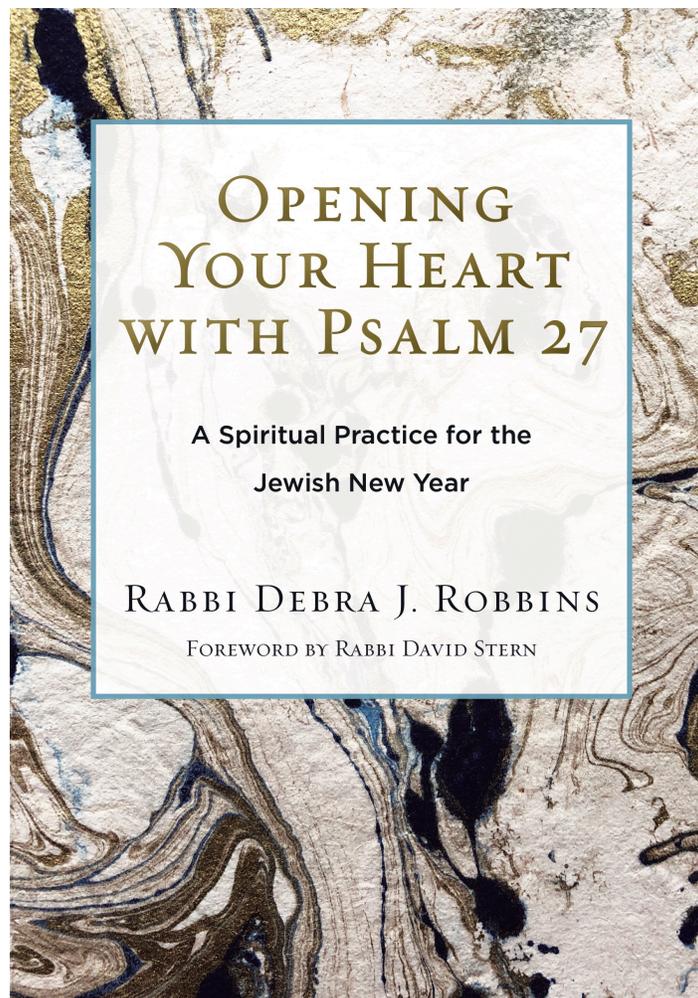


Source Sheets and Discussion Guide

Opening Your Heart with Psalm 27

A Spiritual Practice for the Jewish New Year

RABBI DEBRA J. ROBBINS



CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

NEWYORK • 2020 • 5780

Introduction

This guide provides fourteen source sheets that correspond to fourteen of the Reflections for Focus (one for each verse) in *Opening Your Heart with Psalm 27*, designed to help unpack some of the references in the specific reflections. Key words we are studying are bold in the Hebrew. Also provided with each source sheet is a set of discussion questions or a learning activity designed to deepen the study of that particular verse using a variety of modalities.

The materials can be used to study Psalm 27 verse by verse or as resources to deepen engagements with the Reflections for Focus as they appear in *Opening Your Heart with Psalm 27*.

For a weekly practice with adult learners, from Elul through Sukkot, the following is effective regardless of the order in which the Reflections for Focus appear in Opening Your Heart with Psalm 27.

Week 1 of Elul	My Light
Week 2 of Elul	In This I Trust
Week 3 of Elul	Call Me by My Nickname
Week 4 of Elul/ <i>S'lichot</i> /Pre-Rosh HaShanah	A Gracious Answer
Week of Shabbat Shuvah/Pre-Yom Kippur	They Are Waiting
Week After Yom Kippur and Before Sukkot	Courage, Every Day
Week of Sukkot	In the Rock with Moses

As a supplement for individuals and groups, we are providing an annual tracking chart at psalm27.ccarpress.org. The chart matches the designated reading to the appropriate day of the Gregorian calendar and Hebrew calendar. Rabbi Debra Robbins is also available as a guest teacher during this sacred season. Contact bookevents@ccarpress.org.

Best Practices for Facilitators

- 1) Commit to doing the practice for yourself
- 2) Invite others to join you
- 3) Organize acquisition of the book and make sure everyone has the materials they need
- 4) Set dates (ideally once a week) for the group to gather, in-person or online. Forty-five minutes is more than sufficient.

Options for sessions:

- Facilitate a different session each week with a different group to motivate participants to take up the personal practice.
- Organize a group that meets weekly at the same time, with the same people, to engage in the daily practice (on their own six days and together one day). Share reflections of how their practice had gone during the week.
- Use the book with a study group, either discussing the Reflection for Focus assigned to the specific day or one that suits the needs of the group. Do the practice and share written reflections.
- Teach material on the following source sheets to unpack referenced texts/themes in the designated Reflection for Focus before leading the group in the practice.
- Post a daily reminder to Facebook or send an email with the page number to participants with a corresponding photo, accompanying melody, or additional writing prompt.

