

# Halleluyah!

Psalm 150

Instruments on Shabbat

## Study Session

March 2005

**KOACH**  
on campus



The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

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The following materials have been created by **KOACH** for the enhancement of your on-campus programming. They are designed to be adjustable based on your interests and the available time. This packet contains: a copy ready text sheet, background materials and a facilitator guide. The background materials and facilitator guide will help you build conversations around the text and create connections between the text and contemporary life.

Questions? Send them to: [estrin@uscj.org](mailto:estrin@uscj.org).

## Halleluyah! – Psalm 150

א הַלְלוּהוּ  
הַלְלוּ-אֱלֹהֵי בְּקֹדֶשׁ הַלְלוּהוּ בְּרִקְיעַ עֲזָו:  
ב הַלְלוּהוּ בְּגִבּוֹרֹתָיו הַלְלוּהוּ כְּרֹב גְּדֻלּוֹ:  
ג הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתִקְעַ שׁוֹפָר הַלְלוּהוּ בְּנֵבֶל וְכַנּוֹר:  
ד הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתוֹף וּמְחוֹל הַלְלוּהוּ בְּמִנִּים וְעוּגָב:  
ה הַלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצְלֵי-שִׁמְעַ הַלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצְלֵי תְרוּעָה:  
ו כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְהַלֵּל יְהוָה הַלְלוּהוּ:

1) Halleluyah.

Hallelu-El b'kodsho; Halleluhu birkiya ouzo.

2) Halleluhu bigvurotav; Halleluhu k'rov gudlo.

3) Halleluhu b'teika shofar; Halleluhu b'nevel v'khnor.

4) Halleluhu v'tof umahol; Halleluhu b'minim v'ugav.

5) Halleluhu b'tziltzlei-shama; Halleluhu b'tziltzlei truah.

6) Kol han'shamah t'halel Yah, Halleluyah.

1) Halleluyah

Praise God in his Sanctuary; Praise Him in the firmament of his strength.

2) Praise Him in his mighty deeds; Praise Him for his abundant greatness.

3) Praise Him with sound of the Shofar; Praise Him with the lyre and harp.

4) Praise Him with drum and dance; Praise Him with stringed instrument and flute.

5) Praise Him with resounding of cymbals; Praise Him with blasting of cymbals.

6) Let every breath praise God; Halleluyah.

Said Rabban Yudon in the name of Rabbi Judah,

“Whatever David says in his book pertains to himself, to all Israel, and to all times.”

Midrash Tehillim<sup>1</sup> on Psalm 18:1



<sup>1</sup> Medieval commentary on Psalms

# Halleluyah! – Psalm 150

## Music on Shabbat

### Some of the Sources for Study

- Talmud<sup>2</sup>, Eruvin 104a: The Talmud doesn't allow playing musical instruments because of shevut - a rabbinical prohibition designed to protect a Biblical law. In this case it serves to ensure that if a musical instrument breaks, it won't be fixed.
- Tosafot on Talmud Beitzah 30a<sup>3</sup>: Since those in the general population are no longer experts in repairing musical instruments, the prohibition should no longer hold.
- Shulhan Arukh<sup>4</sup>, Orach Hayyim 338: forbids the use of musical instruments on Shabbat.
- Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim 339: the making of noise is OK, making music is not.
- Rema<sup>5</sup>, on Orach Hayyim 338: claims that this prohibition applies to all instruments that are intended for making noise, not just those intended to make music.
- Biur Halakhah<sup>6</sup>, on Orach Hayyim 338: accepts a more stringent opinion including statements by those who say that this type of noise making is prohibited because it is a weekday-like activity.
- Rabbinical Assembly (Conservative Judaism's Law Committee): In June 1970 the committee stated that instrumental music during a Shabbat service was not halakhically prohibited. They based this on their earlier decision about allowing the playing of an organ on Shabbat.



