

Culto  
Worship

Non è solo teologicamente che si pone la trascendenza, o nel foro interiore degli individui, ma anche, e forse soprattutto, nella comunicazione: è attraverso la parola, financo quella interiore, come pure attraverso i gesti, le posture, le espressioni del volto, che gli esseri umani proiettano nello spazio e nel tempo il simulacro di un essere superiore, o perlomeno di una superiore dimensione dell'esistenza, cui accedere solo in occasioni extra-ordinarie, e secondo percorsi accuratamente codificati. È poi sempre nella comunicazione, largamente intesa, che questi simulacri dell'"ontologicamente altro" sono condivisi e potenziati nell'afflato di un gruppo, di una comunità, di una fede. Il numero 11-12 di «Lexia» getta uno sguardo partecipe ma rigoroso sulle forme semiolinguistiche di questa interazione, caratteristica dell'umano attraverso i secoli e le culture. Contemporaneamente si interessa al destino di tali forme nell'epoca delle società secolarizzate, o di quelle in cui le vie tradizionali del sacro convivono e competono con nuovi modi di porre la trascendenza. Da un lato, dunque, ci si interroga su cosa siano (e su come siano) la preghiera, il rituale e il culto nelle religioni tradizionalmente intese. Dall'altro lato si investigano le metamorfosi di questa comunicazione nelle avventure postmoderne del sacro, quando il senso della trascendenza si tramuta in quello di una trascendenza del senso. Ne deriva un mosaico complesso di saggi e analisi, che spaziano dalla preghiera nelle Religioni del Libro sino ai culti civili, mediatici, consumistici, artistici delle società contemporanee.

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## Culto

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Worship

*a cura di*  
*edited by*  
**Massimo Leone**

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# Indice

- II Prefazione / *Preface*  
*Massimo Leone*

Parte I  
**Il senso del culto nella religione**

Part I  
**The meaning of worship in religion**

I.1 Prospettive semiotiche / *Semiotic perspectives*

- 33 Culto, preghiera, tefillàh  
*Ugo Volli*
- 63 *Shikata ga nai* ou Encore un pas pour devenir sémioticien!  
*Eric Landowski*
- 89 Il rito senza parole e il cadavere che sempre racconta: pratiche di destrutturazione semiotica nella tradizione tibetana  
*Guido Ferraro*
- 109 From the Hieroglyphic Monad to Angel Magic. Semiotic Aspects of John Dee's Esotericism  
*György E. Szönyi*
- 137 Hablar a Dios  
*María Luisa Solís Zepeda*

- 153 L'initiation à la prière dans le *Chemin de la vie éternelle* du jésuite Antoine Sucquet (1623): un parcours entre image et texte

*Andrea Catellani*

- 169 What Does “Psalm” Mean in Hebrew?

*Mony Almalech*

- 191 Being in Order. Ritual and Habit in Charles S. Peirce's Philosophy

*Reni Yankova*

1.2 La prospettiva interdisciplinare /  
*The interdisciplinary perspective*

- 213 Il rito ovvero la questione dell'origine

*Sergio Ubbiali*

- 233 Dal *cult* al culto: l'irritazione della *vicarious religion*

*Luigi Berzano*

- 247 Mediare le religioni africane: il caso del Pentecostalismo

*Cecilia Pennacini*

- 263 Il senso della preghiera nella prospettiva delle pratiche sociali

*Carlo Genova*

- 279 La morfologia della preghiera nell'agiografia medievale

*Marco Papasidero*

Parte II

**Il senso del culto al di là della religione**

Part II

**The meaning of worship beyond religion**

2.1 Culti civili / *Civil Worship*

- 297 The Eucharistic Chiastic Trope in American “Civil Religion”:  
Ritual Interdiscursivity and the Production of Cultural Inter-  
texts  
*Michael Silverstein*
- 327 A Ritual to Deal with an Unspeakable Trauma: the Case of  
the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo  
*Cristina Demaria*  
*Anna Maria Lorusso*
- 357 L’istituzione culturale del *Reich*. Echi contemporanei del *Bo-  
kassa* di Herzog  
*Paolo Heritier*
- 377 I discorsi del Presidente Napolitano sull’unità nazionale come  
professione di fede: per uno studio semiotico della religione  
civile  
*Jenny Ponzo*
- 395 Being a Politician and the Culture of Amazing your Dinner  
Guests  
*Ivo Velinov*

