

PSALM 130:1-8

A BRIEF MEDITATION WITH A TRANSLATION AND NOTES AND COMMENTS

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The following provides the Masoretic vocalized Hebrew text with a translation by Mitchell Dahood, S.J. (1970), based on Northwest Semitic studies and only slightly revised, based on further insights and an emphasis on the recognition of Hebrew poetic devices in the service of exegesis by Walter L. Michel. Please, report any mistakes, corrections and helpful comments to me.

The Masorets are the scribes who transmitted the Hebrew text. The verb *masar*, means, “to deliver up, hand over,” and that is what the Masoretes did over the centuries until an established text was produced only about the end of the first millennium of the Common Era.

A SINNERS CRY

This is the sixth of the Penitential Psalms. The others are Pss 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 143. The psalmist professes to be in a deep spiritual abyss as if in Sheol (i.e., the world of the dead) already during life. The psalm is an expression of remorse for sin and a plea for forgiveness. It is a personal confession and concludes with a prayer for all people undergoing hardships due to national distress. Can Americans relate to this in 2001, 2002?

MASORETIC TEXT	TRANSLITERATION	TRANSLATION (DAHOOD-MICHEL)
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Superscription

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת

šîr hamma ʿălôt

1 A song of ascents

The Penitent's Cry

מִמְעַמְקִים קָרָאתִיךָ

*mimma ʿamaqqîm
qērā ʾîkā*

Out of the Depth I cry to YOU

יְהוָה:

yēhōwāh

oh YaHWeH/LORD

אָדֹנָי שְׁמָעָה בְּקוֹלִי

*yhwh, vowels < ʾădōnāy
ʾădōnāy šîm ʾāh bəqôlî*

2 My MASTER, hear my voice

תְּהִינָה אָזְנוֹיךָ קוֹשְׁבוֹת

*tihyeynāh ʾoznekā qaš-
šubôt*

Let your ears be alert

לְקוֹל תְּחִנּוּנֵי:

*ləqôl taḥnûnāy
root=ḥnn, "be gracious"*

to my voice for mercy/grace for me

Reminding God that God has forgiven in the past

אִם-עֲוֹנוֹת תִּשְׁמָר־יְהוָה	<i>im- āwōnôt tišmār-yāh</i>	3 If YOU should keep record of iniquities, YAH
אֲדֹנָי מִי יַעֲמֹד:	<i>ādōnāy mī ya āmōd</i>	oh, my MASTER, who could stand/survive
כִּי-עִמָּךְ הַסְלִיחָה	<i>kî- immēkā haslîhāh</i>	4 But with YOU there is forgiveness/pardon
לְמַעַן תִּנָּרָא:	<i>lěma'an iwwārē'</i>	that YOU might be revered/feared/held in awe

Intense calling on God throughout the night

קוֹנֵי יְהוָה	<i>qiwwîṭî yēhōwāh</i> <i>qwh = "call," not "wait"</i>	5 I call YaHWeH/the LORD
קוֹנֵה נַפְשִׁי	<i>qiwwētāh napšî</i>	my whole being calls
וְלִדְבָרוֹ הוֹחֵלֵתִי:	<i>wilidbārô hôhālētî</i>	and for HIS WORD I am waiting/hoping
נַפְשִׁי לְאֲדֹנָי	<i>napšî la' dōnāy</i>	6 my whole being (is waiting) for my MASTER
מִשְׁמָרִים לְבֹקֶר	<i>rd la' dōnāy-m, enclitic-m</i> <i>šōmērîm labbōqer</i>	through the watches till morning
שְׁמָרִים לְבֹקֶר:	<i>MT = miššōmērîm</i> <i>šōmērîm labbōqer</i>	through the watches till morning

Exhortation and confidence

יַחַל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-יְהוָה	<i>yaḥēl yiśrā'ēl ēl-yehōwah</i> <i>yhwh vowels < ādōnāy</i>	7 Wait, O Israel, for YaHWeH/the LORD
כִּי-עִם-יְהוָה הַחֶסֶד	<i>kî- im-yehōwāh haḥesed</i>	because with YaHWeH/the LORD there is the <i>ḥesed</i>
וְהַרְבֵּה עֲמוֹ פְדוּת:	<i>wēharbēh immô pēdût</i>	and with HIM abundant redemption/ <i>pēdût</i>
וְהוּא יִפְדֶּה אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל	<i>wēhû 'yipdeh 'et-yiśrā'ēl</i>	8 It is HE who will redeem Israel
מִכָּל עֲוֹנוֹתָיו:	<i>mikkōl āwōnôtāw</i>	from all iniquities against HIM

INTRODUCTION

There is little doubt that Jesus of Nazareth knew the Psalms well and that he lived by the spirit which is expressed in the 150 psalms in the Bible. And as you know, Jesus died with the words of Ps. 22 on his lips. If you read all of Ps 22 then you will get a different insight into how Jesus died.