<sup>2</sup> The Talmud was compiled in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>3</sup> Tosafot were written in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Century by French and German commentators. They interpret and explain the text of the Talmud.

<sup>4</sup> Law code written by Rabbi Yosef Karo, 15<sup>th</sup> Century.

<sup>5</sup> Commentary on Shulhan Arukh by Rav Moshe Isserles, 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Adds Ashkenazi laws.

<sup>6</sup> Deals with issues that would have disrupted the flow of the Mishna Berura. Written by Chofetz Chaim, 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Century.

# Halleluyah! – Psalm 150

## Psalm 150 and You

1. The word *Hallel* occurs thirteen times in psalm 150, corresponding to the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy manifested by God's loving kindness.
2. The word *Hallelu* occurs twelve times, corresponding to the twelve months of the year. The final verse is repeated to reach thirteen, to include a leap year.
3. In a symphonic orchestra, there are groupings are known as strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion. In Psalm 150, the four families in the orchestra are represented.
4. There is an element of physics shown in these verses when we follow the order of the instruments in each line. The sound of the shofar is loud. The harp and lyre give a softer sound. Timbrel and dance are louder. Lute and pipe (or flute) are softer. The cymbals are louder. In naming the cymbal twice, there is a crescendo. If you map out the loudness of the instruments in each line there are three peaks and two valleys. Thus, from start to finish, there are two wavelengths.
5. The order of the instruments brings one to awareness and then a peak of involvement: the sound of the shofar works as a call to attention. The harp and lyre begin the praise on a soft and quiet level, increasing with the beat of the timbrel. The lute and pipe then add an additional layer of feeling and volume, after which the cymbals bring everything to a loud and crashing conclusion. Only to return to the quietness of one's *neshama* – breath in the final line.
6. The sounds of the psalm bring together all of our feelings. The trumpet sounds the note of victory, and our praise should resound with triumph and exaltation. The harp gives the sweet tones of gratitude and love. The tambourine and dance speak of the effervescent energy, effort and enthusiasm of children and young people engaged in a favorite activity. Pipes were instruments of pleasure rather than worship, reminding us that true praise should be the highest enjoyment of believers, not merely a duty. The loud, resounding cymbals are an allusion to the volume, strength and power of worthy praise.



# Halleluyah ~ Psalm 150

## Background Material

### History of Psalms

Sefer Tehillim, literally Book of Praise, is found in the Ketuvim (Writings) section of the Tanakh. The word *Tehillim* derives from the Hebrew root *hey, lamed, lamed – hallel*, and means “to praise”. Typically conjugated as *halleluyah* (praise Him), this word is found nowhere else in Tanakh.

Though not universally accepted, authorship of Sefer Tehillim is traditionally attributed to King David (~1000 BCE) as Midrash Tehillim indicates: “Moses gave Israel the five books of the Torah and correspondingly, David gave them the five books of Psalms.” A glance at the Book of Psalms shows that 73 of the 150 psalms bear his name. In addition, we learn in the Books of Samuel that David was a master musician and song-writer. He organized the singing and musical guilds of the Temple. All of these characteristics are consistent with themes found throughout the psalms.

In Mishnah (1<sup>st</sup> Century CE; T amid 7:4), various psalms are accorded specific honor by being attached to the days of the week as well as a group designated as Hallel. By the time of the Talmud (5<sup>th</sup> Century CE; Kiddushin 33a), Sefer Tehillim is divided into five books, paralleling the five books of the Torah. Each of these books ends with a concluding section called a doxology<sup>7</sup> (Psalms 41, 72, 89, 106, 150). During Talmudic times and beyond, specific psalms continue to be attached to Psukei D’zimrah (Shabbat 118b) prior to the Shaharit service, and to Kabbalat Shabbat (29, 92-93, 95-99).