## 2.2 Culti mediali / *Media worship*

- 411 Anthropo–sémiotique de l’efficacité rituelle: rites religieux,  
rites séculaires et rites spectaculaires  
*José Enrique Finol*
- 429 Il mondo di Steve Jobs: tra visioni distopiche e indulgenze  
tecnologiche  
*Gianluca Cuzzo*
- 443 Per una ritualità della morte senza il corpo  
*Eleonora Chiais*
- 461 Facebook, santuario virtuale di gocce di vita reale  
*Daniela Ghidoli*



- 479    Semiology: the Greek Press Loves It  
*Evangelos Kourdis*

2.3 Culti & consumo / *Consumption worship*

- 497    The Role of Irony in Ritualistic Teen Talk  
*Marcel Danesi*
- 509    From Earth to Altar, through the Supermarket. The Offerings  
of Food to the Buddha between Thai Tradition and Moder-  
nity  
*Simona Stano*
- 527    Rituals of Consumption: a Semiotic Approach for a Typology  
of Nightlife  
*Milena Hristova–Markova*  
*Dimitar Trendafilov*

2.4 Arti del culto / *Worship arts*

- 545    Appunti sul secondo movimento della terza sinfonia di Gó-  
recki  
*Francesco Galofaro*
- 573    All That Fall: Ritual and Myth in Samuel Beckett’s Drama  
and Prose  
*Antoaneta Doncheva*
- 587    Reading the City as a Poetic Ritual  
*Eva Navarro Martínez*
- 601    Raja Yoga and Semiotic Analysis. An interview with Anthony  
Strano, a ‘Contemporary Yogi’  
*Anastasia Christodoulou*
- 621    Lo spazio della preghiera. Sacro contemporaneo  
*Davide Tatti*

Parte III  
**Conclusioni: dal senso del culto al culto del senso**

Part III  
**Conclusions: from the meaning of worship to the worship of meaning**

- 631 Petition and Repetition: on the Semiotic Philosophy of Prayer  
*Massimo Leone*

Parte IV  
**Recensioni**

Part IV  
**Reviews**

- 665 Jean-Jacques Boutaud, *Il senso goloso*. Edizioni ETS, Pisa 2012, 230 pp.  
*Simona Stano*
- 675 Gianfranco Marrone e Alice Giannitrapani (a cura di) *La cucina del senso*. Mimesis, Milano 2012, 371 pp.  
*Simona Stano*
- 685 Paola Gambarota, *Irresistible Signs: The Genius of Language and Italian National Identity*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2011, 349 pp.  
*Jenny Ponzio*
- 693 Note biografiche degli autori / *Authors' Biographies*
- 707 Call for papers. Estasi
- 711 Call for papers. Ecstasy

## What Does “Psalm” Mean in Hebrew?

MONY ALMALECH

ITALIAN TITLE: *Che significa “salmo” in Ebraico?*

ABSTRACT: It is generally believed that the psalm is an intimate communication between the individual and God. The interdisciplinary semiotic approach reveals a string of meanings and conditions for the Hebrew text: 1. In Hebrew the word *psalms* [tehilim] derivates from the root *He–Lamed–Lamed* that produces the words *to praise; to shine*, i.e. the root of the Hebrew words for *shining* and *psalms* includes instructions for those who intend to sing psalms: **the psalmist must flash forth light**; 2. From the perspective of semiotics of colors, every time the root *He–Lamed–Lamed* is used, the text radiates macro–white. It is because *light* is a prototype for white; 3. The Hebrew Word View (Hebrew language and Hebrew spelling) presents a warning. In Hebrew there exists a very similar root, *Het–Lamed–Lamed*, generating the words [halàl] *to profane, to defile, to pollute, to desecrate, to wound, to kill*. Thus the border between *to shine, to praise* and *to profane, to defile, to desecrate* is very thin — just as the border between the short [h] and the non–short [h]. This warning is not passed into the Indo–European and the Finno–Ugric texts the way it is in Hebrew, because of the interlinguistic dissymmetry. 4. Another case of interlinguistic dissymmetry is the Biblical basic color term for blue [tehèlet], which has non short [h] spelled with the letter *Haf*. Numbers 15:38–40 commandment to meditate on the blue color [tehèlet] of tassels (during the worshiping) helps to obey the commandments and to accomplish the state of emission of spiritual light when singing psalms [tehilim]. 5. These signs are now decoded and this allows for a better understanding of the Bible and hermeneutic interpretation.

KEYWORDS: *psalm; to praise; to shine; to pollute; to desecrate; blue color; light; word view.*

## 1. Psalms and the roots *He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל and *Het-Lamed-Lamed* הלל

Regardless of what kind of psalm is present, it is generally accepted that the psalm is an intimate communication between the individual and God. As an intimate communication with God, every kind of psalm is a kind of worship.

