

Psalm 145

Psalm 145 is the only psalm to bear the title *tehillah* (literally "praise") from which the entire book of Psalms takes its Hebrew name, *Tehillim*. The final six psalms enshrine the essence of Jewish ethics and theology, leading up to the final crescendo of the whole Book of Psalms, "Let all that breathes praise the LORD. Hallelujah" (**Psalm 150:6**).

It seems to have been written by David after the Lord had granted him all his requests in the preceding psalms, and had given him rest from all his enemies. This psalm and remaining five that follow are pure praise, without any requests or petitions. They begin and end with "hallelujah"

The Missing 'Nun'

Like Psalm 119 and others, this is an alphabetical psalm, each verse beginning with one of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, but leaving out one letter - *nun*.

A talmudic homily suggests that this is because the letter *nun* also begins a verse prophesying the destruction of Israel (**Amos 5:2**; Ber. 4b). But the Psalmist must admit that our downfalls are real, so he embeds a *nun* in the very next verse, the one for the letter *samekh*: סומך י'הוָה לכָל הַנוּפְלִים וַזָּקֵף לכָל הַכְּפֹפִים, "God supports those who have fallen and straightens all who are bent."

Or as Rashi puts it - The "nun" is missing from the "aleph-beth" because David saw in it a serious downfall [**Amos 5:2**]: "The virgin of Israel has fallen and shall not continue to rise." And he returned and supported her with the Holy Spirit [in the next verse in the psalm]: "The Lord supports all those who fall."

i.e. the absent "nun" stands for the downfalls and failings we can't bear to think about, that bring us shame, and that we don't want to name. But then we are assured that God "upholdeth all that fall."

Another Explanation

The King James Version and the current Jewish translation are based on the "Masoretic" text adopted in the ninth century A.D.

But in the earlier Septuagint (circa 300 B.C.) and in the Psalm Scroll discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls, Psalm 145 does include a *nun* verse reading "*ne'eman Elohim bi-devarav ve-hasid be-khol ma'asav*" ("God is faithful in His words, and pious in all His works"). In the scrolls, each line ends with the refrain *Barukh Adonai u-varukh shemo le-olam va-ed* ("Blessed is the Lord, and blessed be His name for evermore"), which would indicate that the psalm was used liturgically in Jesus' day and as early as the Second Temple period. However, this could also be a scribe's addition to fill in the missing verse. And some other alphabetical psalms have letters missing, e.g. **Psalms 25 and 34**. (See <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/ashrei-jewish-virtual-library>)

By using the alphabet, the implication was that this psalm of praise includes every possible or potential word, an all-inclusive summary of all that could be said about God's attributes and actions.

Rabbi Elazar said, "who ever says the Psalm which we call '*ashrei*' (**Psalm 145**) three times a day is a person who can rest assured that he will inherit the next world." - Talmud Tractate Brachot (4b)

"*ashrei*" means "happy or blessed are they" . . . - While the usual translation of *ashrei* is happy, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch renders it as "forward strides," assuming a link with the word *ashur*, a "pace or step." This does not necessarily mean physically striding ahead but (as spelled out in **Psalm 1**) being a righteous person, a *tzaddik*, who possesses a direction in life, rather than wandering aimlessly as the wicked do.

The complete reading of the *Ashrei* in the Jewish liturgy consists of **Psalms 84:5, 144:15, 145, and 115:18**.

Why does the Talmud insist this recitation guarantees inheriting the next world?

The rabbis were not sure. The consensus is that the alphabetical order alludes to realizing that it is through the Torah that the world was created, and by Torah study we enter into God's presence. This combined with verse 16, "Open Your hand and satisfy all living beings," shows that humans need both spiritual and physical sustenance. Having one without the other leaves man lacking. God provides us both.

Jews recite this psalm, like the *Shema*, three times daily - twice in the morning and once in the evening. Not only that, according to the *Shulchan Aruch* [Code of Jewish Law], if one forgot to say it with proper concentration, one must recite it again.

At **verse 16**: "Thou openest Thy hand, and satisfiest all living," Jews either touch their phylacteries or open their hands to symbolically receive what God is offering.

Aleph and Tav = Alpha and Omega

The Hebrew consonants are called *otiyot yesod* -- "foundation letters." The Kabbalah says that "with them He depicted all that was formed, and all that would ever be formed." (Sefer Yetzirah, 2:2). The reason is embedded in the phrase "*Bereishit bara Elokim et ha-shamayim v'et ha-aretz*. / In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The word "et" is not translated - it's just a sign designating a definite direct object. But it is made of the letters *Aleph* and *Tav*, the beginning and ending letters, and thus encompassing the whole Hebrew alphabet.