Opening Your Heart with Psalm 27

RABBI DEBRA J. ROBBINS

“My Light”

Source texts for Psalm 27:1, pages 90–91

Psalm 27:1

לְדָוִד יְיָ אֱוֹרִי וַיִּשְׁעֵי מִמִּי אֵירָא יְיָ מֵעֹזֶה־חַיִּי מִמִּי אֶפְחָד:

Of David.

Adonai is my light and my victory—

From whom should I feel fright?

Adonai is the stronghold of my life—

From whom should I feel terror?

Psalm 97:10–12, Rabbi Richard Levy translation

אֱהִי יְיָ שִׁבְאוֹ רַע שִׁמְרַנְּפוֹת חֲסִידָיו מִיַּד רְשָׁעִים יִצִּילֵם: אִוֹר זֶרַע לְצַדִּיק
וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל שִׂמְחָה: שִׂמְחוּ צַדִּיקִים בְּיְיָ וְהוֹדוּ לְזִכָּר קִדְשׁוֹ:

Lovers of God, hate evil;

God guards the lives of the covenanted,

Delivering them from the hand of the wicked.

Light is sown for the just,

Delight for the upright of heart.

Delight in *Adonai*, O doers of justice,

Give thanks to the presence of the holiness of God.

High Holy Day *Machzor*

Excerpt from *Un'taneh Tokef*, translation from *Mishkan HaNefesh*

בְּרֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה יִכְתְּבוּן, וּבְיוֹם צוֹם כְּפוּר יִחְתְּמוּן...

On Rosh HaShanah this is written

on the fast of Yom Kippur this is sealed:

how many shall pass away from this world, how many shall be born into it;

who will live and who will die,

who will reach the ripeness of age, who will be taken before their time;

who by fire and who by water;

who by war and who by beast;
who by famine and who by drought;
who by earthquake and who by plague;
who by strangling and who by stoning;
who will rest and who will wander;
who will be tranquil and who will be troubled;
who will be calm and who tormented;
who will live in poverty and who in prosperity;
who will be humbled and who exalted—

וּתְשׁוּבָה וּתְפִלָּה וּצְדָקָה מֵעֲבִירִין אֶת רַע הַגְּזֵרָה.

But through return to the right path,
through prayer and righteous giving,
we can transcend the harshness of the decree.

Deuteronomy 18:18–20

שֹׁפְטִים וְשֹׁטְרִים תִּתֵּן לָךְ בְּכָל־שְׁעָרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּחַר לָךְ לְשֹׁבְטֶיךָ
וְשֹׁפְטֵי אֶתְהַעֲמֵם מִשֹּׁפְטֵי־צְדָקָה: לֹא־תִטֶּה מִשֹּׁפֵט לֹא תִכִּיר פָּנִים וְלֹא־תִקַּח
שֹׁחַד כִּי הַשֹּׁחַד יַעֲוֶר עֵינַי חֲכָמִים וַיִּסְלַף דְּבַר־יְצִדִיקָם: צְדָקָה צְדָקָה תִרְדֹּף
לְמַעַן תִּחְיֶה וַיִּרְשֶׁתָּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּחַר לָךְ:

You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes, in all the settlements that *Adonai* your God is giving you, and they shall govern the people with due justice. You shall not judge unfairly: you shall show no partiality; you shall not take bribes, for bribes blind the eyes of the discerning and upset the plea of the just. Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that *Adonai* your God is giving you.

Discussion Questions for Psalm 27:1, “My Light,” pages 90–91

There are two key words in this verse—Adonai ori, “Adonai is my light”—that link this psalm to important pieces of liturgy for Shabbat and the High Holy Day season as well as to the Torah portion read on Shabbat Shoftim, which falls during the month of Elul each year. Exploring the meaning of these words, and where and how they appear, can help us connect to the liturgical moments in deeper ways. They also may remind us as we read the psalm daily during the season that it is connected to something larger, that we are connected to something larger, a community, a tradition, the pursuit of Light and Justice, a God of Light and Justice, and that we are called to that pursuit.

Psalm 97 Discussion

Psalm 97 is part of the suite of psalms sung for Kabbalat Shabbat as the Sabbath begins. It is also the psalm sung as the ark is opened for the chanting and recitation of Kol Nidrei on Yom Kippur evening.

- There are many passages in psalms that use the imagery of light. Why do you think the rabbis selected the same passage to be used every Shabbat in one context and the same passage in a different context on the holiest night of the year?
- What are some of the challenges of this repetition? How can this synergy enhance your experience of celebrating Shabbat and standing with the congregation during *Kol Nidrei*?

Un’taneh Tokef Discussion

Psalm 97 introduces the idea that there is joy for those who are upright in their hearts, and light is bestowed upon those who manifest the quality of tzedek, righteousness and justice. The Un’taneh Tokef prayer also speaks to the person who engages in tzedek, giving voice to the hope that the practices of repentance, prayer and righteous action (more than charity) will overpower the pain and suffering we can experience in the world.

