



Emotion and Reason, Experience and Intellect: Two Views of the Book of Psalms

Dr. Benjamin Sommer

Benjamin D. Sommer joined The Jewish Theological Seminary faculty as professor of Bible in July 2008. Previously, he served as director of the Crown Family Center for Jewish Studies at Northwestern University, where he had taught since 1994. Dr. Sommer has been a fellow at the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the Tikvah Center for Jewish Law and Civilization at the New York University School of Law, and the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. He has served as a visiting faculty member in the Department of Bible of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and at the Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas. He has received fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies and the Yad Hanadiv/Berakha Foundation.

Dr. Sommer's most recent book, *Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition* received the prestigious Goldstein-Goren Prize in Jewish Thought from Ben Gurion University for the years 2014-2016 and was a finalist for both for the National Jewish Book Award for 2015 and the Association for Jewish Studies' Jordan Schnitzer Prize for 2014-2016. An earlier book by Professor Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, received the Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion in 2010 awarded by the American Academy of Religion, as well as the Jordan Schnitzer Award from the Association for Jewish Studies for the years 2006-2009. The first book Dr. Sommer published, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66*, was awarded the Salo Wittmayer Baron Prize by the American Academy of Jewish Research in 1998.

Dr. Sommer has long been active as a lecturer and scholar-in-residence, teaching rabbis, Jewish educators, and laypeople in a variety of settings in the United States and Israel.

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	מזמור א'
1	אֲשֶׁר־יֵהְיֶה אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִלֵּךְ בְּעֵצַת רְשָׁעִים וּבְדַרְךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד וּבְמוֹשָׁב יֹצִים לֹא יָשָׁב:
2	כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת ה' חִפְצוֹ וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה:
3	וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שָׂתוּל עַל־פְּלִגֵּי מַיִם אֲשֶׁר פֵּרִיו יִתֵּן בְּעֵתוֹ וְעָלְהוּ לֹא־יִבּוֹל וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלִיחַ:
4	לֹא־כֵן הָרְשָׁעִים כִּי אִם־כַּמֶּץ אֲשֶׁר־תִּדְפְּנוּ רוּחַ:
5	עַל־כֵּן לֹא־יִקְמוּ רְשָׁעִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט וְחַטָּאִים בְּעֵדַת צְדִיקִים:
6	כִּי־יִדְעַה' דְּרֹךְ צְדִיקִים וְדְרֹךְ רְשָׁעִים תֵּאבֵד:

Psalm 1

1 Happy is the man who has not followed the counsel of the wicked, or taken the path of sinners, or joined the company of the insolent;

2 Rather, the teaching of the LORD is his delight, and he studies that teaching day and night.

3 He is like a tree planted beside streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, whose foliage never fades, and whatever it produces thrives.

4 Not so the wicked; rather, they are like chaff that wind blows away.

5 Therefore the wicked will not survive judgment, nor will sinners, in the assembly of the righteous.

6 For the LORD cherishes the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked is doomed.

מזמור ב'

1	לָמָּה רָגָשׁוּ גוֹיִם וְלְאֻמִּים יִהְיוּ רִיק:
2	יִתְנַצְּבוּ מַלְכֵי־אָרֶץ וְרוֹזְנִים נוֹסְדוֹי־חַד עַל־ה' וְעַל־מְשִׁיחוֹ:
3	נִתְקָה אֶת־מוֹסְרוֹתֵימוֹ וְנִשְׁלִיכָה מִמֶּנּוּ עֲבֹתֵימוֹ:
4	יֹשֵׁב בְּשָׂמַיִם יִשְׁחַק אֲדֹנָי יִלְעַג־לָמוֹ:
5	אֹז יִדְבַר אֱלִימוֹ בְּאָפוֹ וּבִקְרוֹנוֹ יִבְהַלְמוֹ:
6	וְאֲנִי נֹסֶכְתִּי מַלְכֵי עַל־צִיּוֹן הַר־קֹדֶשׁ:
7	אֲסַפְּרָה אֶל חֶק ה' אֲמַר אֵלַי בְּנֵי אֵתָה אֲנִי הַיּוֹם יִלְדֶתֶיךָ:
8	שְׂאֵל מִמֶּנִּי וְאֶתְנֶנָּה גוֹיִם נַחֲלֶתֶךָ וְאַחֲזֶתֶךָ אֶפְסֵי־אָרֶץ:
9	תִרְעַם בְּשִׁבְט בַרְזֶל כִּכְלִי יוֹצֵר תִּנְפְּצֵם:
10	וְעַתָּה מְלָכִים הַשְׁפִּילוּ הַנֹּסְרוֹ שְׁפֹטֵי אָרֶץ:
11	עֲבֹדוּ אֶת־ה' בִּירְאָה וּגִילוֹ בְרַעְדָּה:
12	נִשְׁקוּ־בַר פֶּן־יֵאָנַף וְתִאֲבֹדוּ דְרָךְ כִּי־יִבְעַר כְּמַעַט אָפוֹ אֲשֶׁרִי כָל־חוֹסֵי בוֹ:

Psalms 2

- 1 Why do nations assemble, and peoples plot vain things;
- 2 kings of the earth take their stand, and regents intrigue together
against the LORD and against His anointed?
- 3 "Let us break the cords of their yoke, shake off their ropes from us!"
- 4 He who is enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord mocks at them.
- 5 Then He speaks to them in anger, terrifying them in His rage,
- 6 "But I have installed My king on Zion, My holy mountain!"
- 7 Let me tell of the decree: the LORD said to me, "You are My son, I have fathered you this day.
- 8 Ask it of Me, and I will make the nations your domain; your estate, the limits of the earth.
- 9 You can smash them with an iron mace, shatter them like potter's ware."
- 10 So now, O kings, be prudent; accept discipline, you rulers of the earth!
- 11 Serve the LORD in awe; tremble with fright,
- 12 pay homage in good faith, lest He be angered, and your way be doomed
in the mere flash of His anger. Happy are all who take refuge in Him.

מזמור ק"נ

1	הַלְלוּ יְיָ הַלְלוּ־אֵל בְּקֹדֶשׁ הַלְלוּהוּ בְּרִקִיעַ עֲזוֹ:
2	הַלְלוּהוּ בְּגִבּוֹרֹתָיו הַלְלוּהוּ כְּרֹב גְּדָלוֹ:
3	הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתִקְעַ שׁוֹפָר הַלְלוּהוּ בְּנֶבֶל וְכִנּוֹר:
4	הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתוֹף וּמְחוֹל הַלְלוּהוּ בְּמִנִּים וְעוּגָב:
5	הַלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצְלֵי־שִׁמְעַ הַלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצְלֵי תְרוּעָה:
6	כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תִּהְלֵל יְיָ הַלְלוּ־יְיָ:

Psalms 150

- 1 Hallelujah. Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in the sky, His stronghold.
- 2 Praise Him for His mighty acts; praise Him for His exceeding greatness.
- 3 Praise Him with blasts of the horn; praise Him with harp and lyre.
- 4 Praise Him with timbrel and dance; praise Him with lute and pipe.
- 5 Praise Him with resounding cymbals; praise Him with loud-clashing cymbals.
- 6 Let all that breathes praise the LORD. Hallelujah.

ישעיה ל"א

4 כי כה אמרה' אלי כאשר יהגה הארניה והכפיר על-טרפו אשר יקרא עליו מלא רעים מקולם לא יחת ומקמונם לא יענה כן ירד ה' צבאות לצבא על-הר-ציון ועל-גבעתה:

Isaiah 31:4

For thus says the LORD to me: As a lion -- a great beast -- growls over its prey and, when the shepherds gather in force against him, is not dismayed by their cries nor cowed by their noise -- so the LORD of Hosts will descend to make war against the mount and the hill of Zion.

ישעיה ל"ח

14 כסוס עגור כן אצפצף אהגה כיונה דלו עיני למרום אדני עשקה-לי ערבני:

Isaiah 38:14

I piped like a swift or a swallow, I moaned like a dove, As my eyes, all worn, looked to heaven: "My Lord, I am in straits; Be my surety!"

מזמור קט"ו

4 עצביהם כסף וזהב מעשה ידי אדם:
5 פה-להם ולא ידברו עינים להם ולא יראו:
6 אזנים להם ולא ישמעו אף להם ולא יריחון:
7 ידיהם | ולא ימישון רגליהם ולא יהלכו לא-יהגו בגרונם:

Psalms 115

4 Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.
5 They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see;
6 they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell;
7 they have hands, but cannot touch, feet, but cannot walk;
they can make no sound in their throats.

מזמור ע"א

24 גם-לשוני כלהיום תהגה צדקתך כייבשו כייחפרו מבקשי רעתי:

Psalms 71:24

All day long my tongue shall recite Your beneficent acts, how those who sought my ruin were frustrated and disgraced.

יהושע א'

6 חזק ואמץ כי אתה תנחיל את-העם הזה את-הארץ אשר-נשבעתי לאבותם לתת להם: 7 רק חזק ואמץ מאד לשמר לעשות ככל-התורה אשר צונו משה עבדי אל-תסור ממנו ימין ושמאול למען תשפיל בכל אשר תלך: 8 לא-ימוש ספר התורה הזה מפיהך והגית בו יומם ולילה למען תשמר לעשות ככל-הכתוב בו כי-אז תצליח את-דרךך ואז תשפיל: 9 הלא צויתוך חזק ואמץ אל-תערץ ואל-תחת כי עמך ה' אל-להיך בכל אשר תלך: פ

Joshua 1

6 "Be strong and resolute, for you shall apportion to this people the land that I swore to their fathers to assign to them. 7 But you must be very strong and resolute to observe faithfully all the Teaching that My servant Moses enjoined upon you. Do not deviate from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Let not this Book of the Teaching cease from your lips, but recite it day and night, so that you may observe faithfully all that is written in it. Only then will you prosper in your undertakings and only then will you be successful. 9 "I charge you: Be strong and resolute; do not be terrified or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

מלאכי ג'

22 זָכְרוּ תוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה עַבְדִּי אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי אוֹתוֹ בְּהַרְבֵּי עַל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים:
23 הִנֵּה אֶנְכִּי שֹׁלֵחַ לְכֶם אֶת אֵלֶיָּה הַנְּבִיא לִפְנֵי בּוֹא יוֹם ה' הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא: 24 וְהִשִּׁיב לְבִרְאבוֹת עַל־בְּנֵי וְלֵב בְּנֵי
עַל־אֲבוֹתָם פְּוֹאֵבּוֹא וְהִפִּיתִי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ חֲרָם:

Malachi 3

22 Be mindful of the Teaching of My servant Moses, whom I charged at Horeb with laws and rules for all Israel. 23 Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the coming of the awesome, fearful day of the LORD.

Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 25b-26a

Rav Pappi said in the name of Rava, “[It is] permissible [to convert] a house of prayer into a house of study, but [it is] forbidden [to convert] a house of study into a house of prayer.” But Rav Pappa taught the opposite in the name of Rava. Rav Aḥa held that the method of Rav Pappi was more likely, since Rabbi Joshua ben Levi had earlier said, “It is lawful to convert a house of prayer into a house of study.” The implication is clear.

Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot 1:5=3b (cf. Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 11a)

Rabbi Yoḥanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yoḥai, “People like us, who are involved in the study of Torah [constantly], do not interrupt [their studies] even for the recitation of the Shema prayer [the recitation of which at a set time is required by biblical law, and all the more so not for the recitation of other prayers, whose timing is not required by biblical law, such as the Standing Prayer; see Rashi to Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 11a].” Rabbi Yoḥanan said in his own name, “People like us, who are not [constantly] involved in the study of Torah, do interrupt [their studies] even for the recitation of the Standing Prayer [and all the more so for the Shema prayer]. Each one’s ruling is in accordance with his opinions [expressed on other occasions]. For Rabbi Yoḥanan said, “If only one could pray all day long! Why? Because prayer never wanes.” Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai said, “If I had stood at Mount Sinai when the Torah was given to Israel, I would have requested that the Merciful One make two mouths for human beings, one with which to study the Torah, and one with which to take care of all other concerns.”

Column xxviii

Line

151 A הללוֹהָ לְדָוִד בֶּן יֵשׁוּׁ(1) קָטָן הֵייתִי מֵאֲחֵי וְצַעִיר מִבְּנֵי אָבִי וַיִּשְׁמַנֵּי

רוּעָה לְצֹנֵנוּ וּמוֹשֵׁל בְּגִדְיוֹתַי(2) עָשׂוּ עֹגֵב וְאַצְבָּעוֹתַי כְּנוֹר

וְאַשְׁיֵמָה לְאֱלֹהִים כְּבוֹד אָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְּנַפְשִׁי(3) הֵהָרִים לֹא יַעֲדוּ 5

לוֹ וְהַגְּבָעוֹת לֹא יִגִּידוּ עָלָיו הַעֲצִים אֶת דְּבָרֵי וְהַצּוֹאֵן אֶת מַעֲשֵׂי
(4) כִּי מִי יִגִּיד וּמִי יִדְבַר וּמִי יִסְפֹּר אֶת מַעֲשֵׂי אֲדוֹן הַכּוֹל רֹאֵה אֱלֹהֵיהַכּוֹל הוּא שָׁמַע וְהוּא הָאֲזִינָן(5) שֶׁלַח נְבִיאָו לְמוֹשַׁחֲנִי אֶת שְׁמוּאֵל
לְגַדְלָנִי יֵצְאוּ אֲחֵי לְקִרְאָתוֹ יִפִּי הַתּוֹר וַיִּפִּי הַמְּרָאָה(6) הַגְּבָהִים בְּקוֹמַתָםהַיָּפִים בְּשַׁעֲרָם לֹא בָחַר אֱלֹהִים בָּם(7) וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיִּקְחֵנִי
מֵאַחַר הַצּוֹאֵן וַיִּמְשַׁחֲנִי בְּשֶׁמֶן הַקֹּדֶשׁ וַיִּשְׁמַנֵּנִי נְגִיד לְעַמּוֹ בְּבִנְיָ 10

בְּרִיתוֹ

151 B תַּחֲלַת גִּבּוֹרָה לְ] יָד מִשְׁמַשְׁחוֹ נְבִיא אֱלֹהִים(1) אֲזִי רָאָ] תִּי פִלְשֵׁתִי

[מַחֲרָף מִמֶּנִּי] אֲנֹכִי [אֶת]

(Translation from *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New English Translation*, trans. Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, and Edward Cook (New York: HarperCollins, 2005):

Hallelujah! A psalm of David, son of Jesse. I was smaller than my brothers, youngest of my father's sons. So he made me a 11Q5 28:4 shepherd for his sheep, a ruler over his goats. My hands fashioned a pipe, my fingers a lyre, 11Q5 28:5 and I glorified the LORD. I said to myself, "The mountains do not testify 11Q5 28:6 to Him, nor do the hills proclaim." So—echo my words, O trees, O sheep, my deeds! 11Q5 28:7 Ah, but who can proclaim, who declare the deeds of the Lord? God has seen all, 11Q5 28:8 heard and attended to everything. He sent his prophet to anoint me, even Samuel, 11Q5 28:9 to raise me up. My brothers went forth to meet him: handsome of figure, wondrous of appearance, tall were they of stature, 11Q5 28:10 so beautiful their hair—yet the LORD God did not choose them. No, He sent and took me 11Q5 28:11 who followed the flock, and anointed me with the holy oil. He set me as prince to His people, ruler over the children of

11Q5 28:12 His covenant (see 1Samuel 16:1–13). (vacat) 11Q5 28:13 [Dav]id's first mighty d[ee]d after the prophet of God had anointed him. Then I s[a]w the Philistine, 11Q5 28:14 throwing out taunts from the [enemy] r[anks] ...

theology,” so long as we are mindful of its fundamental differences from Protestant forms of biblical theology. Discovering the interactions between biblical and rabbinic voices should be one of its major concerns. In this essay, I hope to point out one example of this interaction.

Before doing so, it will be useful to sharpen my initial questions by taking note of two attitudes toward religious experience that play prominent roles in Judaism. One of these attitudes emphasizes Torah study and intellectualization over prayer and spontaneous joy; the other adopts the opposite hierarchy of religious values. The tension between these two attitudes is well-known already in classical rabbinic literature, which, with important reservations and exceptions, tends to regard Torah study as the highest religious value. A few passages will suffice to illustrate the relationship between these types of religious experience in classical rabbinic texts.

In *b. Meg.* 26b–27a, both attitudes are suggested, but one is ultimately endorsed over the other. The discussion in these passages presumes a principle stated at the beginning of the fourth chapter of this talmudic tractate (25b–26a), to wit: it is permissible to use the proceeds from the sale of a sacred item to purchase an item of greater sanctity, but it is forbidden to use these proceeds to purchase an item of lesser sanctity. In other words, one can always convert an object (or the proceeds of its sale) upward in holiness but not downward.³ With this principle in mind, the Talmud records the following debate and its resolution:

Rav Papi said in the name of Rava, “[It is] permissible [to convert] a house of prayer into a house of study, but [it is] forbidden [to convert] a house of study into a house of prayer.” But Rav Papa taught the opposite in the name of Rava. Rav Aḥa held that the method of Rav Papi was more likely, since Rabbi Joshua ben Levi had earlier said, “It is lawful to convert a house of prayer into a house of study.”

The implication is clear. Papi, in short, holds that a house of study is of greater sanctity than a house of prayer; Papa holds the opposite; and the tradition accepts the former view, not the latter. This viewpoint is not unique to this passage. The same chapter of the Talmud teaches that a prayer hall ought not be used for certain secular purposes, including funerals (see *b. Meg.* 28a–b). However, an exception is made for “funerals of many” or a “public funeral,” which, the gemara goes on to explain (28b, and see Rashi to *רבים של הספד* ad loc.), means the funeral of a scholar or a member of his family. Thus, the sanctity of a scholar (or even of a member of his family) overrides the sanctity of a prayer hall.

3. Incidentally, these rules are of little practical relevance for a community selling its religious objects or properties, because the Talmud explains that these rules do not apply when the items are sold by the seven leading members of the congregation in the presence of the congregation. See Rava’s comment in *b. Meg.* 26a and *O.H.* 153:8.



A few texts evince a more ambivalent stance. *Ḳ. Ber.* 1:5 (3b)⁴ discusses whether it is permissible to interrupt study in order to pray:

Rabbi Yoḥanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yoḥai, “People like us, who are involved in the study of Torah [constantly], do not interrupt [their studies] even for the recitation of the Shema prayer [the recitation of which at a set time is required by biblical law, and all the more so not for the recitation of other prayers, whose timing is not required by biblical law,⁵ such as the Standing Prayer].” Rabbi Yoḥanan said in his own name, “People like us, who are not [constantly] involved in the study of Torah, do interrupt [their studies] even for the recitation of the Standing Prayer [and all the more so for the Shema prayer]. Each one’s ruling is in accordance with his opinions [expressed on other occasions]. For Rabbi Yoḥanan said, “If only one could pray all day long! Why? Because prayer never wanes.” Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai said, “If I had stood at Mount Sinai when the Torah was given to Israel, I would have requested that the Merciful One make two mouths for human beings, one with which to study the Torah, and one with which to take care of all other concerns.”