This psalm is really talking about the Messiah, who calls Himself the "alpha and the omega, the beginning and the ending" (**Revelation 1:8; 21:6, 13**). We saw in the discussion of **Deuteronomy 30** that some rabbinical teachers said God first created the Torah, then used it as a tool in creating the cosmos. The alphabet "foundational letters"

were integral to this action. John applied this whole tradition to Jesus - the Word or *Logos*: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (**John 1:3**).

Look for Him within the psalm as we study it.

Psalm 145:1-2 - "I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless you; and I will praise your name for ever and ever."

The rabbis identified the "king" as King Messiah - who is the King of the world, the King of the kings of it, the King of Zion.

- **Zechariah 9:9** - "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."

"I will bless thy name for ever and ever" - This is one of the early scriptures that hint at everlasting life after death.

This everlasting praise and worship is glimpsed by John in Revelation:

- **Revelation 5:13** - "And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: 'Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!'"

In fact, when we praise God now, we are joining an eternal choir worshipping the Lamb, throughout time and into eternity.

Psalm 145:3 - "Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable."

Targum: "and of his greatness there is no end."

- **Romans 11:33** - "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

- **Ecclesiastes 3:11** - "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men, yet they cannot fathom the work God has done from beginning to end."

Psalm 145:4-5 - "One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts. I will speak of the glorious honor of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works."

"Mighty acts" like God's deliverance of His people from bondage in the Exodus from

Egypt:

- **Exodus 12:27** - "And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD'S passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses."

(See also **Exodus 13:8-10, 14; Deuteronomy 32:7; Psalm 44:1; Psalm 78:3-7**)

Psalm 145:6 - "And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts: and I will declare thy greatness."

"Terrible acts" - such as the destruction of a disobedient and ungodly world by a flood, to whom He preached by his Spirit in the days of Noah; the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah by raining on them fire and brimstone from the Lord out of heaven; the dreadful things he did in Egypt and at the Red Sea by the hands of Moses; the earth swallowing up Dathan; and twice destroying Jerusalem for the rebellion of the people.

Hatred of sin and the attributes of righteousness and mercy are joined (see **verse 20**).

Psalm 145:7 - "They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness."

"Abundantly utter" — Literally, "bud forth, to gush out, to flow, as a fountain, pour forth in a stream," as in **Psalm 19:2; Psalm 78:2**.

Not only the terrible acts of wrath and chastisement, but God's goodness and righteousness will be recalled.

Psalm 145:8 - "The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy."

Almost a direct quote of...

- **Exodus 34:6** - "And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth..."

(See also **Psalm 103:8**)

It is our repentance that allows us to see God's compassion and mercy.

Mercy is not just an attribute of God. Christ is literally the "mercy seat," the propitiation of our sins.

- **Romans 3:24-25** - "...being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood, to

show his righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God."

Psalm 145:9 - "The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works."

All His works include not just His creation, but His people, who are new creations:

- **Ephesians 2:10** - "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

The Kingdom of God

Psalm 145:10-13 - "All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations"

Verses 11-13 of the psalm celebrate the sovereignty of God. The corresponding acrostic letters of these verses, inverted, spell out the Hebrew word for king, *mlk*. And within the verses, the word 'kingdom' appears four times, at the beginning, the middle, and the end. These appearances form a triangular structure in the manuscript, with its apex at the end of verse 12 and its base at the beginnings of verses 11 and 13.

This is Christ's Kingdom

- **Luke 10:8-9** - "And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you: And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you."

- **Revelation 11:15** - "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."

- **Psalm 22:28** - "For the kingdom is the LORD'S: and he is the governor among the nations."

- **Zechariah 14:9** - "And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one."

God's Care of Creation

In the ancient Near East, the role of the king was to provide a safe place of habitation for humanity. That safety included dwelling places, farm land, drinking water, abundant harvests, increase of animals, and fertility within the family (see **Psalm 72**). In Christ's kingdom, we become His hands and feet, instruments He uses to pour out help, comfort, protection and forgiveness in this world. We do this by seeing Christ in those in

need.

- **Matthew 25:40** - "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Psalm 145:14 - "The LORD upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down."