Martin Luther liked the psalms so much that he said, that if one really wants to know what Christianity is all about then one needs only to know and pray the psalms. Ps 130 was his favorite psalm and he used it for the composition of his hymn "Out of the depths I cry to thee," = "Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir."

All of my life I have tried to immerse myself in the spirituality of the Psalms and if you do this also you will never have any problems with spirituality. I have read the psalms in Hebrew, just like Jesus. I have done this for over four decades. Reading the psalms in Hebrew gives me a depth of understanding which was not available to me when I read them only in German and in English.

The psalms are truly amazing and they cover all of our human feelings, emotions and thoughts, which run hot and cold through our bodies and brains, from the worst to the best. The ancient Hebrew poets, who wrote the psalms, give me words and expressions which my own heart and brain are never able to find for my intense feelings and emotions and thinking.

The Psalm suggested for today is Ps. 130. So let's have a brief look at Ps 130 and see if the thoughts which are expressed here match our own in some way. It is quite possible that we might even hear the Word from God - through the words of the psalmist - if we have an open mind and heart.

VERSE 1

NOTES

The superscriptions were added probably only around the time when the Psalms were translated, in about the third century before Jesus. Ascent means ascent to Jerusalem, to the temple to worship.

We should never say YaHWeH. The Masoretes indicated that we should read it as *šdōnāy*, "master, lord," as a sign of respect for God.

COMMENTS

How often do we feel deep frustration, anxiety, depression, remorse, sorrow, because of our sin, because of our own wrong doings, our guilt, and then we turn to God, and also to each other, with repentance and a plea for forgiveness and the possibility of new life?

Do I have to give examples of our depressions, guilt, remorse? I do not think so, and I invite each one of us to seriously think of the wrong we have committed to our selves, to others and, therefore, to God. This is serious and without confession there is no hope for a healthy new life, spiritually and physically.

But, you have also noticed that sometimes, we are not guilty and we still suffer. The Bible shows many times that some suffering is not related to sin. But that is another topic. It is argued in about 50 of the 150 psalms, in Jeremiah, in the Book of Job, and in many other passages in the Bible. I have studied this theme of innocent suffering in the Bible quite carefully and if you like I could speak about this topic another time.

Ps 130, though, does speak about suffering because of sin.

VERSE 2

NOTES

Note the pairing of *yhwh*, LORD with *šdōnāy*, "my MASTER." It is better to translate *šdōnāy* as "master," than with "lord," in order not to confuse it with "LORD," which is the usual translation and writing of *yhwh* (the personal name of God in the Hebrew Bible). *Yhwh* is often also pronounced "Yahweh" in English.

The Hebrew root *hnn* is the basis for the names "Ann, Anna, Channah, Grace."

COMMENTS

The psalmist uses an imperative in addressing God, "listen!" Think about it how unusual this is. In no other religion can a sinner address the deity in this manner. According to the biblical understanding of the relationship between God and a person even the worst sinner has the right to address God and to remind God that God sometimes does not listen. "Listen, God, pay attention!" And our God has an obligation to listen to the cry, the prayer of penitence.

Just like parents have an obligation to listen to their children. Some parents, though, not only do not listen to their children they mistreat them, molest them, torture them and even murder them. What punishment must be in store for such parents?

VERSE 3

NOTES

Yāh, *YaH*, is another (and very ancient) divine name. Cf. the ending *-yah*, *-jah* in *hallelu-jah*. The Hebrew consonant *yod* is transliterated in English with *-y-* and in German with *-j-*.

"Who could stand/survive," refers to "standing" in the court in the Final Judgment and give an account, a defense of the conduct of life.

COMMENTS

Some poets understood God as a divine bookkeeper, an accountant, a scribe, who records everything together with the well-deserved punishments. Ps 79:8 can be translated, “Do not record to our debit, O Scribe (*māhīr*), the iniquities of our forefathers.” (Dahood, *Psalms II*, 249) The psalmist shudders, “If this is really true, then we are all in deep trouble.” But have you noticed that God is a lousy bookkeeper sometimes. For some sins I still have not been punished, but, for some good deeds I have not been rewarded either.

What do you think? Do you want God to be a perfect accountant? We want our human accounting firms to be perfect, but, do we really want God to be perfect and totally just? Well, I am not sure that I want to see the book with all of my sins listed. Actually, I hope that God will just misplace the book and never find it, forget about it, or throw it into the fire. I am counting on God to be a lousy accountant. What about you?

VERSE 4

NOTES

In modern Hebrew “*sēlīhāh!*” is used for “pardon me!”