### Psalm 150

As the final psalm of Psukei D’zimrah, and of the Book of Psalms, Psalm 150, is considered to be the most powerful expression of thanksgiving in the collection. Also recited on Rosh HaShanah, during *Shofarot*, and during Birkat HaLevanah (Blessing of the Moon), it is only during Psukei D’zimrah that the final line of Psalm 150 is repeated, signifying the conclusion of a section of prayer as well as of Sefer Tehillim.<sup>8</sup> Another explanation for repeating the verse is so that it can not be said that we are in a hurry to finish our prayers.

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<sup>7</sup> A doxology is a short prayer or hymn of praise that extols the glory and majesty of God. In Psalms is used to close or act as an interruption.

<sup>8</sup> Tur, Oraḥ Hayyim 51

# Halleluyah - Psalm 150

## Facilitator Guide

The Facilitator Guide is designed to direct you through several options. Although it is designed as a progression, you need not follow from beginning to end. Use the packet in its entirety or choose components based on the time you have available and the students in your group.

### Getting Started

You might open your conversation by asking the group to share thoughts and memories they associate with psalms. Follow-up by asking what they know about the history of psalms and then, if needed, share some of the background information found above. You can also try singing pieces of a couple of the myriad of tunes that exist for this psalm.

### Section One - The structure and vocabulary of Psalm 150

Before delving into some of the more esoteric interpretations of this psalm, take some time to look at it critically. Examine the structure and the vocabulary. In *hevruta* (pairs) or small groups, read and discuss the psalm. What is significant about its structure, vocabulary, rhythm, etc.?

#### The Structure:

Like a good news article, this psalm answers all of your questions. The psalm proclaims to whom praise shall be given and where (verse 1); what praise shall be given and why (verse 2); and how praise shall be given (verses 3-5) and by whom (verse 6). The question left for the reader is “when.”

Each verse is slightly longer than the previous one and can be divided in half, with the second half echoing the first half. The structure provides a melodic reading and suggests a growing praise of God that will never end. The final line breaks this double structure, drawing attention to its content and bringing the psalm to a close.

Listen to the assonance<sup>9</sup> in verses one and two. Three times, in *b'kodsho*, *uzo*, and *godlo*, the “oh” sound is repeated. Not only does this tie these concepts together but it reminds the reader of the sound “oh” often expressing wonder and heard in song.

### The Vocabulary:

- *Kodsho* – his sanctuary. Possibly the earthly Temple
- *Rekiah ouzo* – his strong vault. Possibly the heavenly Temple. Not only are humans to praise God, but also those in the vault of heaven – the angels.
- *B'teika shofar* – sound of the shofar, used by the priests; awakens us to God
- *Nevel* – upright harp. Portable, played with the finger. Mentioned 27 times in the Bible
- *Kinor* – lyre. Made from lotus wood (*k'naara*). Played with a pick - though it is said David used his finger. Mentioned 42 times in Bible
- *Tof* – hand drum, timbrel, tambourine. Made with a metal or wood hoop covered with skin. Often used by women.
- *Mahol* – usually understood to mean dance. Can refer to a woodwind instrument.
- *Minim* – stringed instrument. Strings usually from the sheep gut. Used by laity.
- *Ugav* – wind instrument, flute. Has a deep resonance- an instrument of love.
- *Tziltz'le shama* – resounding of cymbals. Thought by scholars to be hand-held, copper. Used by Levites.
- *Tziltz'li tru'ah* – blasting of cymbals. Thought by scholars to be large gong like, bronze.

### Things to Notice – Discussion points.

Below are three ways in which Psalm 150 is all encompassing. Before presenting them to the group, brainstorm ways that the psalm brings together all people, voices, etc.