The psalms are another important example of a significant string of contents that has remained hidden in the Hebrew text because of interlingual asymmetry and dissymetry.

My understanding of the role and place of the Hebrew language and spelling in a semiotic approach to the Bible is explicitly presented in sufficient details (Almalech 2011). It is based on my fluent knowledge of Modern Hebrew, on decades of research on Hebrew grammar, as well as on decades of study of academic biblical studies and theological literature, on the practical work on Bulgarian-Hebrew Dictionary (Almalech 2004b) and the Bulgarian-Hebrew phrase book (Almalech 2002). Hebrew grammar and spelling are used to decode the original message of the Old Testament. Hebrew grammar and spelling are used to decode the original message of the Old Testament. Semiotics of color has an important role in my approach (Almalech, 1996, 2004a, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2010, 2011), as well as the cognitive aspects of the theory of prototypes of colors (Rosch 1972, 1973, 1975a, 1975b, 1975c, 1977, Rosch et al 1976; Lakoff 1978).

Decoding Hebrew text works for a better understanding of the Bible and, ultimately, for Biblical hermeneutics.

Psalms, book of the Old Testament, is composed of sacred songs or of sacred poems. ... titles of many individual psalms contained the word *mizmor*, meaning a poem sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument. The Greek translation of this term, *psalmos*, is the basis for the collective title *Psalmoi* found in most manuscripts, from which the English name *Psalms* is derived. ... Rabbinic literature uses the title *Tehillim* ("Songs of Praise"), a curious hybrid of a feminine noun and a masculine plural ending. (EB)

In approximately one hundred appearances of the Noun Phrase “Psalm of David” the word *psalm* stands for the Hebrew lexeme מִזְמוֹר [mizmòr]. The word מִזְמוֹר [mizmòr] derives from the root *Zain-Mem-Reish* זָמַר which is found in the words *sing, sing praise, make music* זָמַר [zamàr]; *song, psalm* זָמַר [zamàr]; *playing music, singing*.

The name of the book of Psalms in Hebrew is תְּהִלִּים [tehilim] (“Songs of Praise”) but not “mizmôr”. As is noted in the Encyclopædia Britannica, the word תְּהִלִּים [tehilim] is a “curious hybrid of a feminine noun and a masculine plural ending”. The lexeme תְּהִלִּים [tehilim] is derived from the root *He-Lamed-Lamed* הִלֵּל.

The root *He-Lamed-Lamed* הִלֵּל denotes the paradigm of *praise, shine, psalm, to radiate light, to shine*. The noun תְּהִלָּה [tehilà] means *praise*. In gender it is feminine, and its regular form for plural is תְּהִלוֹת [tehilòt]. Namely this is the form used in Psalms 22:3:

וְאַתָּה קְדוֹשׁ יוֹשֵׁב תְּהִלוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל:  
(WTT Psalm 22:4)

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

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

However, the title of the book Psalms in Hebrew is תְּהִלִּים [tehilim] which is a plural masculine form of תְּהִלָּה [tehilà].

We can see that the tradition calls for the masculine form as a title of the whole book. In a written culture of long standing such as the Jewish one, the number and the gender of a form is significant, especially if the regular form for plural is feminine, but the name of the book of Psalms is masculine. Hence the need for a

careful examination of the extended semantics of תְּהִלָּה [tehilà], by checking the derivative potential of the root.

If the derivative territory of the Hebrew root *He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל includes *to sing praises, to sing psalms, psalm, praise, to radiate light, to shine*, the root is one of the Hebrew ways of semantically transforming of the idea of light in the text and into the reader's/ listener's linguistic conscious and unconscious states.

The term "Semantic Transformations of the Idea of Light" refers to the macroimpact of the text of the Old Testament.

The term "transformations of the idea of light" unites more than 22 different Hebrew notions of light. Every single notion of *light* has its corresponding Hebrew root and extended semantics.

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*, and *to praise, psalm* are not derivatives of one and the same root. The root of the Hebrew words for *shining* and *singing psalms* includes instructions for those who intend to sing psalms: the psalmist must be pure, clean and immaculate.

The root *He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל is involved in the forming of macrolight white in Hebrew. The term *macrolight* is used in the sense of Witkowski and Brown 1977, pp. 50-57 and Anna Wierzbicka, 1990.

At the same time the root *He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל also has its "dark", desecrating antonym which is also a paronym – the root *Het-Lamed-Lamed* הלל that occupies the paradigm *to profane, to defile, to pollute, to desecrate; to wound (fatally), to bore through, to pierce; to slain; window*. See הלל in Gesenius 1996.