Each scholar expresses an unrealizable ideal. The highest activity of humanity, which in the best of all worlds would never be interrupted, is either prayer (Yoḥanan) or study (Shimon), and the law takes both views into account. Yoḥanan’s legal ruling, which reflects a higher regard for prayer, applies only in cases where exigencies prevent a scholar from studying all the time; whereas Shimon’s ruling, which valorizes study over prayer, is applicable only for the purest of scholars. The rabbis cherished both prayer and study, and passages such as these show that their relative ranking was a matter of concern in both the tannaitic and amoraic periods in Israel and Babylon. But where a clear preference is stated, the classical rabbis inclined to give study the highest place of honor.⁶

4. Also in *y. Šab.* 1:1 (3a) and, a slightly different version, *b. Šab.* 11a.

5. Cf. Rashi to *b. Šab.* 11a (ד"ה חברים העוסקים בתורה מפסיקים).

6. Many other passages can be cited; in the aggregate, they evince both the tension between these two important values and the greater respect for study, though not without some complexities. See, e.g., *b. Šab.* 10a (concerning which cf. *b. Roš Haš.* 35a); *b. Šab.* 127a; in *b. Ber.* 8a, the teachings of Ḥisda, of Ḥiyya in the name of ‘Ulla (note the complexity of his view, which implies that Temple service was greater than study; cf. *m. ‘Abot* 1.2, where the two seem to be of equal value, and see also the attempt to reach a mediating position in *b. Meg.* 3a–b), of Abbaye, and of Ammi and Assi (cf. Abbaye’s different perspective in *b. Meg.* 29a, but note that this opinion ought to be attributed not to Abbaye but to Rava according to Rabbeinu Hananel and *Gilyon Hašas*); *b. Ber.* 31a–b. On the paramount value of Torah study over all other religious values (including prayer), see especially the debate involving Rabbi Tarfon, Rabbi Akiva, and the elders in *b. Qidd.* 40b and also the teaching of Rabbi Yosi there, and see further *m. Pešab* 1:1 (= *b. Qidd.* 40a), and note also the texts collected in *m. ‘Abot*, chapter 6. For a later rabbinic voice valorizing study over prayer, see Maimonides’ Code, Laws of Prayer, 8:3—a passage



The relative weighting of these two religious values remained a question in later Jewish thought as well. The tension between them played a central role in the conflict between Hasidim and Mitnagdim in the 18th century (and to some extent up to the present). The Mitnagdim, centered in the great academies or *yeshivot* of Lithuania (and their successor institutions in Israel, the United States and, to a lesser degree, Britain), represent the apogee of the viewpoint expressed in the Talmud by Simeon bar Yoḥai, Joshua ben Levi, and Papi: they esteem study over prayer. A central element of early Hasidism, on the other hand, was its emphasis on prayer over study.⁷ (Indeed, Mordecai Wilensky has argued that the Hasidic devaluation of study was the main reason for the opposition of the great

whose higher valorization of study is noteworthy, because it appears in a chapter that emphasizes the great importance of prayer. In light of the consistent tendency of these texts to weigh the relative value of prayer and prophecy, I cannot agree with the claim in Lawrence Hoffman (“Hallels, Midrash, Canon, and Loss: Psalms in Jewish Liturgy,” in *Psalms in Community. Jewish and Christian Textual, Liturgical, and Artistic Traditions* [ed. Harold Attridge and Margot Fassler; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003] 33–57) that “the presumed dichotomy between prayer and study exists more in the minds of twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics than it did in the rabbinic imagination” (p. 54). Hoffman is right to point out that, for the rabbi, prayer was not limited to “the current popular notion of prayer as personal conversation with God” but also includes “the midrashic linking of biblical text to the expression of theological realia” (p. 55) so that prayer was itself, in part, a form of sacred and salvific study; the very fact that prayer in rabbinic culture is conceptualized this way itself points to the rabbinic understanding of the religious value of study. For further discussion of the value of Torah study in classical rabbinic literature, see E. E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (trans. Israel Abrahamson; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975) 612–14; Marc Hirshman, “Torah in Rabbinic Thought: The Theology of Learning” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 4: *The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period* (ed. S. Katz; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 899–924; and Shmuel Safrai, “Oral Torah,” in *The Literature of the Sages, Part One* (ed. Shmuel Safrai; CRINT; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 35–119, esp. pp. 102–6.

7. To be sure, Mitnagdim continued to value prayer, and Hasidim eventually began to reemphasize study, a trend evident as early as the development of Chabad. But the pronounced tendencies are clear. For discussions of these differing religious sensibilities, see Norman Lamm, “Study and Prayer: Their Relative Value in Hasidism and Mitnagdim,” in *Samuel K. Mirsky Memorial Volume: Studies in Jewish Law, Philosophy, and Literature* (ed. Gersion Appel; New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1970) 37–52; Mordecai Wilensky, *Hasidim Umitnagdim: Letoldot Hapulumus Beyneyhem* (2nd ed.; Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1990) 15–26 [Hebrew]; and Allan Nadler, *The Faith of the Mitnagdim: Rabbinic Responses to Hasidic Rapture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) 50–77, 151–70. On the tendency of Hasidim to establish new study groups (*havurot*) for studying Mishna or to infiltrate existing ones in the 19th century, which entailed both a greater emphasis on study within Hasidic communities and also some loss of focus on study in those groups, see Yoḥanan Petrovsky Shtern, “Hasidism, Havurot, and the Jewish Street,” *Jewish Social Studies* 10 (2004) 20–54, esp. pp. 43–44. Attempts at synthesis (albeit sometimes of a limited nature) also occurred among Mitnagdim. For one Mitnagdic attempt to achieve a synthesis, which nonetheless continues to give pride of place to study, see Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Be-Inyan Birkhat Ha-Torah,” in *Shiurim le-Zekker Aba Mari Z”L* (Jerusalem: Solovetsik, 1985) 1–16 [Hebrew].



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Lithuanian rabbis to nascent Hasidism.⁸) Consequently, we might use the terms *hasidic* and *mitnagdic* to identify two temperaments within Judaism throughout the ages. For the purpose of this article, “hasidic” will refer to a form of Judaism that emphasizes prayer and spontaneous joy as the highest way of coming to know God, while “mitnagdic” will refer to a form of Judaism that focuses on study and intellectualization as the preeminent path toward the deity. An additional issue that separated (and separates) historical Hasidim and Mitnagdim will also turn out to be relevant to our discussion: this issue involves the style of leadership each group endorses. Many strains of Hasidism (most prominently the Ruzhin/Boyaner groups, as well as the Chabad sect, especially in recent decades) emphasize a royal or at times even messianic model of leadership.⁹ The rebbe or tzaddik who leads the group is treated as a monarch (and thus it is quite appropriate that he is succeeded by his son or some other member of his family). Mitnagdim, on the other hand, look toward the scholar as the most important authority for their communities—especially the scholar who holds no official position or holds a decidedly modest one.¹⁰ (While dynasties of scholars exist among the Mitnagdim, most prominent rabbis within that world achieve their positions through intellectual achievement rather than

8. Wilensky, *Hasidim U Mitnagdim*, 1:17–19. See further the comments of Nadler, *Faith*, 151, 232–33.

9. To be sure, some scholars (e.g., Martin Buber and Simon Dubnow) argue that early (pre-1800) Hasidism constituted an attempt to do away with messianism, but others (Ben Zion Dinur, Isaiah Tishby) regard early Hasidism as thoroughly messianic in orientation, and some (Gershon Scholem, Joseph Weiss) take a middle ground, regarding messianism as an accepted doctrine but not an area of intense focus among early Hasidim. For a review of the literature and a defense of the last position, see Gershon Scholem, “The Neutralization of the Messianic Element in Early Hasidism,” in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken, 1971) 176–202, 359–63. For a recent treatment of messianic speculation in the earliest period of Hasidism, see Mor Altshuler, “Messianic Strains in Rabbi Israel Ba’al Shem Tov’s ‘Holy Epistle,’” *JSQ* 6 (1999) 55–70. All scholars would agree, however, that intense messianic speculation became more common among some Hasidic leaders by about 1800; see Scholem, 179. Regardless of the more specific question of messianism, it remains clear that already in its early period Hasidism began to develop a model of leadership that can appropriately be termed royal. This model usually involved dynastic mechanisms for the transfer of leadership. (On the development of the dynastic model during Hasidism’s 1st century, see David Assaf, *The Regal Way: The Life and Times of Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin* [Stanford Series in Jewish History and Culture; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002] 47–68). Further, it focused on particular leaders who, like an ancient Near Eastern monarchs, served as an axis mundi. See Arthur Green, “The Zaddiq as Axis Mundi in Later Judaism,” in *Essential Papers on Kabbalah* (ed. Lawrence Fine; New York: New York University Press, 1995) 291–311.

10. For a highly readable treatment of the different styles of leadership in each community, see Amnon Levi (*The Haredim* [Jerusalem: Keter, 1989] 150–64, 176–77 [Hebrew]), who also notes the tendency among Mitnagdim in recent decades to exalt certain *rashei yeshiva* in a manner that begins to approach the royal model of the Hasidim. On the even more extreme movement among recent Mitnagdim toward insistence that scholars are the ultimate leaders, see Haym Soloveitchik, “Migration, Acculturation, and the New Role of Texts



genetic succession.) For our purposes, then, the adjective “hasidic” will be-token not only an emphasis on prayer but a inclination toward royal or mes-sianic models of leadership. The adjective *mitnagdic* will suggest an elitist view of learning and a strong emphasis on the honor due to those devoted to it—an elitism with paradoxically democratic implications, because any person,¹¹ regardless of birth, can aspire to learning.

In light of all this, we can phrase our original question in a new way: is the book of Psalms fundamentally a hasidic or mitnagdic book? At first blush, the answer seems obvious. The Psalter is, after all, a book of prayers. The exuberant hymns, with their cries of “Praise Yah!” (e.g., Psalms 29, 33, 95, 114, 117); the songs of thanksgiving, which disclose the strong connection between the person praying and the God who answered their cries for help (e.g., 18, 30, 32, 116, 118); the personal laments, which are rooted in the worshiper’s intimate sense of connection with God (e.g., 3, 4, 5, 71, 77); the communal laments, whose aggrieved tone reflects the very presumption of closeness between community and deity (e.g., 44, 60, 74, 90, 123)—all these genres, which together account for the vast majority of texts in the Psalter,¹² represent a religiosity of feeling, not a religiosity rooted in the intellect. Each genre encourages an individual or a community to address a personal God directly. Furthermore, the adjective *hasidic* as I intend it here hints at the central role a royal figure plays in maintaining the connection between God and nation. Consequently, the royal psalms (e.g., 2, 18, 45, 72, 110) also establish the appropriateness of the adjective *hasidic* in character-izing the Psalter. The Zion psalms (e.g., 46, 48, 76) similarly underscore the importance of the royal family whose palace is on Mount Zion and who sponsor the Temple located there. To be sure, some psalms are not really prayers and have no connection to royalty—to wit, the wisdom psalms (e.g., 37, 49, 112). This category, however, represents a small fraction of the texts found in this book.¹³ If the contents of any biblical book deserve to be called hasidic, surely that book is the Psalter.

in the Haredi World,” in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements* (ed. Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) 197–235, esp. pp. 216–21.