- When have you found that doing what is right and just in the world has helped you navigate a challenging situation or alleviated some pain in your life or the world?
- How could you commit, in some small way, to deepen your commitment to doing more of what is right and just in the world, to increase the light of hope and holiness, not only for yourself, but for others who are suffering?

Deuteronomy 18 Discussion

The Torah portion Shoftim, which includes these verses, is always read during the month of Elul, reminding us of the commandment: “Justice, justice you shall pursue.” There are many commentaries that explore the repetition of this verb in its imperative form, many of which emphasize the urgency of the action, not only for biblical times but in all generations.

- The Torah uses a very strong verb, *tirdof*, “pursue,” in regards to *tzedek*, “justice.” Why didn’t the Torah use “speak about” or “walk after” or “wait for” instead of pursue Brainstorm some synonyms for this word and explore how they can deepen your understanding and commitment to this pursuit.
- In the Torah, very often repetition of a word is a hint about urgency and a call to action. Why is this call to *tzedek* so essential for individuals and communities, not only in Elul but throughout the High Holy Day season?

Opening Your Heart with Psalm 27

RABBI DEBRA J. ROBBINS

“They Are Mine”

Source texts for Psalm 27:2, pages 20–21

Psalm 27:2

בְּקֶרֶב עָלַי מְרַעִים לֶאֱכֹל אֶת־בְּשָׂרִי צָרִי וְאִיְבִי לִי הֵמָּה כְּשֶׁלּוֹ וְנִפְּלוּ:

When evildoers approach me in battle to feed on my flesh--
My pursuers, my adversaries [they are mine]—
They have stumbled, they have fallen down.

Deuteronomy 23:10

כִּי־תֵצֵא מִחֲנֶה עַל־אִיְבֹיֶיךָ וְנִשְׂמַרְתָּ מִכָּל דָּבָר רָע:

When/If/Should you (singular) go out to war/battle with your enemies (plural)...
And God gives/delivers them over into your (singular not plural) power/hands...

Rashi on Deuteronomy 23:10

[This is in the plural because it is not really about war on the battlefield]. The Torah speaks only about the fight against our evil inclinations (our *yetzer hara*).

Baal Shem Tov

The Torah states “when you go forth” in the singular. Every individual Jew has no greater enemy than her Evil Inclination. If you go forth against it, “*Adonai* will deliver it into your hands.” The Torah promises you’ll emerge victorious. Not only that, but “you will take it captive” so that you’ll be able to harness the forces of the Evil Inclination to serve God.

Discussion Questions/Writing Prompts for Psalm 27:2, “They Are Mine,” pages 20–21

The Torah portion Ki Teitzei, which includes the passage from Deuteronomy 23 about how to approach enemies, is read on the second Shabbat in the month of Elul and compliments verse 2 of Psalm 27. Both texts express the challenges we face in confronting our enemies, and the commentaries to the Torah help illuminate the words of the Psalmist.

Discussion Questions/Writing Prompts

- How does the pronoun “you,” being in the singular, make the psalm more relevant in the month of Elul?
- How does the noun “enemies,” being in the plural, expand the metaphoric use of the word in doing the sacred work of this season?
- Why do you think the Psalmist used so much repetition in this verse? How do the synonyms for the word “enemy” function? Why does the Psalmist use three verbs to distinguish between the approach, the stumble, and the fall of the enemies?
- Consider the questions embedded in the Reflection for Focus that explore some of the enemies we each face at this time of year:
 - What are the old narratives that pursue me?
 - What are my adversaries, convictions, and habits that trap me in their grip?
 - What obstacles block my path, force me to run away, or to remain immobilized?
 - How will I go to battle against my enemies in this New Year?

Opening Your Heart with Psalm 27

RABBI DEBRA J. ROBBINS

“In This I Trust”

Source texts for Psalm 27:3, pages 24–25

Psalms 27:3

אִם־תִּתְּחַבֵּה עָלַי מַחֲבֵה לֹא־יִירָא לְבָבִי
אִם־תִּתְּקוּם עָלַי מִלְחָמָה בְּזֹאת אֲנִי בּוֹטֵחַ:

If a camp encamps against me,
my heart will not fear;
If a war arises against me,
In this I would trust:

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren Siddur*

Should an army besiege me, my heart would not fear.
Should war break out against me, still I would be confident.

Martin S. Cohen, *Our Haven and Our Strength*

Should a platoon camp against me, my heart shall not know fear;
should war be declared against me, even then shall I remain confirmed in my faith.

Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary*

Though a camp is marshaled against me,
my heart shall not fear.
Though a battle is roused against me,
nonetheless do I trust.

Pamela Greenberg, *The Complete Psalms: The Book of Prayer Songs in a New Translation*

If an encampment pitches tents against me,
my heart will not quiver.
If a war rises up against me,
in you I still trust.

