "psychological" factors. What role could these factors have played?

31. The megillah tells us that, after the defeat, the Jews did not take any of the spoils. What does this tell us?

32. As a reaction to the battle, the Jews spontaneously made parties and practiced "mishloah manot ish le're'ehu umatanot la'ebyonim." How do these actions relate to the emotional feelings they must have felt.

33. Of all the events that occurred, the "lottery" aspect was just one detail. Yet the holiday was called Purim - lots. What was the reason for this?

34. The megillah states that the Purim holiday will never cease. The Talmudic sages expounded that even if all other holidays are annulled in the time of redemption, Purim will continue to be celebrated. Why was Purim singled out from all the holidays?