11. Or, in the actual world of Mitnagdim, any male.

12. In the mentioned examples, I refer to a few randomly selected from each genre for the benefit of nonbiblicists.

13. The identification of wisdom psalms is a matter of some controversy, but even by the broadest definitions they amount to less than a tenth of the psalms found in the Psalter. On this issue, see Avi Hurvitz, *Wisdom Language in Biblical Psalmody* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991 [Hebrew]); R. N. Whybray, “The Wisdom Psalms,” in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel. Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton* (ed. John Day et al.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 152–60; Roland Murphy, “A Consideration of the Classification, ‘Wisdom Psalms,’” *VT* 9 (1963) 156–67; J. Kenneth Kuntz, “Wisdom Psalms and the Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter,” in *For a Later Generation: The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (Essays



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This portrayal applies well to the vast majority of psalms. But the canonical *book* of Psalms as we have it in the Hebrew Bible may be more than the sum of its parts. As a result, the question of how the Psalter is presented must be raised as its own question, distinct from a discussion of the individual texts this anthology contains. One can ask the same question about psalms and Psalms and receive different answers for each, because the way psalms are organized into Psalms may spin the psalms in a surprising way. The most prominent way to give any collection of material a particular identity that one might not have discerned from its contents alone is in the way it is either introduced or summed up. This phenomenon is well known in narrative literature. Adele Berlin has pointed out the importance of an abstract or introductory remark that begins many narratives.¹⁴ These often provide crucial guidance for the reader. For example, without the brief abstract in Gen 22:1, we would not know that the events narrated in that chapter are a divinely ordained test. One would have a very different reading of the story of the binding of Isaac if it began with the sentence

Now, after these things, God said to Abraham, "Abraham!" and Abraham said, "Here I am," And He said, "Take your son."

rather than what we in fact read in Genesis,

Now, after these things, *God tested Abraham*, saying to him, "Abraham!" and Abraham said, "Here I am," and He said, "Take your son."

The same may be said of the first poem in any anthology of poetry: the introduction can serve as an abstract for all that follows. I would like to argue that Psalm 1 presents, or re-presents, the Psalter in an original and rather surprising way: as a mitnagdic book.

The poem that opens the Psalter is an odd psalm; indeed, it is not really a psalm at all.¹⁵ It is not addressed to God (as the laments and thanksgiving psalms are), nor does it speak of him in the third person (as is the case with many psalms of praise). Its topic is not God, at least not directly. Rather, its topic is God's *torah*, which may mean God's instruction generally or may refer to a specific document that contains such instruction, such as the Pentateuch. In fact, it probably means both; while the term *torah* may include something general, the phrasing of the psalm presumes that *torah* is found in a particular text. This becomes evident in the psalm's

in Honor of George Nickelsburg (ed. Randal Argall et al.; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000) 144–60, esp. pp. 146–49. On the characterization of Psalms 1, 19, and 119 as Torah psalms rather than wisdom psalms, see James Luther Mays, "The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter," *JBL* 106 (1987) 3–12.

14. Adele Berlin, *Poetics and the Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994) 102.

15. The same point was made by Whybray, "The Wisdom Psalms," 155.



second verse, according to which the happy person is one who takes delight in God's *torah*, reading (יִהְיֶה) it day and night. The verb הִגִּיד at the end of that verse is often translated with the English verb "meditate on," which may suggest to the English reader an exclusively mental activity (and hence one that need not be connected to a particular text). Nevertheless, nearly all attestations of the verb הִגִּיד in the Hebrew Bible refer to a physical act that involves one's mouth and one's vocal cords; the verb does not refer to pure ratiocination. Certainly, the pigeon and lion who perform the act of הִיְהִיג in Isa 38:18 and Isa 31:4 are making a soft low sound, not merely cogitating (they are cooing and growling respectively). The physicality of the act is clear in most of its occurrences with human beings as its subject: see, for example, Ps 115:7, where the throat is mentioned as its organ, just as hands are the organ of touching and legs of walking; Ps 71:24, where it is the tongue that performs the הִיְהִיג; and Josh 1:8, where it is the presence of the Book of the Torah in Joshua's mouth that allows him to הִיְהִיג it. (The evidence of this last verse is especially significant, given its many parallels with Ps 1:2, to which we will return later.) Several texts do identify the mind (לֵב) as the organ of this activity (Isa 33:18), yet most of these also put the verb alongside words indicating verbal expression, such as the verbs הִדְבֵּר or הִבְיִיעַ or nouns referring to parts of the mouth such as הַפּ and שִׁפָּה (e.g., Isa 58:13; Prov 15:18, 24:2). The meditation described by the verb הִגִּיד, then, is not the silent act that the word *meditation* may conjure up for many contemporary speakers of English, an act that is thought to be deeply spiritual or rational. Rather, it is something done aloud, perhaps very softly but nonetheless physically. Its connection with the mind (לֵב) shows that this physical act can involve contemplation or learning as well.¹⁶ (The traditional Yeshivah rather than the Quaker meeting would be the place to see the activity Psalm 1 has in mind.)

This being the case, the *torah* to which Ps 1:2b refers consists not only of abstract ideas but of specific words that can be enunciated; in other words, it is a text. It is impossible to decide whether the text of which the author of Psalm 1 speaks is more or less identical to our Pentateuch (like the תּוֹרָה to which Ezra–Nehemiah and Chronicles refer) or consists of some predecessor text, such as the book of Deuteronomy or some early edition thereof (to which the book of Kings refers when it used the term תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה);¹⁷ further, it is possible that the author of the psalm meant the

16. One might compare the comment of Rabbi Simeon bar Yoḥai quoted above from *y. Ber.* 1:5 (3b), where studying is presumed to be an activity that one performs with one's mouth; reading or contemplating a text is done out loud. Study involves mouth and mind simultaneously.

17. Both ibn Ezra and Gunnel André note the similarity of vocabulary in Ps 1:1–2 and Deut 6:4–9, on the basis of which they suggest that the psalmist alludes to that passage from



term in one way while the editor who put the psalm at the head of the Psalter (if that editor was not also the author of the psalm) meant it in some other way. What remains clear, however, is that, as the introduction to the Psalter, our psalm refers us to another text; the book of Psalms begins by putting itself in relation to a book called Torah, whatever that Torah may be.

That editorial act has two implications. First, as many scholars including Meir Weiss, Claus Westermann, Joseph Reindl, and Gerald Wilson have noted, the editor who placed this paean to Torah-study at the head of the Psalter suggests a radically new vision of that anthology and its setting. While individual psalms are prayers, which one uses in cultic settings (including but not limited to the Jerusalem Temple), the Psalter that begins with Psalm 1 is a textbook, to which one turns for guidance and instruction. One recites or sings a psalm; one reads or studies the book of Psalms.¹⁸ In short, Psalm 1 attempts to convert the book of Psalms into another form of Torah. It suggests that one ought to learn this text, just as one learns the Pentateuch. By intimating that one can receive teaching from the Psalter, Psalm 1 also makes the somewhat surprising move of transforming prayers

Deuteronomy. See Gunnell André, “‘Walk,’ ‘Stand,’ and ‘Sit’ in Psalm 1:1–2,” *VT* 32 (1982) 327; Stefan Reif, “Ibn Ezra on Psalm 1 1–2,” *VT* 34 (1984) 232–36. This reference specifically to Deuteronomy (and not to other books) might suggest that the author of Psalm 1 regards the Torah as Deuteronomy.

18. So far as I know, this approach to the canonical function of Psalm 1 was first expressed, rather in passing, both by Meir Weiss, “The Way of Torah in Psalm 1,” in *Miqra’ot Kekhavanatanam* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1988) 111 [Hebrew] (originally published in the journal *Ma’ayanot* 6 [1957]); and by Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981) 253 (first published in German in 1964). This insight is developed in greater depth by Joseph Reindl, “Weisheitliche Bearbeitung von Psalmen: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der Sammlung des Psalters,” *VT* 32 (1981) 333–56, esp. pp. 339–41; and by Gerald Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBLDS; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985) 143, 204–7. Reindl pays particular attention to the form-critical question of setting, noting the difference between the setting of psalms and the setting of the Psalter. For brief treatments of the canon-shaping role of Psalm 1, see also Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 513; Johannes Marböck, “Zur frühen Wirkungsgeschichte von Ps 1,” in *Freude an der Weisung des Herrn. Beiträge zur Theologie der Psalmen. Festgabe zum 70. Geburtstag von Heinrich Groß* (ed. Ernst Haag and Frank-Lothar Hossfeld; Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge 13; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1986) 207–22, esp. p. 211; J. Clinton McCann, “The Psalms as Instruction,” *Interpretation* 46 (1992) 117–28, esp. p. 119. Other scholars have made the slightly different suggestion that Psalm 1 attempts to present the Psalter as a wisdom collection, or at least a collection related to wisdom, or that Psalm 1 encourages the reader to read the Psalter in the prism of wisdom. See Johann Maier, “Psalm 1 im Licht antiker jüdischer Zeugnisse,” in *Altes Testament und christliche Verkündigung: Festschrift für Antonius H. J. Gunneweg zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Manfred Oeming and Axel Graupner; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1987) 353–365, esp. p. 365; Whybray, “The Wisdom Psalms,” 155; Kuntz, “Wisdom Psalms,” 150–51.



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into instruction. What one might have regarded as a human's words to the deity become a form of divine revelation to humanity.¹⁹ (One might object to the suggestion that Psalm 1 transforms prayer into learning, arguing that the phrase *יהגה בתורתו* in verse 2 might refer to prayerful recitation of the Torah. In that case, Psalm 1 would attempt to make the Torah into a prayer book rather than Psalter into a study book. However, the verb *יהגה* is almost never used to refer to an utterance made in prayer. In the few cases where it does, it means to articulate a particular idea in the context of a prayer, not to sing or chant.²⁰ Similarly, one might refer in English to a person "uttering God's praises," but this does not mean that the word *utter* by itself suggests a liturgical context. Further, the object of the verb in Ps 1:2 is "T/torah," which definitively places the phrase *יהגה בתורתו* in a context of study, because "torah" means "instruction, that which is studied.")