Or "all that are falling"

Compare **Psalm 37:24** - "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand."

Psalm 145:15 - "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season."

We sang a beautiful choral work based on this text in high school - it always moved me. To affirm this image of mankind and all of creation dependent on God for sustenance drains us of pride and reduces us to humility before Him.

God also provides us spiritual milk, or meat, whatever is needful for us. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (**Matthew 4:4, Deuteronomy 8:3**) Christ provides the true Manna, and the unleavened bread of His body in the afikomen.

A similar idea is found here:

- **Psalm 104:27-28** - "All creatures look to You to give them their food in due season. When You give it to them, they gather it up; when You open Your hand, they are satisfied with good things."

Psalm 145:16 - "Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing."

The Jewish translation has, "You give it openhandedly, feeding every creature to its heart's content"

"desire" = *ratsown* - will, pleasure, delight, pleasure, accepted; sometimes used for wicked pleasures

Seeing there are thousands of creatures who die from hunger - human and animal - what does this mean? Furthermore, if every creature's "desire" was met, predators would devour all prey, and not many would be left alive.

Some rabbis explain that the "will" referred to here is God's will - i.e. God supplies according to His will or favor, not the living creature's desire. Other explanations are that

starving creatures must not be "fit recipients of Divine blessing." None of these arguments seem very convincing.

Really, Messiah should be seen here, providing complete spiritual sustenance for believers. But also, as Creator, He provided originally for every creature's needs. And even now He is upholding all physical creation, even in its fallen state in which hunger, violence and death continue, as the creation "groans" awaiting final redemption (**Romans 8:20-22**).

Jesus seems to comment on this verse here:

- **Matthew 6:25-26** - "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?"

The words in verse 16 could be rendered, "...and satisfies every living one with that which is acceptable with favor."

The same word - *ratsawn* - is used in a different sense when Moses blesses the tribe of Naphtali:

- **Deuteronomy 33:23** - "And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali, satisfied with favor (*ratsawn*), and full with the blessing of the LORD: possess thou the west and the south."

In this reading, then, every living creature could and should be satisfied with God's favor, acceptance and grace, no matter what the circumstances. This could be what the rabbis had in mind.

If that still doesn't sound fair, the next verse anticipates that objection:

Psalm 145:17 - "The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works."

Like with Paul in **Romans 11**, there is no further explanation offered.

"holy" - *chasid* - merciful, full of lovingkindness.

Righteousness and mercy meet together in Christ.

Psalm 145:18 - "The LORD is near to all them that call on him, to all that call on him in truth."

"The LORD is near' - This is the connection to the Torah reading of Deuteronomy 30:

- **Deuteronomy 30:11** - "For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. .. For the thing is very near you - it is in your mouth

and in your mind (leb- heart) so that you can do it."

Paul ascribes this passage to Christ in **Romans 10:5-10** - "...the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

God was near to Israel:

- **Deuteronomy 4:7** - "For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for?"

But now, in Christ He's even nearer - He is near because He became one of us in His Son, and dwells within us and among us by His Holy Spirit.

"In truth" is the limiting factor. God provides no comfort to hypocrites, heretics or those feigning piety.

See **Psalm 34:18** - "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart."

Psalm 145:19 - "He will fulfill the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them."

Compare **Psalm 37:4** - "Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."

- **1 John 5:14-15** - "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."

Psalm 145:20 - "The LORD preserves all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy."

The "severity" of God is always set against his "goodness" in Holy Scripture, lest men should misunderstand, and think to obtain salvation though they continue in wickedness (see **Exodus 34:6,7; Romans 2:2-11; Romans 11:22**) - *Pulpit Commentary*

- **2 Thessalonians 2:8** - "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming"

Rabbi David Kimchi (1160–1235) interprets the destruction of the wicked to a future time, when there will not be a wicked man left in the world, and compares it with Malachi 4:1.

- **Malachi 4:1** - "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."

Psalm 145:21 - "My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD: and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever."

Just as the letter "*tav*" (or *tau* in Greek) - originally shaped like a cross - is the endpoint of the Hebrew alphabet, so when Christ was hanging on the *Tau/cross* He declared, "It is finished!" This verse is the "*Tav*" or endpoint of the psalm - The goal of creation is all flesh blessing His holy name in eternity.

See https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=356

<https://www.anschechesed.org/tefillah-tuesday-missing-nun/>

<https://jbqnew.jewishbible.org/index/author/raymond-apple/addenda-psalm-145/>