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* הלל there is a short *h* ה, while in *Het-Lamed-Lamed* הלל there is a non-short *h* ח.

Perfect articulation habits are necessary for making this difference in usage. I know that for people whose mother tongue is Bulgarian it is very difficult to pronounce the short Hebrew *h* correctly (aspiration) because there is no such sound in Bulgarian. They would be well advised not to try to pronounce it at all.

These two counterpart roots are interesting for a number of reasons:

There is phonetic similarity based on the sound *h* and its allophones. There is also an orthographic similarity – *He* ה and *Het* ח. At the same time the roots build semantic opposition: *to sing songs of praise, to shine, to praise* (*He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל) – *to profane, to desecrate, to slain* (*Het-Lamed-Lamed* חלל).

*He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל makes up part of the picture of the world (Worldview) by signifying one of many different kinds of light created by the Hebrew language. (Almalech, 2010)

The artifact *window* חלון [halòn] (*Het-Lamed-Lamed* חלל) is in opposition to *psalm, shine, praise* (the root *He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל), but at the same time the function of the *window* is to provide light.

The root *He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל takes part (explicitly and implicitly) in the naming of the basic semantic features of the prototypes of white (light, snow, milk, see E. Rosch) – ‘pure’, ‘purity’, ‘clean’, ‘immaculate’.

### 1.1. Data on the root *He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל from BibleWorks 98

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 *to praise* הלל [halàl]. This will appear in about 200 uses when the explicit meaning is *to praise*, whereas the implicit one is *to shine* הלל [halàl]. In Indo-European languages *to praise* (Bul.<sup>1</sup> възхвалявам) and *to shine* (Bul.

1 The examples for Bulgarian translations (Bul.) are from Библия 1940, Библия 1992, Библия 2001, Библия 2002.

*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 other words, in Indo-European languages there is no derivative connection between *to praise* (Bul. *възхвалявам*) and *to shine* (Bul. *излъчвам блестяща светлина*) while in Hebrew in both cases we read and write הלל [halàl].

In English and in Bulgarian the word *psalm* (*псалм*) has no association and no logical connection evolved from the derivative relationship to *light* and to *shining*. The data from TWOT in BibleWorks98 shows clearly that the situation is the opposite in Hebrew, i.e. when we say *praise* תהלה [tehilà] or the book of *Psalms* תהלים [tehilim], it implies *to shine* הלל [halàl]:

הלל (hàlâl) I. **shine**.

הֵלֵל (hêlêl) **Helel**. This proper name is a *hapax legomenon* describing the King of Babylon (Isa 14:12). L.J.C. (N.A., M.A. - actually the proper name is pronounced [ilel]).

הלל (hàlâl) II. **praise, boast** (only in Piel, Pual and Hithpael).

הִלּוּל (hillûl) **rejoicing, praise**.

מְהַלֵּל (mahâlâl) **praise**.

תְּהִלָּה (t<sup>h</sup>illâ) **praise**.

Our root occurs 206 times. (TWOT)

## 1.2. Verbs

- *To flash forth* הלל [halàl] (Bul. *блести/излъчва*) (Job 41:10/18); *to give/to flash forth* יְהִלּוּ [iahelù] *their light* (אורם) (Job 29:3; 31:26; Isaiah 13:10) Most of the uses of the verb are in the context of comparison between the monotheistic God and mythological creatures – the Leviathan, the sun and the moon as pagan symbols. In Isaiah 13:10 English and Bulgarian need an approximate description (*give/flash forth* and the Bulgarian equivalent of *to give* – *давам, дам.*) to deliver the original sense. Only Библия 2001 resolves the problem with a semantically close verb – *излъчвам* (*radiate*). This Bulgarian verb does not contain the



semantic feature ‘light’ while the Hebrew יְהִלֵּי [iāhelù] necessarily includes ‘light’ in its semantics. The situation varies in other Indo-European languages: LXX δώσουσιν; VUL *expandent*; IEP *brillare*; BFC *scintiller*; RST дают; BTP *jaśniały* and BKR *svítiti* are equivalents of *to shine*.

- The verb לְהִלֵּל [lehalèl] is infinitive form and is translated in a variety of ways: *to sing praise; leading the praise; leading in the celebration* (Bul. да псалмопеят; да пеят псалми; ръководеха хвалението; славословие). The Russian text prefers славословии (2 Chronicles 23:13).
- Non-standatrd meanings: יְהוֹלִילֵי [itholelù] – *shall rage/race madly/rage*; Bul. *буйствуват, пренускат, търчат*; but not *to shine* (Nahum 2:5); in Psalm 75:4/5 the verb תְּהַלֵּל [taholù] is translated as *foolishly; boast; deal boastfully; transgress* (Bul. постъпвам надменно; гордея се; безумствам). The other Indo-European translations present a large variety – *d’arrogance; d’insolence; glorifies* etc.