The second implication following from the placement of Psalm 1 involves the shape of the canon. What does it mean to begin the book of Psalms—and hence the Ketuvim as a whole—by praising the Torah and recommending its study? The answer to this question becomes sharper when we realize that the phrasing found in Ps 1:2 also appears in the very first chapter of the *Nevi'im*.²¹

19. On this conversion of human response into divine revelation, see also Childs, *Introduction*, 513–14; Wilson, *Editing*, 206; McCann, "The Psalms as Instruction," 119. Already in the 10th century, Saadia Gaon viewed the Psalter as a revealed text rather than a humanly authored one. In light of the canon-shaping role of Psalm 1, it becomes clear that the attempt to convert the Psalter into a revelatory text is much older than Saadia; Saadia's seemingly radical reading in fact reflects the *pesbat* of Psalm 1, or at least the *pesbat* of Psalm 1's editorial role. On Saadia's view of the Psalter, see Uriel Simon, *Four Approaches to the Book of Psalms* (trans. Lenn Schramm; Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991) 2–5. An intermediate position on the essential nature of the Psalter is held by Ibn Ezra, who (reworking the rabbis' view) regarded some though not all of the psalms as composed by David writing not as an individual but as a prophet, so that parts of the Psalter is revealed, but not in the same way as the Pentateuch. See Simon, *Four Approaches*, 127–216, 314–17, 330–33. (These medieval Jewish views of the Psalter may have even earlier antecedent, incidentally. Early Muslim views of the Psalter in several ways resembled those later articulated by Saadia and Ibn Ezra. See Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993] 108 and references there.)

20. The only strong examples are Pss 35:28 and 62:7. In three cases (Ps 62:7, 77:13, and 143:5) the verb refers to the worshiper's utterance describing divine works. In these cases, the verb is always parallel to some form of *זכר* (= "mention"), so that the verb *יהגה* does not itself denote prayer but refers to a verbalization of some idea that happens to occur in the context of prayer.

21. On the significance of this parallel, see Alexander Rofé, "The Piety of the Torah-Disciples at the Winding-up of the Hebrew Bible: Josh 1:8; Ps 1:2; Isa 59:21," in *Bibel in jüdischer und christlicher Tradition: Festschrift für Johann Maier zum 60. Geburtstag* (ed. Helmut Merklein et al.; Frankfurt: Anton Hain, 1993) 78–85, esp. pp. 81–82; and, at slightly greater length, idem, "The Move towards the Study of Torah at the End of the Biblical Period: Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2; Isaiah 59:21," in *The Bible in Light of Its Interpreters: Memorial Volume for Sarah Kamin* (ed. Sara Japhet; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994) 622–28, esp. pp. 624–26 [Hebrew].



This book of Torah (הַתּוֹרָה) should never leave your mouth; learn it through recitation day and night (וְהִגִּיתָ בּוֹ יוֹמָם וָלַיְלָה) so that you will carefully observe everything written in it. Then your way will succeed, and you will achieve understanding. (Josh 1:8) [The righteous individual] takes delight in Yhwh's Torah (בְּתוֹרַת ה'), learning His Torah through recitation night and day (וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יְהִיגֶה יוֹמָם וָלַיְלָה). (Ps 1:2)

Especially when viewed alongside each other, these verses have a clear message. The former asserts the subservience of the text that begins with Joshua 1, which is to say, the whole of Nevi'im, to the Five Books of Moses. The latter proclaims the subordination of Psalms, and with them all of Ketuvim, to the Five Books.²² The two verses work together to shape the canon, dividing it into the unequal parts known from later Jewish tradition. Within Scripture, Torah is what really matters; the remaining material is worthwhile insofar as it can serve as an adjunct or spur to studying and observing the Torah.²³ (The canon-formative role these passages play, incidentally, is clearly a late development. Rofé points out that 1:8 is an addition to the original text of Joshua 1. It is bracketed by a *Wiederaufnahme*; note the parallel of לְמַעַן תִּלְדָּךְ in Josh 1:7b and תִּשְׁכִּיל בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר תִּלְדָּךְ in Josh 1:8b.²⁴)

In short, Psalm 1 fosters a particular sort of piety, which I have called *mitnagdic*, and it fosters a particular view of the Scripture, which we might simply call Jewish. It attempts to put the book of Psalms and by extension the phenomenon of prayer in their place. That place, to be sure, is important; the Psalter remains a part of Scripture, and prayer remains part of the religious experience of the ideal Jew. But that place is also secondary: Psalms is less important than the Pentateuch, and prayer is less important than study. The phrasing in 1:2 is especially important for understanding how appropriate the term *mitnagdic* is for this psalm. The ideal person

22. The last passage in the Nevi'im makes the same point; see Mal 3:22. (One might see the reference to Elijah in 3:23 as a response which attempts to defend prophecy after the lower ranking it received in 3:22. This defense reserves an eschatological role for prophecy, even if, in the here-and-now, prophecy has surrendered its role to Torah.) The beginning of Proverbs may have a similar function; see Scott Harris, "Proverbs 1:8–19, 20–33 as 'Introduction,'" *RB* 107 (2000) 205–31.

23. On this characterization of the Jewish canon, see John Barton, *Oracles of God: Perception of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1986) 21.

24. Further, even the reference to Torah in 1:7 is probably secondary; the LXX reads not the MT's "carefully observe all this Torah that My servant Moses commanded you" but merely "carefully observe what Moses my servant commanded you." Later scribes specified that Moses' commandments to Joshua were not only oral but were also found in the written Torah (that is, the Pentateuch, or perhaps Deuteronomy). Even later scribes then added v. 8 to clarify that one can observe the Torah by internalizing its commands through studying it aloud day and night. See Rofé, "Piety," 78–80; and idem, "Move," 622–24.



never moves away from Torah study according to that verse, because the Torah that is his delight and desire is on his mind and in his mouth all the time.²⁵ This is precisely the sort of study that Simeon bar Yohai presents as a sadly unrealizable ideal in the passage from *y. Ber.* 1:5 (3b) cited above and that contemporary mitnagdim have come strikingly close to realizing after all.²⁶

Of course, the viewpoint reflected in the editorial placement of Psalm 1 as the introduction to the Psalter is not the only one possible. Other scriptural attempts to characterize that anthology seem to have been suggested in ancient times as well. I will briefly review a few of them.

Just as an introduction sums up a work, so too does a conclusion. In this light, the contrast between the first and last poems in the Psalter could hardly be more striking.²⁷ Psalm 150 focuses on prayer; and within the realm of prayer, it focuses on praise. (The rather tendentious name by which the Psalter is known in Hebrew, תהילים, “Songs of Praise,” picks up on the same characterization of the anthology, which is of course by no means limited to songs of praise.) The final chapter of the Psalter is not concerned with Torah study, with recitation or meditation. Indeed, it is not concerned with words at all. Rather, Psalm 150 calls on all living creatures (כל הַבְּשָׂמָיִם) to praise God through music. Conspicuous in its absence as the psalm specifies the types of music with which to praise God is singing. The whole world should praise God with trumpets and harps, with drums and cymbals—but not, apparently, with the voice. The logocentrism of Psalm 1 is challenged by the non-verbal music of Psalm 150. This summation, then,

25. On the ceaseless nature of study as envisioned by this psalm, see also Weiss, “The Way of Torah,” 126.

26. On the emphasis of a life of nearly uninterrupted Torah study in contemporary mitnagdim, see Haym Soloveitchik, “Migration, Acculturation,” 216–17. He also notes that the trend in this direction among Israeli Hasidim for reasons that are as much practical as ideological.

27. On the contrast between the two, see especially Walter Brueggemann (“Bounded by Obedience and Praise: The Psalms as Canon,” *JSTOT* 50 [1991] 63–92, esp. p. 66), who notes, “One would mistake neither of these two Psalms for a routine poem which might turn up anywhere in the collection. It is probable that both Psalm 1 and Psalm 150 have been carefully selected (or created) and placed as they are, in order to provide a special framing for the collection, and to assert the issues that should inform one’s reading and singing of the Psalms. The perimeters of the collection thus are *obedience* (Psalm 1) and *praise* (Psalm 150).” Wilson critiques Brueggemann’s reading of Psalm 1’s role: “The reader is never counseled to ‘keep, follow, or obey’ the Torah but only to find delight in constant meditation on it. Certainly, canonical wisdom was capable of enjoining its listeners to obedience. . . . Psalm 1 seems rather to encourage an attitude of constant delight in, and meditation on, the Torah as the guide to life rather than to death.” See Gerald Wilson, “The Shape of the Book of Psalms,” *Int* 46 (1992) 129–42, esp. pp. 136–37. Wilson is correct to critique Brueggemann on this point, but the contrast to which Brueggemann draws our attention remains deeply significant, even if it is better characterized as a contrast between learning and praise or between mitnagdic and hasidic modes of religiosity.



posits a hasidic view of the book that is in tension with its mitnagdic introduction. Further, the two psalms mention different religious artifacts, thus deepening the contrast between them. Psalm 150 opens with a reference to God's holy place, which either means the Jerusalem Temple or (if one sees the word *קִדְשׁוֹ* as meaning God's heavenly abode, a reading that the last half of the line supports) at least hints at it. The only locus of religious meaning mentioned in Psalm 1, on the other hand, is the text of the Torah. Here again, we find a contrasting set of religious values. One psalm emphasizes the importance of sacred place and perhaps implies the importance of royalty who sponsor it; the other psalm regards the holy as a function of the sacred word, open to any who are willing to study it.²⁸

Another attempt to characterize the Psalter may appear in Psalm 2. Like Psalm 1, Psalm 2 seems to play an introductory role; Psalms 1 and 2 stand apart from all the other poems found in the first division or *הַזְמַשׁ* of the Psalter in that neither has a *לְדָוִד* superscription.²⁹ It is possible that Psalm 2 can be taken as an introduction to the first division of the Psalter, just as Psalm 1 is an introduction to the Psalter as a whole.³⁰ Alternatively, Psalm 2 may once have been the introduction to the Psalter, to which Psalm 1 was subsequently added as another, rather different, introduction.³¹ (Some support for this speculative suggestion may come from the ancient tradition, known from some manuscripts of the MT and the New Testament, which numbers what we call Psalm 2 as Psalm 1, leaving what we call Psalm 1 without a number.³²) If one can imagine, at least for purposes of argument, a Psalter that began with Psalm 2, one finds a very different

28. On the democratizing trend of study implied in Psalm 1, see Rofé, "Piety," 81, and idem, "Move," 625.

29. Wilson points out that the two apparent exceptions, Psalms 10 and 33, are in fact no exceptions at all, because these psalms are simply continuations of the poems found in Psalms 9 and 32, respectively, both of which have a *לְדָוִד* superscription. See Wilson, *Editing*, 155; and the similar argument in Jesper Høgenhaven, "The Opening of the Psalter: A Study of Jewish Theology," *SJOT* 15 (2001) 169–80, esp. p. 173.