Jewish Publication Society translation

Should an army besiege me, my heart would have no fear;
should war beset me, still would I be confident.

Translation Activity for Psalm 27:3, “In This I Trust,” pages 24–25

Note: This is one of my adult students’ favorite class activities—we’ve done it with many different verses and it never ceases to inspire everyone in the room that their own life experiences are great tools for interpreting text.

Materials:

- Source sheets with translations
- Pencils
- Lined paper

Directions:

1. Read each translation aloud (I like to have a different person represent each translation).
2. Ask students to read texts again to themselves and circle a word or two that are similar in two or three (or maybe more) of the translations. Draw lines between them so it looks like a big spider web.
3. Ask students to underline a word that is unique in each translation
4. Ask students to choose a single word from any of the translations that “sparkles” at them from the page. Draw lines around it or box it or somehow identify it as special on the page.
5. Invite students to write for five minutes (set a timer and write yourself during this time) about why it sparkles, how it speaks to you, what memories or feelings it evokes, what it makes you wonder about or think about in a different way. Remind the students (and yourself) to just write, not judge or edit, the writing—let the words and impressions or even questions flow, and just keep writing.
6. For a large group, invite people to share in pairs and then encourage a couple of brave souls to share with the whole group, either what they wrote or their reaction to the experience. For a smaller group, open it up for everyone to share.
7. Wrap up by inviting everyone to go back to the source sheet and write their own translation of the verse. Go around and ask everyone to read their new translation.

Opening Your Heart with Psalm 27

RABBI DEBRA J. ROBBINS

“One Hundred Times a Day”

Source texts for Psalm 27:4, pages 28–29

Psalm 27:4

אַחַת שְׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֲתֵי אוֹתָהּ אֶבְקֵשׁ שְׁבִיתִי בְּבֵית־יְיָ
כְּלַיְמֵי חַיִּי לַחַזוֹת בְּנַעַם־יְיָ וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהִיכְלוֹ:

One thing have I sought from
Adonai—how I long for it:
That I may live in the House of
Adonai all the days of my life;
That I may look upon the
sweetness of *Adonai*,
And spend time in the Palace.

Mitchell Dahood, *Anchor Bible Commentary*

One thing I have asked a hundred times,
this, O Yahweh, do I seek:

...*a hundred times*...Read *may-ate* as *may-aht* as in Ecclesiastes 8:12...The feminine absolute ending...is normal in Ugaritic-Phoenician and is not unknown in Hebrew...

Ecclesiastes 8:12

...The fact that a sinner may do evil a hundred times and his [punishment] still be delayed. For although I am aware that “It will be well with those who revere God since they revere God...”

אֲשֶׁר חָטָא עֲשָׂה רַע מֵאֵת
וּמֵאֲרִיךְ לוֹ כִּי גַם־יִוָּדַע אָנֹכִי
אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה טוֹב לְיִרְאֵי
הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יִירָאוּ מִלְּפָנָיו:

Babylonian Talmud, *M'nachot* 43b:15

It is taught in a *baraita* that Rabbi Meir would say:

A person is obligated to recite one hundred blessings every day,
as it is stated in the verse:

“And now, Israel, what [ma] does the Lord your God require of you” (Deuteronomy 10:12). Rabbi Meir interprets the verse as though it said one hundred [*me'a*], rather than *ma*.

Adapting the Practice Activity for “One Hundred Times a Day,” pages 28–29

Materials:

- Pens/pencils
- file cards
- copy of pages 28–29
- timer

Adapted Version of the Practice

1. Number 1–10 on the file card and set it aside.
2. Two Minutes to Sit
 - Invitation to settle into seat—feet planted, palms up, eyes closed or lowered, paying attention to breath.
 - Think about the past twenty-four hours. Going hour by hour, identify things big and small for which you are thankful.
 - When you get distracted and start making a different list or thinking about something else, go back to breathing and pick up at whatever hour you stopped, considering what happened at that time that you are grateful for having happened.
3. Two Minutes to Write

Next to each number on the card, write one thing you are grateful for from the past twenty-four hours.
4. Share

Ask ten volunteers to stand. Have them share their lists of ten things they are grateful for that happened in the last twenty-four hours. (This will be one hundred things!)
5. Read aloud “One Hundred Times a Day” (pages 28–29).
6. Conversation and/or Text Study
 - Discussion of the Dahood interpretation and the Talmud passage, if appropriate.
 - What surprised you about the lists?
 - What are ten ideas that would help us show more gratitude in our lives?
 - What would you like to try to do to show more gratitude between now and Rosh HaShanah?
 - How can this group help you to succeed?

Opening Your Heart with Psalm 27

RABBI DEBRA J. ROBBINS

“In the Rock with Moses”

Source texts for Psalm 27:5, pages 116–117

Psalm 27:5

כִּי יִצְפְּנֵנִי בְּסֻכָּה בְּיוֹם רָעָה יִסְתַּרְנִי בְּסִתְרֵי אֱהָלוֹ בְּצוּר יְרוּמֵמֵנִי:

That You might hide me in
Your sukkah on a chaotic day,
Hide me in the hiding places
of Your tent,
Raise me high upon a rock.

