

# WHAT DOES PSALM MEAN IN HEBREW?

**MONY ALMALECH**  
**(New Bulgarian University)**  
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**Part I**



# The Book of Psalms - wikipedia

**The Book of Psalms** ("praises") commonly referred to simply as **Psalms**, is a book of the [Hebrew Bible](#) and the Christian [Bible](#). Taken together, its 150 poems "express virtually the full range of Israel's religious faith."

**Etymology**: The word *psalms* is derived from the Greek **Ψαλμοί** (*Psalmoi*), perhaps originally meaning **"music of the lyre"** or **"songs sung to a harp"** and then to any piece of music. From *psallein* "play upon a stringed instrument" and then to "make music in any fashion".

Singular - **Ψαλμός**

**The Book of Psalms in its current, most commonly used form consists of 150 songs and **prayers** referred to individually as psalms and referenced by chapter and verse. They each have a **poetic character** with frequent use of parallelism.**

## The Book of Psalms - wikipedia

**In addition to the title of the collection, which translates as "song" or "hymns" from both Hebrew and Greek, superscriptions (or headings) in many of the Psalms provide musical references and some direction, in some cases even references to melodies that would have been well known by early congregations.**

**Songs that can be identified as such in the Psalms include songs of **thanksgiving** (e.g., Ps 30), **hymns of praise** (e.g., Ps 117) and **royal psalms**, which may have been used in coronations and weddings.**

**Identification of some psalms as prayers is also seen within the text, for example in the conclusion to Psalm 72, "The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended."**

The largest category of Psalms, though not grouped as such in the text, is that of **lament** (expressions of complaint and pleas for help from God). There appears to also have been an **instructional function** of the psalms as seen in **their references to the law** (e.g., Ps 1 and 119).

## The Book of Psalms - wikipedia

Dating of individual compositions is difficult, and in some cases impossible.

**Many** appear to have been written early in the history of ancient Israel (**first millennium BC or even earlier**), while **others** may have been written after the exile to Babylon, which occurred in the **sixth century BC**.

Authorship is also uncertain in spite of frequent attributions to David.

## **The Book of Psalms** - wikipedia

**In Jewish tradition, the Psalms were actually sung in front of the Tabernacle, and then later during the reign of King Solomon, when the Temple was completed, they were sung from the steps of the Temple.**

## **The Book of Psalms** - wikipedia

**The singers all came from the tribe of Levi (Levites), and it was exclusively their privilege – no non-Levites were allowed to sing in that area of the Temple. Levites played musical accompaniment on various instruments, some mentioned within the Psalms themselves.**

**Psalms are used throughout traditional Jewish worship. Many complete Psalms and verses from Psalms appear in the [morning services](#).**

## **The Book of Psalms - wikipedia**

**While the Psalms are used extensively in worship and prayer, the original intent was as a vehicle to teach, explain, encourage, and communicate with the individual listener as well as the entire people, hence their public performance.**

Ψαλμός - תְּהִלִּים [tehilìm]

The book of Psalms

in Hebrew is תְּהִלִּים [tehilìm] which is a  
plural masculine form from  
תְּהִלָּה [tehilà].

The root is *He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל

**"Ψαλτήριον" - תְּהִלִּים [tehilim]**

**are**

**Δοξολογία (praise) and**

**θρησκευτικό τραγούδι (religious songs)**

**but Hebrew grammar and spelling rise  
hard conditions to sing psalms.**

**The derivative territory of the Hebrew root  
*He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל includes *to sing*  
*praises, to sing psalm, psalm, praise, to*  
*radiate light, to shine.***

**Thus the root is one of the Hebrew ways  
of transformation of the idea of the light  
in the text and into the reader's /  
listener's linguistic conscious and  
unconscious.**

**Biblical warning remaining  
Hidden in Hebrew - *psalm;*  
*to praise; to shine* הָלַל [halàl]  
**or** *to profane, to defile,*  
*to pollute, to desecrate* הָלַל [halàl]**

**This Hebrew way of signification remains hidden and **untranslatable** in any Indo-European language. The paradigm of the root marks the semantic territory in the system of the Hebrew language which is asymmetrical to Indo-European and Finno-Ugric languages, because in these languages *to shine*, *to praise*, and *psalm* are not derivatives of one and the same root. **The root of the Hebrew words for *shining* or *singing psalms* includes instructions for those who intend to sing psalms: they should be pure, clean and immaculate.****

At the same time the root *He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל has its “dark”, desecrating paronym – the root *Het-Lamed-Lamed* חלל that occupies the paradigm *to profane, to defile, to pollute, to desecrate; to wound (fatally), to bore through, to pierce; to slain; window.*

From a linguistic point of view, the two roots' similarity and opposition is based on the fact that **the difference between them is the invariant of the sound *h***. In *He-Lamed-Lamed* הֶלֶל there is a **short *h* הֶ**, while in *Het-Lamed-Lamed* חֶלֶל there is a **non-short *h* חֶ**.

One should have perfect articulation habits to make the difference in use.

*He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל and *Het-Lamed-Lamed* חלל are involved in similarity and opposition, at the same time. But only *He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל is part of the **macrolight white** in Hebrew.

The term *macrolight* is in sense of Witkowski, S., C. Brown [Witkowski, Brown, 1977, pp. 50-57] and A. Wierzbicka [Wierzbicka, 1990].