30. Similarly, Psalm 145 may be the conclusion of the last division of the Psalter; its first and last verses contain the characteristic language of the doxologies that conclude the four earlier divisions (*עוֹלָם וּבְרָכָה*). The five hymns of praise in Psalms 146–50 would then be a concluding set of hymns that cap off the Psalter as a whole. For this view of Psalms 146–50, see Wilson, *Editing*, 185; and idem, "Shape," 132–33.

31. See idem, *Editing*, 204; Patrick D. Miller, "The Beginning of the Psalter," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (ed. J. Clinton McCann; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 83–92, esp. p. 85; Gerald Sheppard, *Wisdom as Hermeneutical Construct: A Study in the Sapientializing of the Old Testament* (BZAW 151; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980) 139–41.

32. For a listing of the relevant MT manuscripts, see Wilson, *Editing*, 207. Some manuscripts of Acts 13:11 cite Ps 2:7 as 1:7. It must be admitted that the reference in some manuscripts of Acts might imply not that what we usually call Psalm 1 is unnumbered but that what we usually call Psalms 1 and 2 are a single Psalm. The opinion in *b. Ber.* 9b–10a of Rabbi Yehuda son of Rabbi Shimon ben Pazzi, who numbers what we know as Psalms 19 and 104 as



conceptualization of the anthology. Psalm 2 is a royal psalm, and hence as an introduction it emphasizes David's connection to the Psalter. (For this reason, it is an appropriate prelude to the first division, which is the most Davidic of the five divisions in that it has by far the highest proportion of psalms with a לַדָּוִד superscription.) The difference between Psalms 1 and 2 reflects a dichotomy that was central to ancient Israelite religion, that between writers deeply committed to the royal family and writers not enthused by the monarchy. Biblical literature frequently wrestles with the question, does God's relationship with Israel flow primarily through the king or through priests and scribes? This question reflects a tension between people who looked toward David as the ideal Israelite in communion with God and those who looked toward Moses as that ideal. For example, first Isaiah was deeply committed to the Davidic monarchy, insisting on its unique and eternal right to the throne. Deutero-Isaiah, on the other hand, rejected the possibility of the renewal of the Davidic monarchy after the exile, viewing God as the only king of Israel; according to this prophet, the whole Israelite nation enjoys the status of a royal family.³³ The literature found within the deuteronomistic history is similarly mixed. 2 Samuel 7 represents the apogee of the pro-Davidic viewpoint as it promises David that his descendants will never be removed from the throne, thus presenting God as an advocate of the monarchy. On the other hand, texts such as 1 Samuel 8 regard the monarchy as an unfortunate if unavoidable concession to human frailty. Similar dichotomies appear throughout the canon. The Chronicler consistently idealizes David, and Zech 12:8 comes close to imagining an apotheosis of the Davidic king. On the other hand, texts such as Num 12:6–8 and Deut 34:10–12 regard Moses as the most extraordinary man in Israelite (perhaps human) history. It is no coincidence that the same tension appears at the very beginning of the Psalter. The first introduction to the book looks toward Moses and the mode of religiosity he represents as the best guide for one who will read the Psalms. The second introduction insists that readers should think of David as they sing his songs.³⁴

18 and 103, respectively, might be taken as additional support for this numbering, though the Gemara there understands this tradition different (see note 00 below). See also Høgenhaven, "Opening," 170–71.

33. See my *Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Contraversions; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) 84–88, 112–19, 154.

34. In arguing that these two texts contend with each other, I regard them as separate texts. On the other hand, many scholars argue that Psalms 1–2 are a single unit, which therefore provide a single, if complex, introduction, to the Psalter. The view that Psalms 1–2 is a unified text is already evident in *b. Ber.* 9b–10a. It is based on an inclusio that links them together: note that the word אֶשְׁרָא appears in the first line of Psalm 1 and the last line of Psalm 2. See Miller, "Beginning," 85; and, for further verbal links between these psalms, Marböck, "Frühen Wirkungsgeschichte," 211; Kuntz, "Wisdom Psalms," 152. For an especially comprehensive review of the evidence (including patristic sources not cited in other discussions) and



One additional attempt to present the Psalter may be noted. In the Septuagint, the Psalter ends with a poem not found in the MT, Psalm 151. A fuller Hebrew text of this psalm is known from the Dead Sea Scrolls in 11QPs^a. The first part of this text (vv. 1–3 in the LXX, which roughly correspond to lines 3–8 in 11QPs^a column 28) focuses on David as singer whose lyre and songs praise God’s creation; the next lines (LXX 151:4–7 and 11QPs^a 28:8–14) describe David as God’s anointed (that is to say, His messiah) and as a heroic warrior. The earlier verses in Psalm 151 stress themes similar to Psalm 150; the latter stress themes similar to Psalm 2. This text, then, deftly combines in a single conclusion³⁵ two aspects of what I am terming the hasidic apprehension of the Psalter: the emphasis on song and the emphasis on royalty. A Psalter that concludes with Psalm 151 emphasizes the same musical and messianic themes found in a Psalter beginning with Psalm 2 and ending with Psalm 150.

secondary literature on this issue, see Høgenhaven, “Opening,” 169–72. On the basis of this apparent unity, Sheppard attempts to read the unified text that is now Psalms 1–2 as functioning together to form a single introduction to the Psalter (see Sheppard, *Wisdom*, 136–44), an attempt that I do not regard as holding together. In spite of the verbal connections between these two psalms, the distinct nature of each psalm should not be overlooked. In particular, Psalm 1 begins and ends with its own inclusio that marks this text as a unit (דָּרַךְ // דָּרַךְ / רָשָׁעִים / רָשָׁעִים), as noted by Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985) 116. For a defense of reading Psalm 1 as its own text (rather than just part of Psalm 1–2), see J. T. Willis, “Psalm 1: An Entity,” *ZAW* 91 (1979) 381–40. It seems unnecessary to me to attempt to interpret away the manifest tension between what clearly were (as even Sheppard acknowledges, 139–41) originally two separate texts. Rather, we might note the dialectic that has been created by the placement of these two texts, a dialectic that is not explicitly resolved in the Psalter. For another approach that acknowledges these tensions without artificially resolving them, see Miller, “Beginning,” 88–92. For another example of an attempt to resolve these sorts of tensions (in this case, between Psalm 1 as introduction and Psalm 150 as conclusion), see Brueggemann, “Bounded,” 68–86. Brueggemann’s resolution is, to my mind, clearly artificial, even as it is artful; it presents a compelling theological reflection on the relationship among various psalms, though there is no evidence that the editors of the Psalter intended this particular harmonization. The same may be said of Høgenhaven’s attempt to read Psalm 1 in light of the allegedly eschatological elements of Psalm 2. He suggests that these texts form a unified introduction to the Psalter, which emphasizes Mosaic torah and eschatological expectation. This reading summarizes the main theme of each psalm and attributes it to the other, and then declares them a unity because the combined psalm contains both themes. Of course, one could put many other psalms together and produce a similar result. The crucial question regarding this thesis (even if one accepts Høgenhaven’s assumption that Psalm 2 deals with the eschaton at all) was already raised by Frantz Delitzsch, as Høgenhaven notes (p. 179 n. 29); unfortunately, Høgenhaven does not succeed in responding to it.

35. In fact, this text probably combines two originally independent poems, one found in lines 11QPs^a 28:3–12 (corresponding, roughly, to LXX 151:1–5), the second in lines 13 and following (corresponding, roughly, to LXX 151:6–7). This becomes clear from the inclusio linking 11QPs^a 28:3–4 with 11QPs^a 28:11–12. (This inclusio is lost in the abbreviated version in the LXX.) The two poems may have been combined to create a psalm with strong elements of both sides of David, the musical/religious and the heroic/political.



We have seen, then, that ancient editors suggested two different views of the Psalter. In so doing, they created an unresolved debate within the canon. Is David the epitome of a Jew's connection to God, or does Moses take first place even in a Davidic collection? Is the highest way to the deity to be found in song or in study? It is significant that voices on behalf of both viewpoints appear; while Psalm 1 may be said to have superseded Psalm 2 as the primary introduction, Psalm 150 still gives the hasidic stance the last word—at least for someone who has followed Psalm 1's mitnagdic advice and studied the whole Psalter as a textbook.

Precisely the same debate appears in the midrash to Psalm 1 in *Midr. Tehillim*.³⁶ Indeed, only in light of this debate among various editors of the Psalter are the opening sections of the midrash to Psalm 1 comprehensible. That midrash begins by linking the happy man described in Ps 1:1 with David and goes on to point out that David instituted the 24 watches of priests and Levites (*Midr. Tehillim* 1 §1). This teaching is based on 1 Chronicles 24, but its connection to Ps 1:1 might seem baffling: What has the long bureaucratic list in 1 Chronicles 24 to do with the wisdom saying in Psalm 1:1? In fact, however, this teaching comes to bear on what might be called the canonical debate (that is, the debate implied by the juxtaposition of Psalms 1 and 2 as introductions or by the juxtaposition of Psalms 1 and 150 as introduction and conclusion). More specifically, *Midr. Tehillim* 1 §1 addresses David's relationship to Moses. One might have regarded the priestly and Levitical offices as inherently Mosaic in nature, not only because Moses was a Levite and his brother the ancestor of the priests but also because Moses established both institutions and gave the laws concerning their responsibilities (see, for example, Leviticus 8 and Numbers 18). *Midr. Tehillim* begins, however, by reminding us that it was David who instituted the priestly and Levitical offices as they functioned in the First and Second Temples. In other words, the initial section of *Midr. Tehillim* comes to answer an implied question, which is the same question suggested by the editorial juxtaposition of Psalm 1 and Psalm 2: who is more important, Moses or David?³⁷ We should pause to note the irony of the answers

36. Two recensions exist, but the differences between them do not affect my argument. All subsequent references are to the Buber edition (Solomon Buber, ed., *Midraš Tehillim, Which Is Called Šōḥer Tōb* [Vilna: Romm, 1891]). For an overview of the textual history, see Isaac Kalimi, "Midrash Psalms Šoḥer Tōv: Some Theological and Methodological Features and a Case Study—the View of God," in *God's Word for Our World. Theological and Cultural Studies in Honor of Simon John De Vries* (ed. J. Harold Ellens, D. L. Ellens, R. P. Knerim, and I. Kalimi; JSOTSup 389; London: T. & T. Clark, 2004) 63–76, esp. pp. 63–65.