### 1.3. The proper name Hilel הִילֵּל – Lucifer

Isaiah 14:12 tells us about the king of Babylon הִילֵּל [ilèl], which is a derivate from the root *He-Lamed-Lamed* הִלֵּל. The name is related to the verb *to shine* הִלֵּל [halàl]. Some translations (KJV) use the proper name *Lucifer* to transmit the Semitic proper name הִילֵּל [ilèl]. Others use loan translation and the result is *star of the morning* (NAU). The Bulgarian word Деница means exactly *star of the morning*. The other Bulgarian version is Сияйна звезда, lit. *Shining star*; the Septuagint’s ἑωσφορος is *morning star*. The BTP *Jaśniejący* is a Slavic word which is a loan translation of *Lucifer*; Vulgata – the common name *lucifer*; IEP – *astro del mattino*; BFC – *l’astre brillant*; TOB – *Astre brillant*; FIN – *kointähti*; EST – *hommikutäht*.

*Helel* הִילֵּל [ilèl] is a popular Semitic proper name but it is also symbolical according to the Biblical principle “such as the man

– such is the name”, e.g. Jacob becomes Israel, and vice versa: “the name creates the man as the name is”. Obviously the idea of the “fallen Lucifer” fits into this ancient logic. In Isaiah 14:12 the symbolism is directed towards the fallen angel: “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer” recalls to the fallen angel Lucifer. One more argument for the angelic symbolism is the second part of the verse – “How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!”.

#### 1.4. *Halleluyah*

The Hebrew sentence “Praise God” הַלְלוּ יְהוָה [halelù iàh] is very popular in Christianity in the form of one word – “Hallelujah”. Actually הַלְלוּ [halelù] is an imperative form of the verb הָלַל [halàl]. “Praise God” הַלְלוּ יְהוָה [halelù iàh] appears 35 times in the Old Testament. Wikipedia presents objective and good quality information in the article *Hallelujah*:

*Hallelujah, Halleluyah* and the Latin form *Alleluia* are transliterations of the Hebrew word הַלְלוּ יְהוָה meaning “Praise Yah”.

(Wikipedia)

The article on “Hallelujah” in the *Macmillan Dictionary and Thesaurus* is meaningful for those who are not familiar with the role and place of the psalm and the ‘psalm-worship’ relation. (*Hallelujah* in MD) What is missing is the connection of Hallelujah to the emission of light. Especially in the context of the fact that there are 22 different Hebrew roots, which denote, in fact, 22 kinds of light, see Almalech, 2010.

For the linguistic consciousness of an educated and sensitive Hebrew reader *hallelujah* implies *radiating light*. For an uneducated and insensitive Hebrew reader the word-derivative relation ‘light-hallelujah’ works at the level of linguistic subconsciousness.

### 1.5. Translation of words derived from He-Lamed-Lamed הלל

The examination of the root *He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל 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 explicitly designate *shine*. The cognitive presence includes all cases when, in English, we have *to praise, rejoicing, praise, psalms* or even *to 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 conscious and subconscious levels. Such derivative motivated associations do not exist in the Indo-European languages.

### 1.6. Data on the root Het-Lamed-Lamed חלל from Bible Works 98

According to **TWOT**, the semantics of the root *Het-Lamed-Lamed* חלל is:

- חָלַל (ḥālal) I. wound (fatally), bore through, pierce.
- חָלַל (ḥālāl) slain, fatally wounded.
- חָלָה (ḥallâ) cake (if pierced).
- חָלוֹן (ḥallôn) window.
- חָלִיל (ḥālîl) flute, pipe.
- חָלַל (ḥālal) play the pipe.
- מְחִלָּה (m<sup>e</sup>ḥillâ) hole.
- חָלַל (ḥāl) II. 1. profane, defile, pollute, desecrate; 2. begin (Hiphil only).
- תְּחִלָּה (t<sup>e</sup>ḥillâ) beginning, first.
- חָל (ḥōl) profaneness, commonness.
- חָלַל (ḥālāl) profaned, dishonoured, unhallowed.
- חָלִילָהּ (ḥālîlâ) far be it (from me etc.), God forbid that emphatic substantive used as negative particle or interjection. (TWOT)

There is a strong level of phonetic and spelling closeness between חָלַל [ḥalàl] and חָלַל [ḥalàl], but on the level of semantics the verbs חָלַל [ḥalàl] and חָלַל [ḥalàl] are antonyms:

‘to praise the God of Israel הָלַל [halàl]’ vs. ‘to profane God of Israel חָלַל [halàl]’;

‘to praise the God of Israel הָלַל [halàl]’ vs. ‘to desecrate the God of Israel חָלַל [halàl]’;

‘to shine הָלַל [halàl]’ vs. ‘to pollute חָלַל [halàl]’

The meanings of the verb in Paal הָלַל [halàl] are *wound (fatally), bore through, pierce* (Bul. *ранявам смъртоносно; убивам*). The meanings of the verb in Piel חָלַל [hilèl] are *profane, defile, pollute, desecrate*; (Bul. *осквернявам, принизявам, опорочавам*), related to the profanisation of the contract with God.

### 1.7. Conclusions.

The relationships between the roots *He-Lamed-Lamed* הָלַל and *Het-Lamed-Lame* חָלַל as well as the conclusions are mine. They can be perceived as a hypothesis.

Classical knowledge on the essence of the psalm comprises the following: being sincerely and deeply thankful for and/or satisfied in lauding a superior quality(ies) or great act(s) of the object; delight and rejoicing. The psalm reflects very important personal feelings and, in addition it was especially uniquely congregational; the strong relationship between praise and intellectual content.

Out of this classical knowledge on the essence of the psalm some new findings have emerged.

Different features of the psalm are pointed out by root semantics analysis:

The root *He-Lamed-Lamed* הָלַל marks the direction ‘from man to God’, i.e. the semiotic axis ‘from below upwards’.

The psalm should be a transformation of the idea of light but not an act of desecrating the God.

The significance of the Hebrew *praise/psalm* of God is an associative fact of root semantics of *He-Lamed-Lamed* הָלַל where the

*psalm* is a derivate of *shine* and vice versa. The *psalm* in Hebrew linguistic presentation/categorization of the world should be a leakage of light in the form of spiritual shining. All of 57 Hebrew uses of *praise* תְּהִלָּה [tehilà] carry the semantic clue ‘shine’ in Hebrew, missing in Bulgarian, English, Estonian and other texts.

Of course such radiating of moral purity is possible only if the behaviour of the psalm singer before the psalmody and the prayer is clean and immaculate.

The significance of the Hebrew-specific fact is that every praise of God should be a leakage of light in the form of shining. This Hebrew regulation disappears in the Indo-European and in the Finno-Ugric texts of the Bible because of the interlinguistic dissymmetry.

TWOT aptly indicates that the psalm, as an activity and as a state, is not only a joyful and ecstatic emotion but also “the strong relationship between praise and intellectual content”. It is widely acknowledged that psalmody is an intimate contact between the individual and God.

Now it should be stated clearly that the intimate conversation and turning to God is impossible without the element ‘shine’ (‘radiating strong light’) which is the result of moral, spiritual and behavioral purity. All this is despite the burden of the Primeordial sin. In Hebrew, every time *praise* and *psalm* are given when via the word תְּהִלָּה [tehilà], in an associative way the idea of ‘shining’ and ‘giving light’ is expressed.

In Biblical and Modern Hebrew there is a paronymic relation between the roots *He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל and *Het-Lamed-Lamed* חלל. The resemblance is on the formal level – a phonetic and orthographical similarity based on the sound *h* and its allophones – the short [h] ה and the non-short [h] ח. There is a semantic opposition under the similarity of the form. At the same time, the slight difference between *He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל and *Het-Lamed-Lamed* חלל is essentially the difference between *He* ה and *Het* ח, i.e. the difference between the short [h] ה and the non-short [h] ח.

The phonetical similarity and the semantic difference between the two roots could be interpreted as ‘danger and 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’. Thus, if the short *h* ה from *shine, praise* הלל [halàl] turns into the non-short *h* ח (this is not hard at all), *shine* and *praise* turn into *profane, defile, pollute, desecrate* חלל [halàl] God.

In that way the *praise* and the *light* could be transformed to *profane*; the shining light disappears and an important mechanism of the transformation of the idea of light (the psalm) could disappear from the human life and acts.

- In the terms of linguistic relativity, the Hebrew linguistic presentation of the world is untranslatable into languages of different families.
- In terms of Lotman’s Semiosphere, the Hebrew phonetic similarity stays out of the semiosphere organized by Indo-European and the Finno-Ugric languages. The Hebrew language based wisdom that ‘when one sings psalms it is presumptive that he should be clean and radiate light’ also stays behind the border of the Indo-European and the Finno-Ugric semiosphere, and had never been absorbed in any way.
- Under the similarity of the form (*He-Lamed-Lamed* הלל vs. *Het-Lamed-Lamed* חלל) there is a Hebrew semantic opposition and warning: In Hebrew the boundary between *to shine; to praise* and *to profane, defile, pollute, desecrate, to wound, to kill* is very thin – just as the boundary between the short [h] and the non-short [h]. This warning is not passed into the Indo-European and the Finno-Ugric texts the way it is in Hebrew due to of the interlinguistic dissymmetry.
- Worship with psalms bears a very specific Hebrew linguistic representation of the moral warning which remained hidden for centuries but is now revealed.