Rabbi Sam Feinsmith translation

For You envelop me in Your cooling shade on a bad day;
You enable me to find shelter in the confines of Your tent.
I am uplifted through Your rock-solid support.

Jewish Publication Society translation

He will shelter me in His pavilion
on an evil day
grant me the protection of His tent
raise me high upon a rock.

Exodus 33:17–23

And *Adonai* said to Moses, “I will also do this thing that you have asked; for you have truly gained My favor and I have singled you out by name.”

He said, “Oh, let me behold Your Presence!”

And God answered, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you the name *Adonai*, and the grace that I grant and the compassion that I show. But, you cannot see My face, for humans may not see Me and live.”

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה הִנֵּה מָקוֹם אֲתִי וְנִצַּבְתָּ עַל־הַצּוּר: וְהָיָה בְּעֵבֶר כַּבְּדֵי וְשָׁמַתִּיךָ
בְּנִקְרֹת הַצּוּר וְשָׁכַתִּי כַּפִּי עָלֶיךָ עַד־עֲבָרִי:

And *Adonai* said, “See, there is a place near Me. Station yourself on the rock and, as My Presence passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you will see My back; but My face must not be seen.”

Exodus 34:5-7

Adonai came down in a cloud;
God stood with him there,
and proclaimed the name *Adonai*.
Adonai passed before him and proclaimed:
“*Adonai, Adonai*,
a God compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger,
abounding in kindness and faithfulness,
extending kindness to the thousandth generation,
forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin;
yet God does not remit all punishment,
but visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children’s children,
upon the third and fourth generations.”

Deuteronomy 34:10

Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses—whom *Adonai* singles out, face to face...

Exploration of Shelter for Psalm 27:5, “In the Rock with Moses,” pages 116–117

This makes use of the Torah portion read on the Shabbat of Sukkot.

Translation Comparison

Read the translations together and track carefully the various interpretations.

- What are the differences?
- How do the various translations convey different experiences and emotions?
- What do you like?
- Consider crafting your own translation using a combination of words that speak to you.

Rabbi Richard Levy	Rabbi Sam Feinsmith	JPS
hide	envelop	shelter
sukkah	cooling shade	pavilion
chaotic day	bad day	evil day
hide me	enable me to find shelter	grant me protection
hiding places of Your tent	confines of Your tent	protection of His tent
high upon a rock	Your rock-solid support	high upon a rock

Discussion Questions about Shelter

This passage from Psalms, with its imagery of hiding/sheltering on a rock, echoes the imagery of the Torah portion read on the Shabbat of Sukkot, from Exodus 33 and 34.

- How do the passages contradict and complement each other?
- What places have been places of shelter and safety for you?
- What are the “rocks” upon which you have stood?
- When have you been a “rock” where someone else has found protection or support?
- How can you be a bit like Moses during these sacred days and glimpse even a bit, a single characteristic, of God’s Presence in the world?

Opening Your Heart with Psalm 27

RABBI DEBRA J. ROBBINS

“The Sound at the Center”

Source texts for Psalm 27:6, pages 40–41

Psalm 27:6

וְעַתָּה יְרוּם רֹאשִׁי עַל אֵיבֵי סְבִיבוֹתַי וְאֶזְבְּחָהּ בְּאֶהְלוֹ זְבַחַי תְּרוּעָה אֲשִׁירָה
וְאֶזְמְרָה לַיהוָה

Now my head rises high above
my enemies roundabout,
And in Your tent I'll offer
Offerings to the sound of *t'ruah*.
I shall sing and chant praises
to *Adonai*!

Numbers 29:1

וּבַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל־מִלְאכָתְּ עֲבֹדָה לֹא
תַעֲשׂוּ יוֹם תְּרוּעָה יִהְיֶה לָכֶם

In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations. You shall observe it as a day when the horn is sounded.

Mishnah Rosh HaShanah 3:7

One who blows into a pit or a cistern or a jug, if he heard the sound of the shofar, he has fulfilled his obligation, but if he hears the echo [also], he has not fulfilled his obligation.

And also one who was passing behind a synagogue or if his house was next to the synagogue and he heard the sound of the shofar or of the *m'gillah* [being read], if he directed his heart (had intention), then he has fulfilled his obligation, but if not he has not fulfilled his obligation.

Even though this one heard and this one heard, this one directed his heart and this one did not.

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Shofar, Sukkah, and *Lulav* 3:2

This *t'ruah* that the Torah discusses, due to the many years of exile, we are unsure what it is.

It may be the wail that women wail amongst themselves whilst crying.

It may be the sigh that one does, one after the other, when one is worried about a great stress.