37. To be sure, the themes we see in this section are not unique within *Midr. Tehillim*. As Esther Menn points out, *Midr. Tehillim* frequently goes "far beyond the biblical sources themselves in portraying Israel's greatest king as a founding figure for its holiest site"; see Esther Menn, "Prayerful Origins: David as Temple Founder in Rabbinic Psalms Commentary (*Midrash Tehillim*)," in *Of Scribes and Sages: Early Jewish Interpretation and Transmission of Scripture*



provided by the Psalter and the *Midr. Tebillim*, respectively. The final form of David's Psalter puts Moses (more precisely, Torah) first; but the midrash, composed by the rabbinic sages who regarded themselves as inheritors of Moses' mantle, puts David first. Thus, the sages' first comment on Psalm 1 attempts to overturn the viewpoint of that psalm. The rabbis created a hasidic homily on a mitnagdic text—which in turn attempted to displace the most natural understanding of the Psalter as hasidic!³⁸

Immediately thereafter, the midrash presents a debate concerning who is permitted to sit in the presence of God (*Midr. Tebillim* §2). Citing 2 Sam 7:18, Rabbi Ḥiyya teaches that no one other than a Davidic king may sit in the Temple courtyard (that is, in the presence of God), a teaching supported by additional traditions coming through Rabbi Ammi from Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish. The midrash points out that even in heaven the angels must stand in the presence of God, which makes the exception granted to Davidic kings even more remarkable. Speaking in his own name, Ammi then denies that Davidic kings were permitted to sit in God's presence, explaining that 2 Sam 7:18 ("And David came and sat [יָשָׁב] in God's presence") should be understood to mean merely that David leaned against a wall while standing, or perhaps that David set his mind (יָשַׁב) toward intense and focused prayer.³⁹ The midrash then asserts that it was not the king but the high priest who was permitted to sit in the Temple courtyard, as evidenced by 1 Sam 1:9: "And Eli the priest was sitting on his chair at the doorpost of God's Temple."

(ed. Craig Evans; London: Continuum, 2004) *77–89, esp. p. 77. Thus, this passage fits a larger pattern found later in this work. Similarly, the comparison between Moses and David found in *Midr. Tebillim* 1 §1–2 occurs elsewhere in this work; see Menn, 81, and references there. It remains important to ask why these themes are brought forward in a comment on Psalm 1, which seems to deal with neither David nor the Temple.

38. One of their last comments on Psalm 2, interestingly, moves in the other direction (see *Midr. Tebillim* 2 §2). There, Rav understands Ps 2:12 to be a commendation of Torah study—even though Psalm 2 is clearly concerned with royalty, not sagacity. Something similar occurs in 4Q174 (= 4QFlor). The section of this *pesher* that deals with Ps 2:1–2 seems, so far as we can tell from the fragment available, to connect the discussion of the messiah or annointed one in Psalm 2 with באחרית הימים ביהודי ישראל, which no doubt refers to the sect itself, its Zadokite leadership, and its Torah-meditating membership. (For this understanding of ישראל ביהודי, see especially Yigal Yadin, "A midrash on 2 Sam. vii and Ps i–ii [4QFlorilegium]," *IEJ* 9 [1959] 95–98, esp. p. 98 and n. 30.) In other words, there is an attempt here to insert into the psalm's discussion of the Davidic messiah the theme of the sectarian vision of law and learning—to convert the Davidic into the Toraitic or Mosaic. This tendency is also evident a few lines earlier (lines 11–12), where references to the Davidic messiah in 2 Samuel 7 and Amos 9:11 give occasion to mention not only the Davidic messiah but the priestly sage who stands at his side. On the interpretive nature of the *pesher*, see also Marböck, "Frühen Wirkungsgeschichte," 217–19; Maier, "Psalm 1," 356; and George Brooke, *Exegesis at Qumran: 4QFlorilegium in Its Jewish Context* (JSOTSup 29; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1985) 86–97 and 114–19.

39. On the contradiction between Rabbi Ammi's first and second statements, see Buber, *Midraš Tebillim* (Buber), 1–2 nn. 8 and 14.



At first glance, this discussion on the right to sit in the presence of the Most High seems tenuously connected to Ps 1:1, on which it purports to comment. The teaching that only Davidic kings may sit in the Temple court is based on 2 Sam 7:18 and need not mention Psalm 1; in fact, most attestations of this saying do not do so, even in cases where they do mention 2 Sam 7:18.⁴⁰ But the teaching's relevance to our psalm becomes clear in light of the debate among the editors of the Psalter discussed above. *Midr. Tehillim* 1 §2 is unique among the many rabbinic attestations of the teaching in question: this is the only passage that uses the teaching in question to set up a comparison between David and Eli.⁴¹ The significance of this comparison becomes clear when we recall that Eli is a member of Moses' family. In the standard rabbinic view, he is descended from Moses' brother, Aaron.⁴² Thus, the comparison made in *Midr. Tehillim* picks up on the antithesis between Psalm 1 and Psalm 2—that is, between a mitnagdic or sapiential outlook and a hasidic or royalist one. The comparison implies the question: who is of the highest status, David and the kings descended from him or Moses and the priesthood related to him? As is the case in the canonical Psalter, the competition between these polarities is not resolved in the midrash; two answers to the question are presented without either one being rejected. The citation of a rabbinic teaching concerning 2 Sam 7:18 in a midrash on Ps 1:1 might have seemed a nonsequitur, but the application of this teaching here turns out to be deeply connected to the debate sparked by the editorial role of Psalm 1. Put differently: the first unit in

40. See *b. Soṭah* 40b, *b. Soṭah* 41b, *b. Yoma* 25a, *b. Yoma* 69b, *y. Pesah* 5.10 (7d), *y. Yoma* 3.2 (4b), *y. Soṭah* 7.7 (8a). An exception is *Midr. Sam.* 27 §1–2, which contain an extremely abbreviated form of the midrash as found *Midr. Tehillim*.

41. The one text that comes close to making this sort of comparison is *b. Qidd.* 78b. When quoting the tradition that only Davidic kings may sit in the Temple court, this passage notes an apparent exception in 1 Sam 3:3: Samuel sleeps at the temple in Shiloh. Because Samuel was Eli's disciple, his successor, and a fellow Levite (according to rabbinic interpreters who follow 1 Chr 6:17–23 in this matter), this passage might be taken to set up a comparison if not between David and Eli then at least between David and an Eloid. However, see Rashi ad loc.

42. Some modern biblical scholars believe that the Eli was in fact a direct descendant of Moses himself; see Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (trans. Black and Menzies; New York: Meridian, 1957) 142–43; and Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973) 195–217. The Chronicler implies that Eli was descended from Aaron in 1 Chr 24:3 (cf. 1 Sam 22:9–20), and the rabbis follow this view. Either way, the connection of any high priest to the theme of Torah is clear. In a dichotomy between Torah and Psalter, study and prayer, or Sinai and Zion, Eli clearly aligns himself with Torah, study, and Sinai whether he is an Aaronide or a Mushide. That Eli represent an antithesis of Zion is even clearer in light of his connection to Shiloh; cf. Psalm 78, which regards Shiloh as a competitor to Zion, because Zion's rise resulted from Shiloh's fall.



Midr. Tehillim 1 §2 comments not on Ps 1:1 but on the implication of Psalm 1 as introduction and hence on the Psalter's relationship to the Torah.

The issues raised by the editorial placement of Psalm 1 recur as the midrash progresses. The last part of *Midr. Tehillim* 1 §2 compares David and Moses:

“For this is the Torah of man” (2 Sam 7:18). What man? The greatest of the prophets, or the greatest of kings? The greatest of the prophets was Moses, as it is written, “Moses went up to God” (Exod 19:3), and the greatest of kings was David. You find that whatever Moses did, David did. Moses brought the Israelites out of Egypt, and David brought the Israelites out of subjugation to foreign kingdoms.⁴³ Moses fought a war against Sichon and Og, and David fought a war against all around him . . . Moses reigned over Israel and Judah . . . and David reigned over Israel and Judah. Moses split the sea for Israel, and David split the rivers for Israel . . . Moses built an altar, and David built an altar. This one officiated at a sacrifice, and the other one officiated at a sacrifice. Moses gave the five books of the Torah to Israel, and David gave the five books of Psalms to Israel . . . Moses blessed Israel, saying “Happy are you!” (Deut 33:29), and David blessed Israel, saying “Happy is the man” (Ps 1:1).

The connection of this teaching to Ps 1:1 is not in question, because the passage ends with a reference to this verse. At the same time, its placement near the beginning of *Midr. Tehillim* is telling. Like the two teachings it follows, its subject is, this time explicitly, a comparison of Moses and David. Here again, we find the midrash grappling not so much with the wording of the verse in question but with the issue raised by the editors of the Psalter. Whereas the first teaching in the midrash (1 §1) exalts David over Moses and the second (beginning of 1 §2) presents two opinions, one exalting Davidic kings over all other created beings and the other exalting a Mosaic priest over all other beings, this tradition equates David and Moses. In a rabbinic context, a teaching such as this is perhaps surprising, the more so in an interpretation attached to our mitnagdic or Mosaic psalm.