## 2. Psalms and the blue color

### 2.1. The blue color and another letter, *Haf* כּ, for the non short [h].

The biblical term for the color *blue* is תְּכֵלֶת [tehèlet] and it is phonetically close to *psalms* תְּהִלִּים [tehilim].

The letter *Kaf* כּ is used in cases where the non short[h] changes in derivative words to [k], e.g. *king* מֶלֶךְ [mèleh], *kingdom* מַלְכוּת [malkùt]. The letter refers to the non short[h] and to [k]. That is why we call the letter *Kaf/Haf*. If the letter *Kaf/Haf* כּ/כ is the last letter in the word, then it is called *Kaf Sofit* and is written in another way – ךּ/ך. This does not change of the letter’s referent. Theoretically, there is a difference between the *Het* ח and *Haf* כּ but practically the referent of the letters is non short [h].

### 2.2. The blue color and the commandment from Numbers 15:38-40.

The color blue תְּכֵלֶת [tehèlet] is a part of the sacred four color unit, which is an obligatory part of the interiors of the tabernacle and the first temple. *Blue* has a special role in the 613 commandments:

38 Speak to the sons of Israel, and tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue.  
39 It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you played the harlot, 40 so that you may remember to do all My commandments and be holy to your God.

(NAU Numbers 15:38-40)

Ben Zion Bokser gives an example of the importance of this commandment in the post Talmudic era:

Through the commandment of the fringes, declared Rabbi Ahai Gaon, the children of Israel are given the means of seeing God “at every

hour,” thereby freeing them from the limitation pronounced in Exod. 33.20, that “man cannot see Me and live.”

(Bokser 1963, p. 30)

The hue should be produced by marine animals but never from plants.

Another element of special interest in the color blue was the delicacy of the operation by which the blue dye was prepared. It was extracted from a species of shellfish, called in the Talmud *halazon*, and found on the coast of the Mediterranean. The *halazon* was apparently the *murex*. Tyre was the center of the dye industry and coins minted in Tyre carry frequently the decoration of a murex shell.

(Bokser 1963, p. 2)

In Rome purple was the favorite dye, and it was also made from the murex. The continued decline of the Mediterranean world which followed the Islamic conquests in the seventh century destroyed the mollusc based dye industry and the thread of blue finally fell into obsolescence. The disappearance of the thread of blue did not put an end to speculations on the subject.

(Bokser 1963, 29-30)

### 2.3. The root of Biblical blue תְּכֵלֶת [tehèlet]

There is no agreement on the root of the word. One hypothesis is that the root comes from שְׂכֵלֶת [šhèlet] which means *oniha* – marine mollusk (murex, shell fish), which is an ingredient of incense, made only for the Lord. Another hypothesis connects תְּכֵלֶת [tehèlet] to the root *Kaf-Lamed-He* כֹּלֵה because of the words תְּכֵלֶת [tehlit] (*perfection, completion*) and תּוֹכֵלֶת [tohèlet] (*hope, expectation*).

### 2.4. The color blue, the sapphire of Chariot of God and their interpretation.

Scholars agree that Jewish tradition (Josephus, Rabbi Meir in Talmud, the Zohar) permanently associates תְּכֵלֶת [tehèlet] at



Numbers 15:38-40 to the divine level and to the mystical and magic powers of the sapphire of the Chariot of God (Exodus 24:10; Ezekiel 1:22-26).

and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself.

(NAU Exodus 24:10)

And above the firmament over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness as it were of a human form.

(RSV Ezekiel 1:26)

Then I looked, and behold, in the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim something like a sapphire stone, in appearance resembling a throne, appeared above them.

(NAU Ezekiel 10:1)

Bokser connects the meanings of the color blue with the prototypes of blue long before the theory of prototypes (Eleonor Rosch, 1976 et al) appeared.

Apart from its intrinsic aesthetic appeal as a color, blue carries an added interest; it resembles the color of the sea and the sky. In all cultures of antiquity the sky is conceived as the special abode of the deity, and this led to a closer association of the color blue with the deity. The thread of blue was, in other words, a link with the deity, and, gazing on the blue, one was really, by a chain of associations, gazing on the divine.