*He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל takes part  
(explicitly and implicitly) in the  
naming of the basic semantic features  
‘pure’, ‘pureness’, ‘clean’,  
‘immaculate’ of the **prototypes of**  
**white (light; snow; milk)**.  
**Prototypes** is sense of Rosch  
**Prototype Theory (1973; 1975; 1976)**

**In approximately one hundred  
appearances of the Noun Phrase  
“Psalm of David”  
word *psalm* stays for the Hebrew  
lexeme מִזְמוֹר [mizmòr].**

The derives from the root  
*Zain-Mem-Reish זמר* are found in the  
words *sing, sing praise, make music זמר*  
[zamàr].

In Modern Hebrew – *orchestra תזמורת*  
[tizmòret].

The two uses of לְהַלֵּל [lehalèl] (2 Chronicles 23:13) and תְּהִלָּה [tehilà] (Psalms 33:1) as *sing psalms / praise* seem insignificant and unimportant but this is not the case.

ἐπαίνων PRAISES תְּהִלֹּת [tehilòt]

**Psalm 22:4/3 (21:4)**

WTT 22:4 וְאַתָּה קָדוֹשׁ יוֹשֵׁב תְּהִלֹּת יִשְׂרָאֵל:

NAU Psalm 22:3 Yet You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the **praises** of Israel.

BGT Psalm 21:4 σὺ δὲ ἐν ἁγίοις  
κατοικεῖς ὁ **ἑπαινος** Ἰσραηλ

MGK Psalm 22:3 Σὺ δὲ ὁ Ἅγιος  
κατοικεῖς μεταξὺ τῶν **ἐπαίνων** τοῦ  
Ἰσραήλ.

ἑπαινος, ου, ὁ *praise, approval, recognition* Ro 2:29; 1 Cor 4:5; Eph 1:6, 12, 14; 1 Pt 2:14; *a thing worthy of praise* Phil 4:8.

**The Indo-European translations convey in different ways the meaning of the word תְּהִלּוֹת [tehilòt]. The preferred solution is *praises* but not *pslams*. This example is evident for the normative use of the feminine plural form תְּהִלּוֹת [tehilòt] of the singular feminine תְּהִלָּה [tehilà].**

However, the title of **the book Psalms** in Hebrew is **תְּהִלִּים** [tehilìm] which is a **plural masculine** form – ending **ים** [-im] – from **תְּהִלָּה** [tehilà]. We can see that **the tradition** calls for the masculine form as a title of the whole book.

**That is why we need to examine carefully the extended semantics of תְּהִלָּה [tehilà] by checking the derivative potential of the root.**

With a view to the fact that an interlinguistic dissymmetry exists between Hebrew and Indo-European languages, it is appropriate to indicate the functional semantics of the verb *praise* לָלַחַח [halàl]. This will appear in about 200 uses when the *explicite* meaning is *to praise* but the *implicit* one is *to shine* לָלַחַח [halàl].

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In Indo-European languages *to praise* (Bul. *възхвалявам*) and *to shine* (Bul. *излъчвам блестяща светлина*) **are not of the same root** and **the implicate suggestion of ‘to shine’ does not exist when the text says *to praise*.**

In English and in Bulgarian the word *psalm* (*ncalm*) has no association and no logical connection evolved from the derivative relationship to the *light*, to the *shining*. The data from TWOT in BibleWorks98 shows clearly that the situation is the opposite in Hebrew:

## ROOT SEMANTICS

when we say  
*praise* תְּהִלָּה [tehilà] or  
*The book of Psalms* תְּהִלִּים [tehilìm],  
it implies *to shine* הָלַל [halàl].

## ROOT AND CONTEXT SEMANTICS

**The examination of the root *He-Lamed-Lamed* ללל shows that in the Hebrew text there are more than 300 uses of the derivatives from this root. These appearances of the root are cognitively related to macrolight white, despite the fact that most of the words do not designate explicitly *shine*.**

**The cognitive presence include all cases  
when in English we have *to praise*,  
*rejoicing*, *praise*, *psalms* or even *boast*.**

**All 300 uses of the derivatives of  
*He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל appear to be  
Hebrew associations of the  
transformations of the concept of light  
denoted by *He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל.**

**They work at the Hebrew linguistic consciousness and subconsciousness. Such derivative motivated associations do not exist in the Indo-European languages.**

*Profane, defile, pollute, desecrate*  
(Bul. *осквернявам, принизявам, опорочавам*) with the closest root  
*Het-Lamed-Lamed* ללל

## Semantic OPPOSITION

**There is a strong level of phonetic and spelling closeness between הלל [halàl] and הלל [halàl], but on the level of semantics they are antonyms:**

**‘to praise the God of Israel’** לְהַלֵּל  
[halàl] – **‘to profane God of Israel’**  
לְחַלֵּל [halàl];

**‘to praise the God of Israel’** לְהַלֵּל  
[halàl] – **‘to desecrate the God of  
Israel’** לְחַלֵּל [halàl];

**‘to shine’** לְהַלֵּל [halàl] – **‘to pollute’**  
לְחַלֵּל [halàl].

## CONCLUSION

The phonetical similarity and the semantic difference between the two roots could be **interpreted** as ‘**warning to every human person that if the praise of God is legalistic, not clean enough as the light is, the praise may become a profane, a defile, polluted, desecrated act**’.

Mony Almalech

**THANK YOU**

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