The midrash to Psalm 1 moves on to other themes in subsequent sections, but it occasionally comes back to our debate. In §5, Rabbi Pineḥas opens a teaching by quoting the line “From the elders I gain learning” (Ps 119:100). He goes on to note a historical chain involving the opening and

43. So the standard printed edition. The text of the Buber edition (which follows most of the manuscripts; see Buber's note ad loc.) reads “subjugation of exile.” This reading makes little sense, because the Israelites were not in exile immediately prior to David's time. William Braude notes Felix Perles' suggestion that one read “subjugation to Goliath” (גלית rather than גליות). See William Braude, trans., *The Midrash on Psalms* (Yale Judaica Series; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959) 2:397 n. 10.



closing words of biblical blessings: God blessed Abraham “with *all* things” (Gen 24:1); of Abraham we read in turn, “*all* he had he *gave* to Isaac” (Gen 25:5); Isaac began his blessing to Jacob with the words, “May God *give* you the dew of heaven” (Gen 27:28), a passage that ends with the words “Isaac *called* Jacob and blessed him” (Gen 28:1); the narrative of Jacob’s blessing of his sons begins with the words, “Jacob *called* his sons” (Gen 49:1) and ends with the words, “*This* is what their father said when he blessed them” (Gen 49:28); Moses picked up the chain in his final blessing to Israel, which is introduced with the word, “*This* is the blessing that Moses spoke to all Israel” (Deut 33:1), and he ended the blessing with the words “*Happy* are you, O Israel” (Deut 33:29). David finishes the chain, beginning his book with the words “*Happy* is the man” (Ps 1:1). One might argue that, because David is the culmination of the chain, he represents its apogee and enjoys a place of honor greater than those who come before, including Moses. (Indeed, as the last link he is chiasmatically paired with God.) On the other hand, the whole teaching begins with a verse from Psalm 119, which emphasizes the value of learning from one’s forebears. Thus the teaching may be intended to stress that what David did was merely an imitation of the great ones before him; moreover, Ps 119:100 emphasizes elders and learning, a motif that underscores a mitnagdic trope.⁴⁴

A comparison of the Psalter to the Torah occurs slightly later in our text, in *Midr. Tehillim* 1 §8. There we are told that David expressed the hope that his book would not be read like the books of Homer. He wishes, rather, that people will read it and meditate on it. By doing so, they will merit reward as though they had studied the mishnaic tractates concerning leprosy and concerning impurity that results from the presence of a dead body in a dwelling (two of the most difficult and technical parts of the Mishna). The locus of value assumed by this comment is Mosaic law; David’s own book can only aspire to match its value. On the other hand, this comment at least suggests that one might be able to gain the sort of merit associated with Torah study through recitation of Psalms, which puts the Psalter on the same level as Torah—at least if the Psalter is studied as a mitnagdic text.

The midrash addresses the relation between prayer and study directly in 1 §16, which comments on Ps 1:2 (“But he takes delight in Yhwh’s Torah, studying His Torah day and night”). Rabbi Eliezer asserts there that

44. My comment on the significance of Ps 119:100 assumes that Rabbi Pineḥas understands this verse as the rabbis usually do, and as I translated it above. That reading of the verse suggests a devolution from generation to generation, reflecting the idea that whatever value later figures have is derived from the earlier figures on which they draw. On the other hand, the contextual and grammatical meaning of the verse suggests an ascending model of value: “I understand more than the elders.” If Rabbi Pineḥas understood the verse this way, then he may have intended to exalt David above all who came before him.



Israel wanted to study Torah all the time (to the exclusion of all other activities), but they did not have the opportunity to do so. God reassured them, saying that by observing the commandment of wearing *tefillin* or prayer-phyllacteries, they bring on themselves merit equal to that gained by constant study. Rabbi Joshua suggests another response by God (perhaps because he was troubled by Eliezer's suggestion, which substituted a commandment observed only in the daytime for the study of Torah that should have taken place day and night). According to Joshua, the recitation of the Shema prayer in the morning and in the evening can be the functional substitute for constant Torah study. In spite of their differences, Eliezer and Joshua share a basic perspective: some form of prayer (whether non-verbal prayer through the donning of *tefillin* or verbal prayer through the recitation of the Shema) can be the moral equivalent of Torah study. Bar Qappara, however, has a very different suggestion: a person who recites two chapters from Scripture each morning and two each evening has, for all practical purposes, fulfilled the ideal of constant Torah study. Rabbi Ḥiyya explains that Bar Qappara meant not only that a person should recite the two chapters but should engage in their elucidation; the requirement, then, involves not only two chapters of Written Torah but two *halachot* or legal traditions from the Oral Torah as well. This section moves on to other matters, ending with a statement of Rabbi Naḥman in the name of Rabbi Mani: a person who praises God seven times a day (in accordance with Ps 119:164) has performed the equivalent of constant Torah study. In 1 §16, then, *Midr. Tehillim* gives voice to rabbis who assert the hasidic viewpoint (Eliezer, Joshua, Naḥman, and Mani) as well as ones who uphold the mitnagdic view (Bar Qappara, Ḥiyya). While the last word comes from one of the former, no definitive resolution is reached.

Midr. Tehillim, in short, begins by addressing precisely the same question implied by the redactional setting of Psalm 1: Is the Psalter fundamentally a hasidic or mitnagdic book? The midrash directs our attention to two aspects of this polarity: the dichotomy between king and priest or sage and the dichotomy between prayer and study. It provides a range of answers to the implied question. In so far as it includes voices that value David over Moses or at least put them on an equal footing, it undermines Psalm 1's attempt to transform the Psalter into a mitnagdic anthology. At the same time, it allows for a variety of rabbinic opinions to be expressed on the issue. Thus the midrash to Psalm 1 reenacts the juxtaposition evident in the final form of the Psalter, which begins with a mitnagdic voice in Psalm 1, moves directly to a hasidic voice in Psalm 2, and ends with another hasidic voice in Psalm 150.

In this essay, I have attempted to draw a comparison between the explicit discussions of the rabbis in *Midr. Tehillim* 1 and the implied discussions of the redactors who placed Psalms 1, 2, and 150 in their canonical



locations (and also the implied discussion of the redactors who placed Psalm 151 in its location in the LXX or its Vorlage). This sort of comparison may provide an example of, or a model for, the creation of Jewish biblical theology. Whereas some Protestant (especially Childsean) models for biblical theology emphasize the work of the final redactors (and hence attempt either to harmonize the tension between Psalm 1 and Psalms 2 and 150⁴⁵ or to privilege the voice of what we think is the final redactor⁴⁶), a Jewish biblical theology should put no particular emphasis on the redactor.⁴⁷ Thus, the message of the redactor who made Psalm 1 the abstract for the Psalter is not definitive for a Jewish exegete. But the questions implied by the redactional placement of Psalm 1 emerge as Jewishly interesting for two reasons. The first of these is the fact that rabbinic exegetes picked up on those questions, even as they sometimes answered it in ways differing from the proposal of Psalm 1 itself. The second is the fact that the questions with which the redactors and *Midr. Tehillim* are concerned are addressed not only in the midrash to Psalm 1 but in many other parts of rabbinic and postrabbinic Jewish literature, usually in formulations that do not refer to Psalm 1 itself (for example, in the Talmudic passages quoted at the outset of this essay). In other words, it is not merely the work of the redactors but postbiblical Jewish tradition that must guide an attempt to generate a Jewish biblical theology, and in this particular case, Jewish tradition clearly used the ancient debate among the psalms' redactors as a starting point for continuing and extending the redactors' discourse.⁴⁸

45. E.g., see Sheppard, *Wisdom*, 136–44.

46. See Wilson, "Shape," 137–38. Wilson argues there that in light of the placement of Psalm 1, "the psalms are no longer to be sung as human response to God but are to be meditated upon day and night as the source of the divine word of life to us." Building on this conclusion, he further maintains the final redaction of the Psalter must have occurred after the year 70 C.E.: "It is difficult for me to understand how such a move from performance to meditation could have taken place during a time in which the temple was in operation and the psalms in constant public worship. To appropriate these performance pieces for private meditation would seem to necessitate a period of considerable time in which Temple worship was interrupted and there was little hope of reestablishing it." This reasoning is flawed. We need not assume the rigid either/or dichotomy on which Wilson's conclusion is built. That the Psalter is to be studied does not mean that it cannot be used liturgically. Indeed, even a post-70 dating of the psalter would still assume both uses, even though the liturgical use would occur now in synagogues rather than the Temple. Similarly, the Psalter could have been both studied and chanted while the Temple still stood.

47. Cf. my "Scroll of Isaiah as Jewish Scripture, or, Why Jews Don't Read Books," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1996 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996) 225–42; and, more briefly, my "Revelation at Sinai in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish Theology," 423. Some Christian thinkers express similar qualms about the canon criticism and its theological application; see, for example, James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983) 49–74.

48. In the particular case under discussion, the rabbinic answers largely follow in the path of the biblical answers, because the rabbinic answers, like the redactors' answers, can be



A description of this particular crossgenerational discussion is especially representative of Jewish biblical theology. In the end, neither the Psalter nor *Midr. Tebillim* provides a definitive answer to the questions at hand. Both contain hasidic as well as mitnagdic voices, and any reading of the Psalter's final form or of the midrash that privileges one perspective over another is a reflection of the reader, not of the texts themselves. One could, for example claim that the first psalm is the most important and hence that the Psalter is ultimately mitnagdic; but one could just as easily argue that the last Psalm is conclusive, and therefore the Psalter is hasidic. Similarly, Jewish tradition in its widest senses never fully resolves the debate concerning prayer and study or the controversy regarding the most ideal model of leadership. While the Talmuds clearly lean in one direction, many alternative voices are preserved in their pages, and even more appear in aggadic rabbinic literature outside the Talmuds. Further, we have seen that later forms of Judaism continue the debate; it is significant that Hasidism, which began by emphasizing one of these sets of values in the 18th century, moved within a few generations to a sort of rapprochement with the other, even as the Mitnagdim produced thinkers who valued direct contact with God and messianism. The biblical redactors, then, did not so much provide an answer as an agenda concerning what issues are to be pondered. Consequently, a Jewish biblical theology need not—in fact, should not—set for itself the goal of definitely stating what the Bible says; rather, it should look for what the Bible invites us to attend to, and it should examine how rabbinic and later Jewish literatures pick up that invitation. It is by attending to the same issues and by turning them over and turning them over again, that Jewish biblical theology can become part of the all-encompassing discussion that is Torah.

readily classified as either hasidic or mitnagdic. It is also possible, however, that postbiblical thinkers will continue to address the biblical questions while providing new sorts of answers. In questions of theodicy, for example, the rabbinic doctrine of postmortem reward and punishment and the Lurianic idea of divine self-restriction or *šimšum* are only barely adumbrated in biblical texts.



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