(Bokser 1963, p. 1)

The same is in Talmudic speculations:

Rabbi Meir's statement is: "Why was the color blue singled out from all other colors? Because blue resembles the sea and the sea resembles the sky and the sky resembles the throne of divine glory."

(Bokser 1963, p. 3)

Bokser's analyses leads to important conclusions which support my hypothesis:

The thread of blue was, in other words, a link with the deity, and, gazing on the blue, one was really, by a chain of associations, gazing on the divine. ... The law of the fringe has now gone through a radical transformation. Its essence is not in the fringe itself but in the thread of blue which, by a series of associations, is said to offer man the very greatest prize of the religious life, admission to God's presence. There are four elements in the chain of associations through which the color blue becomes a reminder of the "throne of divine glory," the blue thread, the sea, the sky, and the divine throne. The link between the thread, the sky, and the divine throne is understandably important. ... The resemblance between sea and sky was a demonstration of the link between the earthly and the heavenly and the blue fringe was a precious carrier of this mystery.

(Bokser 1963, p. 4-5)

For details and bibliography on biblical blue color, the sapphire of the Chariots of God and their interpretation, see Almalech 2010, 372-410, Bokser 1963, Scholem 1979.

### 2.5. *Conclusions.*

The relationship between psalms, the blue color and the sapphire from Chariot of God as well as the conclusions, are mine. They can be perceived as a hypothesis.

Genuine achievement of the light through psalms is a very difficult action, but the psalm still remains one of the easiest ways of access to the macro light blue (sapphire) of the Throne of the Lord.

Vise versa – Numbers 15:38-40 commandment to meditate on the blue color תְּכֵלֶת [tehèlet] of tassels (during the worshipping in the Temple) helps to obey the commandments and to accomplish the state of emission of spiritual light when singing psalms תְּהִלִּים [tehilim].

The blue color תְּכֵלֶת [tehèlet] helps to avoid desecrating (הִלָּל [halàl]) God and to achieve the state of radiating spiritual light (הִלָּל [halàl]) in singing psalms תְּהִלִּים [tehilim].

### 3. General Conclusions.

The Hebrew language and alphabet possess a complex system of concepts that promote logical thinking. This system has cognitive aspects such as the Hebrew wordview, different spelling of similar phonemes, the notion and vision of color. A remarkable feature of this system is the hermeneutic aspect held by language and spelling which works at the level of linguistic consciousness and subconsciousness.

The name of the book of Psalms תְּהִלִּים [tehilim] is just an example of the sophisticated mental systems existing in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament which are untranslatable into Indo-European and Finno-Ugric languages.

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- BHS – *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, fourth corrected edition, ed. K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, 1990.
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- BTP – *The Polish Millennium Bible 1984*, 4th Ed.: Polish Biblia Tysiąclecia, Wydawnictwo Pallottinum, Poznan.
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- EB – *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/> July 2011.
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- FIN – *The Finnish Pyhä Raamattu 1933/1938 käännös* (FIN), Vanha Testamentti XI 1933 / Uusi Testamentti XII 1938 taken with permission from Online Bible as published in 1993 by Stichting Publishare, The Netherlands.
- IEP – *The Italian Nuovissima Versione della Bibbia* (NVB), San Paolo Edizione. San Paolo Edizione, Roma Italia, 1995-1996.
- KJV – *King James Version*, 1769 Blayney Edition of the 1611 King James Version of the English Bible.
- LSG – *The French Louis Segond Version 1910* Copyright by the Online Bible Foundation and Woodside Fellowship of Ontario, Canada, 1988-1997.
- LXX – *Septuaginta*, ed. A. Rahlfs. Württembergische Bibelanstalt / Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, 1935.
- MD – *Macmillan Dictionary and Thesaurus: Free English Dictionary Online*. July 2011.

- NKJ – *The New King James Version*, 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc. 501 Nelson Place, Nashville, Tennessee.
- NAU – *The New American Standard Bible*, Copyright 1986 by The Lockman Foundation.
- NRS – *The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, Copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.
- RST – *The Russian Synodal Text of the Bible* (Orthodox Synodal Edition 1917).
- TOB – *French Traduction œcuménique de la Bible*, édition à notes essentielles, Copyright © 1988, Société biblique française & éditions du Cerf.
- TWOT – *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, originally published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois, 1980.
- VUL – *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, edited by R. Weber, B. Fischer, J. Gribomont, H.F.D. Sparks, and W. Thiele [at Beuron and Tuebingen] by Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft (German Bible Society), Stuttgart, 1969, 1975, 1983.

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