- Within the psalm, everyone praises God. The *nevel* and *kinor* express our nearly silent meditation on God while the *minim* and *ugav* represent the quiet rejoicing of the individual. The *tof* and *mahol* are the louder, public manifestations of exulting in God. Traditionally, the Priests blew the *shofar*; the Levites the used cymbals, the men played the *minim* and *ugav*, and the women played the *tof*.
- Each part of our body is included in this psalm. With our ears and eyes we experience the music, with our mouths, lungs, arms, and hands the instruments would be played, and with our

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<sup>9</sup> Similarity of sounds in words or syllables. Used as an alternative to rhyme in verse

legs and bodies we dance as a means to praise God, as it is said, "And David was leaping about with all his might before God." (Sh'muel II 6:14)

- All aspects of nature and humanity are represented in this psalm. The *ugav* is identified as the "*abuv*," which is made from a mere plant — not from cedar or any other fine wood, but from a simple reed. The *nevel*, *kinor*, and *hof* all contain various woods and the *minim* and *hof* use animal products. The cymbals are made of copper, or bronze, inanimate materials. All of these instruments are fashioned by the hands of people. Every aspect of creation is swept up in the singing of God's praises.
- In Hebrew, *neshamah* (150:6) can refer to either "breath" or "soul." Brainstorm with the students about to what *neshamah* might refer, and how those understandings affect their reading of the text. One idea is that we thank God for even those things that have no material substance. Not a moment passes that we do not benefit from God's gift of breath. For this we should praise God but also for the smallest of things, like the ability to smell a flower.

## Section Two – Psalm 150 and You

As with all of Torah, there are a variety of ways to approach Psalm 150 that may assist us in making connections with the Psalms. For this activity we suggest that you hand out the "Psalm 150 and You" text sheet, have the students work in *hevruta* or small groups and read through the various approaches, choosing the one that speaks to them. As a large group, invite students to share which they chose and why.

## Section Three ~ Music on Shabbat

Within the Conservative Movement, there are those who hold that instruments can be used on Shabbat and those who disagree. You might begin this conversation by having the students share their experiences with regard to musical instruments during Shabbat services. Then take some time in *hevruta*, small group or together to look at the overview of sources prohibiting the use of instruments on Shabbat as well as the excerpts from the discussion had by Committee on Jewish Law and Standards.

### Things to Consider - Discussion points.

- The ability to choose between multiple opinions is a cornerstone of our Movement, but sometimes causes conflicts within our communities. Decisions affecting public life, such as the use of musical instruments in the synagogue on Shabbat, are made by the *mara d'atra* of the institution, usually the Rabbi, often in conjunction with the ritual committee. That decision may conflict with what individuals would decide for themselves, in some cases preventing them from joining Shabbat services. Based on the sources what are your thoughts on the use of musical instruments on Shabbat?
- According to most opinions the prohibition is rabbinic (created by the rabbis, not stated in Torah). How does that influence our observance today?
- What do we do when there are conflicting opinions within one community?
- What are the policies of your Hillel regarding the use of musical instruments on Shabbat and why were those decisions made?
- On the crowns that beautify many Torah scrolls, there are bells. When the Torah is moved, these bells make music. But, the use of instruments on Shabbat is prohibited. How is it that we decorate the Torah with a forbidden item? One answer: The bells are not intended to create music but rather to alert the congregation that the Torah is being removed from the ark so that they can stand to honor the Torah. How does this fit with the laws? What do you think?

# Additional Resources

- Hammer, Reuven. Or Hadash, A Commentary on Siddur Sim Shalom. The Rabbinical Assembly. 2003.
- Hoffman, Rabbi Lawrence, ed. My People's Prayer Book. P'sukei D'zimrah (Morning Psalms). Jewish Lights Publishing. 1999.
- Nulman, Macy. The Encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer. Aronson Publishing. 1996.
- Polish, Daniel. Bringing the Psalms to Life. Jewish Lights Publishing. 2000.
- Sarna, Nahum. On the Book of Psalms. Schocken Books. 1993.

S.Y. Agnon; "They contain everything. Nothing is more important than the Book of Psalms. King David asked that those who read Psalms should receive the same reward as they would receive if they were engaged in the depths of Torah."