COMMENTS

The psalmist remembers and reminds God that God is a God of forgiveness. Great! What a great move on the part of the sinner! Ps 86:5 reads, “Since you, my Master, are good (*ṭōb*) and forgiving (*sallāh*) / rich in mercy (*hesed*) to all who invoke you.”

The word *hesed* is hard to translate. It refers to the loyalty and obligations which God has entered with God’s people in the covenant. This is something similar to the obligations and duties which parents have toward little children and even toward teenagers. The children may be naughty and parents may want to dash the children to the wall, but, usually parents do not do that and if they do they must be severely punished.

It is for this reason, namely because of *hesed*, that God is feared, held in awe, revered, and respected, because we all know that forgiveness is not automatic and that it depends on deep remorse on our part, it depends on a sincere confession of sin and a change of life, a new life - without the evidence of new life the confession is, of course, an insincere lie.

If God would not forgive the one who pleads to God and is ready to have a change of life, then not one of us could endure the ordeal of the Divine Tribunal, the Last Judgment. Well, at least, I could not, may be you could?

And once we have experienced forgiveness we, certainly, can not but pass it on and give forgiveness to those who ask it from us. If we do not do this then the forgiveness which we have received already will be taken away from us and we will rot in our sin no matter how many times we participate in some religious gatherings or some ritual.

Jesus said this in a horrific story and you can read it in Matthew 18:23-35. Please read it and take it to heart. This is not a joke.

We can not be disciples of Jesus if we do not live the same Spirit which Jesus exemplified. We are asked by Jesus to be the disciples of Jesus and, just like Jesus, be transparent of the Holy Spirit and the intentions which God has, the vision, the image which God has for all of humans, namely, to have an absolutely astonishingly beautiful life in our relationship with one another.

VERSES 5 AND 6

NOTES

Again we need to read יהוה as *ādōnāy*, “my master, my lord.”

The pairing of “I” with “whole being” (not “soul”) is very effective

By the “word” is meant the word of pardon, release, deliverance from the horrendous consequences of sin.

In poetry repetition is a very important and effective poetic device.

COMMENTS

The psalmist is so desperate to hear the word of release, pardon, and forgiveness from God that the psalmist has entered into an intense prayer vigil, being awaked at the appointed watches, or times for prayer, to continue the plea to God to forgive.

How many of us have ever done that? It is not part of our custom. Should we make it our custom? Can you imagine the benefits for us if we would institute such a custom in our church?

Twice the poet uses the root *qawah* which means “to call” and not “to wait.” Twice the poet uses the word *nepeš*, which is usually translated “soul,” but, actually, means something like, “breath, panting, living being, appetite, emotion, passion,” and not what we mean by “soul.” In many contexts *nepeš* is best understood as, “my whole being, I myself.”

The poet is using the verb *yaḥal*, once. This verb does mean “to wait, to hope,” that is, to patiently wait for the word, the verdict of forgiveness to come from God and from the person we have wronged. But, this waiting does not mean to sit around and do nothing. On the contrary, it means to engage in doing what God would want us to do, namely, to forgive, to dry someones tears, to be just, ...

VERSES 7 AND 8

NOTES

Ḥesed means “mercy, covenant loyalty.” Here it is used with the article, “the *Ḥesed*.”

The root of *ṣēdūt* is *ṣādāh*, “to ransom, redeem.” It is a commercial term.

COMMENTS

Not only the individual, but, the whole community of the people of God is admonished “to wait, to hope” for God to act and proclaim the word of forgiveness and, therefore, the possibility of a new life.

How we lack this sense of community. Do we not experience day in and day out that when one of us suffers all of us suffer? As long as one of us suffers an injustice none of us is safe, and we know now that this includes all humans on this planet. There can be no home security if there is no world security.

Note that the poet uses the word *ḥesed* again and pairs it with the word *ṣēdūt*, “redemption,” from the root *ṣādāh*, “to ransom, redeem,” which he uses in the next line.

Whenever such a pairing of words occurs then the poet wants to say with the second word which aspect of the first word is meant. So, he uses *ḥesed*, which can mean “covenant loyalty, mercy, kindness,” and then with the second word, *ṣēdūt*, tells us which aspect of *ḥesed*, he had in mind. In this case he had in mind *ṣēdūt*, “redemption, ransom.” *Ṣēdūt* is a commercial term which is used, for example, when buying a slave out of slavery and providing freedom for the slave. Aha, the sinner feels that sin is like a prison and wants God to put up the bail money.

In the end it is God who gives us freedom from guilt and sin when we turn to God in sincere repentance and prove our repentance with deeds of *ḥesed*, just like God.

Can we do this? Of course we can. Try it, right away, today, with the person you have dealings with next.

Amen