It may also be both together, the sigh followed by the cry, as it usually comes afterwards.

This may be called *t'ruah*, as this is the way of a worrier, to first sigh, and then cry.

We therefore do all options.

Discussion Questions for Psalm 27:6, “The Sound at the Center,” pages 40–41

The shofar is sounded daily (except on Shabbat) during the month of Elul, one hundred times on Rosh HaShanah, and at the close of the day on Yom Kippur. Determining the technical sounds of the various calls is important, but even more important is consideration of how hearing them will impact our lives and call us to act in this season and throughout the year.

Explore the passage from Psalms and the source materials to identify:

- What are the actions we are called upon to engage in related to hearing the sound of *t’ruah*?
- How is the instruction to hear the actual sound, and not the echo, a reminder to pay attention and listen with the heart and not only the ear?
- What emotions are evoked and awakened by the sound of *t’ruah*? How are these universal and accessible experiences a good solution to the problem of not knowing the sound?
- How will you have the sound of the shofar at the center—of your thoughts, your experiences, your prayers—during these weeks of holiness?

Opening Your Heart with Psalm 27

RABBI DEBRA J. ROBBINS

“A Gracious Answer”

Source texts for Psalm 27:7, pages 71–72

Psalm 27:7

Hear, *Adonai*, my voice—
I am crying out!
Be gracious to me, answer me!

שְׁמַע־יְי קוֹלִי אֶקְרָא וְחַנּוּנִי וְעֲנֵנִי:

From *Gates of Repentance: The New Union Prayerbook for the Days of Awe*

Avinu Malkeinu,
Be gracious and answer us,
For we have little merit.
Treat us generously and with kindness,
And be our help.

אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ,
חַנּוּנֵנוּ וְעֲנֵנוּ,
כִּי אֵין בָּנוּ מַעֲשִׂים.
עֲשֵׂה עִמָּנוּ צְדָקָה וְחֶסֶד,
וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ:

From *Mishkan HaNefesh for Rosh HaShanah*

*Avinu Malkeinu, chadeish aleinu
shanah tovah.*

May we taste anew the sweetness of each day.

אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ, חֲדָשׁ עָלֵינוּ
שָׁנָה טוֹבָה.

*Avinu Malkeinu, malei yadeinu
mibirchotecha.*

Let us wake up to the blessings already in our grasp.

אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ, מְלֵא יָדֵינוּ
מִבְּרַכּוֹתֶיךָ.

*Avinu Malkeinu, choneinu vaaneinu;
ki ein banu maasim.
Aseih imanu tz'dakah vachessed,
v'hoshi-einu.*

However small our deeds, let us see their power to heal. May we save
lives through compassion, generosity, and justice.

אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ, חַנּוּנֵנוּ וְעֲנֵנוּ,
כִּי אֵין בָּנוּ מַעֲשִׂים.
עֲשֵׂה עִמָּנוּ צְדָקָה וְחֶסֶד,
וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ.

Listening Activity for Psalm 27:7, “A Gracious Answer,” pages 71–72

Part I: Prayer

- Read closely the different translations of the *Avinu Malkeinu* prayers. What do you notice? What do you like? What do you think was the goal of the translator?
- Compare the difference between Psalm 27:7 being written in the first person singular (hear me and answer me) and *Avinu Malkeinu* which is written in the first person plural (Hear us and answer us).

Part II: God

Questions for conversation, reflection, or writing:

- What images do you like to describe God? What metaphors are obstacles when you imagine God?
- What do you believe about God hearing the prayers of people?
- How is your experience of prayer different when you use personal or communal language?
- What “truth” would you like to hold/remember when you pray these words on the High Holy Days this year?

Part III: Music

Listen to two recordings of this anthemic High Holy Day prayer, one by the twentieth-century composer Max Janowski and one by the twenty-first-century composer Josh Nelson.

Max Janowski - <https://www.milkenarchive.org/music/volumes/view/cycle-of-life-in-synagogue-and-home/work/avinu-malkenu-janowski/>

Josh Nelson - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oYYATbKKBM>

- Share some adjectives to describe each composition—compare and contrast them.
- How is each piece powerful or spiritual to you?
- Why is it important to have old melodies and new melodies in a congregation and in your life?
- How can these melodies enhance your High Holy Day experiences?
- How do they help you think about what it means to be heard and to hear an answer?

Opening Your Heart with Psalm 27

RABBI DEBRA J. ROBBINS

“Bless Me and Keep Me”

Source texts for Psalm 27:8, pages 50–51

Psalm 27:8

לֵךְ אָמַר לְבִי בְקֶשׁוֹ פָּנֵי אֶת־פָּנֶיךָ יְיָ אֲבִיקֶשׁ:

My heart has said to You:

“Seek my face,”

I am seeking Your face, *Adonai*—

Numbers 6:24–26

May God bless you and keep you.

May God's face shine upon you
and be gracious to you.

May God's face be lifted toward you
and bring you peace.

יְבָרֶכֶךָ יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמְרֶכָּ:

יָאֵר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחַנֶּךָ:

יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּשֵּׁם לְךָ שָׁלוֹם:

Receiving Blessing Practice for Psalm 27:8, “Bless Me and Keep Me,” pages 50–51

Discussion Guide

1. Read Psalm 27, verses 8 and 9 in Hebrew to draw attention to the word *panecha*, Your (God’s) face. Note who is speaking and who is being spoken to.
2. Read the passage from Numbers, known as the Priestly Blessing, in Hebrew and English. Note who is speaking and who is being spoken to.
3. Two minutes to think, sitting in focusing position. When or where did you receive or witness this blessing? Give a few examples. Try to see as many details in your memory of the moment: Who else was there? What was the light like? How did you feel? What happened before or after the blessing moment?
4. Share the memory in pairs or around the table (depending on time and size of group)
5. Read pages 50–51 (Reflection for Focus: Bless Me and Keep Me)
6. Discuss: What is so audacious about what the Psalmist has done? How do you think you could find a voice like his/hers to speak to God?

To explore *Birkat Kohanim*, the Priestly Blessing, more deeply, consider watching this video and talking about it. You may conclude with the guided meditation video to close the session with blessing. Another option would be to listen to a recording of the blessing or simply read it together (in Hebrew or English or antiphonally).

Video teaching about the Priestly Blessing with Rabbi Jordan Bendat-Appell
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3tXsX_ltDI

Three-minute guided meditation by Rabbi Jordan Bendat-Appell
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TmZGRJlnZ6E>

Bonus Gift:

Listen to this beautiful setting of the Psalm 27:8 by the Israeli prayer group Nava Tehila
<https://navatehila.bandcamp.com/track/lakh-amar-libi-2>

Opening Your Heart with Psalm 27

RABBI DEBRA J. ROBBINS

“Call Me by My Nickname”

Source texts for Psalm 27:9, pages 52–53

Psalm 27:9

אַל־תִּסְתֵּר פְּנֵיךָ מִמֶּנִּי אֶל־תִּטְּבֵאֵף עַבְדְּךָ עֲזָרְתִּי הִיִּתְּ
אֶל־תִּטְּשֵׁנִי וְאֶל־תִּעֲזֹבֵנִי אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעֵי:

Do not hide your face from me
Do not turn Your servant away in anger,
You have been my help—
Do not forsake me, do not abandon me,
God of my deliverance.

Psalm 18:2–3

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶרְחֹמֶךָ יְיָ חֲזָקִי:
יְיָ סִלְעִי וּמְצוּדָתִי וּמִפְּלִטִי אֵלֵי צוּרִי אֶחְסֶה־בּוֹ מִגְּנִי וּקְרָר־יִשְׁעֵי מִשְׁגַּבֵּי:

He [David] said, I have loved you from the womb,
Adonai,

My strength!
Adonai is my towering crag, my fortress,
My rescuer.
My God is my rock, I take refuge in Him.
My shield, horn of my victory,
My stronghold!

Psalm 147:2–4

בּוֹנֵה יְרוּשָׁלַם יְיָ גִדְּחֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יִכְנֶס:
הֲרַפָּא לְשִׁבּוּרֵי לֵב וּמְחַבֵּשׁ לְעֵצָבוֹתָם:
מוֹנֵה מִסְפָּר לְכוֹכְבֵימ לְכֹלָם שְׁמוֹת יִקְרָא:

Adonai is rebuilding Jerusalem,
Gathering scattered Israel,
Healing wounded hearts,
Binding up our sores,
Numbering every star in the sky
Giving each a name.

Psalm 121:1-2

שִׁיר לַמַּעֲלוֹת אֲשֶׁר עֵינֵי אֱלֹהֵהֶרִים מֵאֵין יבֹא עֲזָרִי:
עֲזָרִי מֵעַם יְיָ עֲשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ:

A Song of Ascendings:
I will raise my eyes to the mountains:
From where will come my help?

My help is from the realm of *Adonai*,
Maker of heaven and earth

Genesis 2:18

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא טוֹב הָיִיתָ הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה־לוֹ עֲזָר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ:

It is not good for man to be alone: I will make an *ezer k'negdo*, a fitting helper for him.

Exploring Names for God with Psalm 27:9, “Call Me by My Nickname,” pages 52–53

Part I: Working the List

There are many names for God used throughout the Bible and especially by the Psalmists. Psalm 18 and Psalm 147 are particularly rich examples that include a wide range of options, especially if we adjust the capitalization of the words or make verbs into proper nouns when we translate them into English.

Invite each person to mark the list on the handout included below, based on the psalms on the source sheet, using the coding system underneath the names. (five minutes)

Part II: Let’s Talk about the Names on the List

Discuss in small groups (two to three people, fifteen minutes):

- Which two or three names resonate (or not) with you? Why? What feelings, memories, hopes do they evoke for you?
- Which one or two names (if any) are most distant or uncomfortable for you? Why? What could you learn from someone who finds those names meaningful?
- What could happen when a community uses different names in communal prayer? How would it facilitate or frustrate your experience in communal prayer?
-

Discuss as a whole group—ideally go around so everyone can speak:

- What was the biggest insight you gained from your partner?
- What is the biggest challenge you need to continue to think about?
- What else would you like to share about the conversations?

Part III: We Each Have Our Own List of Names

- How does the poem by Rivka Miriam echo and/or amplify the voice of the Psalmist?
- How does Rivka Miriam contradict or complement your ideas about names to call God?

Names of God from Psalm 18, Psalm 147, Psalm 121, and Psalm 27

You

Adonai

My Strength

Towering Crag

Fortress

My Rescuer

Rock

Refuge

Him

My Shield

Horn of Victory

Stronghold

Builder of Jerusalem

Gatherer of Jews

Healer of Broken Hearts

Binder of Wounds

Numberer of Stars

Namer of All

Maker of Heaven and Earth

My Help

- **circle** names that appeal to you, or you might use
- **underline** names you are surprised to see here
- **box** names you would *not* be inclined to use for God
- **star** names that could be human qualities
- **add** names for God you like or use that aren't included above

Read “**I Spread Out God’s Names in Front of Me**” by Rivka Miriam in *The Torah: A Women’s Commentary* (CCAR Press, 2008), page 353

Opening Your Heart with Psalm 27

RABBI DEBRA J. ROBBINS

“Never Abandoned”

Source texts for Psalm 27:10, pages 118–119

Psalm 27:10

כִּי־אָבִי וְאִמִּי עָזְבוּנִי וַיִּיָּאֲסֹפְנִי:

For my father and my mother have abandoned me,
Yet *Adonai* gathers me up.

Exodus 23:16

וְחַג הַקְּצִיר בְּכוּרֵי מַעֲשֵׂיךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּזְרַע בַּשָּׂדֶה וְחַג הָאָסֹף בְּצֵאת הַשָּׂנָה
בְּאָסֹף אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂיךָ מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה:

...and the Feast of the Harvest, of the first fruits of your work, of what you sow in the field;
and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in the results of your work
from the field.

Genesis 25:8

וַיָּגוּעַ וַיָּמָת אַבְרָהָם בְּשֵׁיבָה טוֹבָה זָקֵן וְשָׁבַע וַיֵּאָסֹף אֶל־עַמּוּיוֹ:

And Abraham breathed his last, dying at a good ripe age, old and contented; and he was
gathered to his people.

Genesis 49:33

וַיְכַל יַעֲקֹב לְצִוּוֹת אֶת־בָּנָיו וַיֵּאָסֹף רַגְלָיו אֶל־הַמֶּטֶה וַיָּגוּעַ וַיֵּאָסֹף אֶל־עַמּוּיוֹ:

When Jacob finished his instructions to his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and, breathing
his last, he was gathered to his people.

Deuteronomy 32:49–51

Ascend these heights of Abarim to Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab facing Jericho,
and view the land of Canaan, which I am giving the Israelites as their holding.

וַיָּמָת בְּהָר אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עֹלָה שָׁמָּה וְהָאָסֹף אֶל־עַמּוּיֶךָ בְּאֶשְׁר־יָמָת אֶהְרֹן אַחִיד
בְּהָר הַהוּא וַיֵּאָסֹף אֶל־עַמּוּיוֹ:

You shall die on the mountain that you are about to ascend, and shall be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people; for you both broke faith with Me among the Israelite people, at the waters of Meribath-kadesh in the wilderness of Zin, by failing to uphold My sanctity among the Israelite people.

Discussion Questions for Psalm 27:10, “Never Abandoned,” pages 118–119.

The festival of Sukkot is also called the Festival of Ingathering (Chag HaAsif), referring to the ingathering of the crops from the field during the fall harvest. Much of the symbolism of the festival focuses on this image of gathering—we gather the harvest, we gather in the sukkah, we gather the species of the lulav, we gather with our ancestors with the practice of ushpizin, we gather with our memories as the festival concludes with Yizkor memorial prayers. The word is commonly used in the Torah as a euphemism for death, when one is gathered to one’s people.

- How can the daily recitation of the psalm with focus on the word “gather” help you prepare not only for Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur but also to celebrate the festival of Sukkot, expanding its meaning?
- The Torah uses the same word to describe the deaths of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and Aaron. What qualities are manifest in these moments of gathering? How can they serve as inspiration for us at moments of death and also in daily life?
- Consider engaging in the practice of *lulav* and *etrog* when exploring this Reflection for Focus and discussing what it means to gather together the varied species as both guide and goad to our own lives.

Opening Your Heart with Psalm 27

RABBI DEBRA J. ROBBINS

“They Are Waiting”

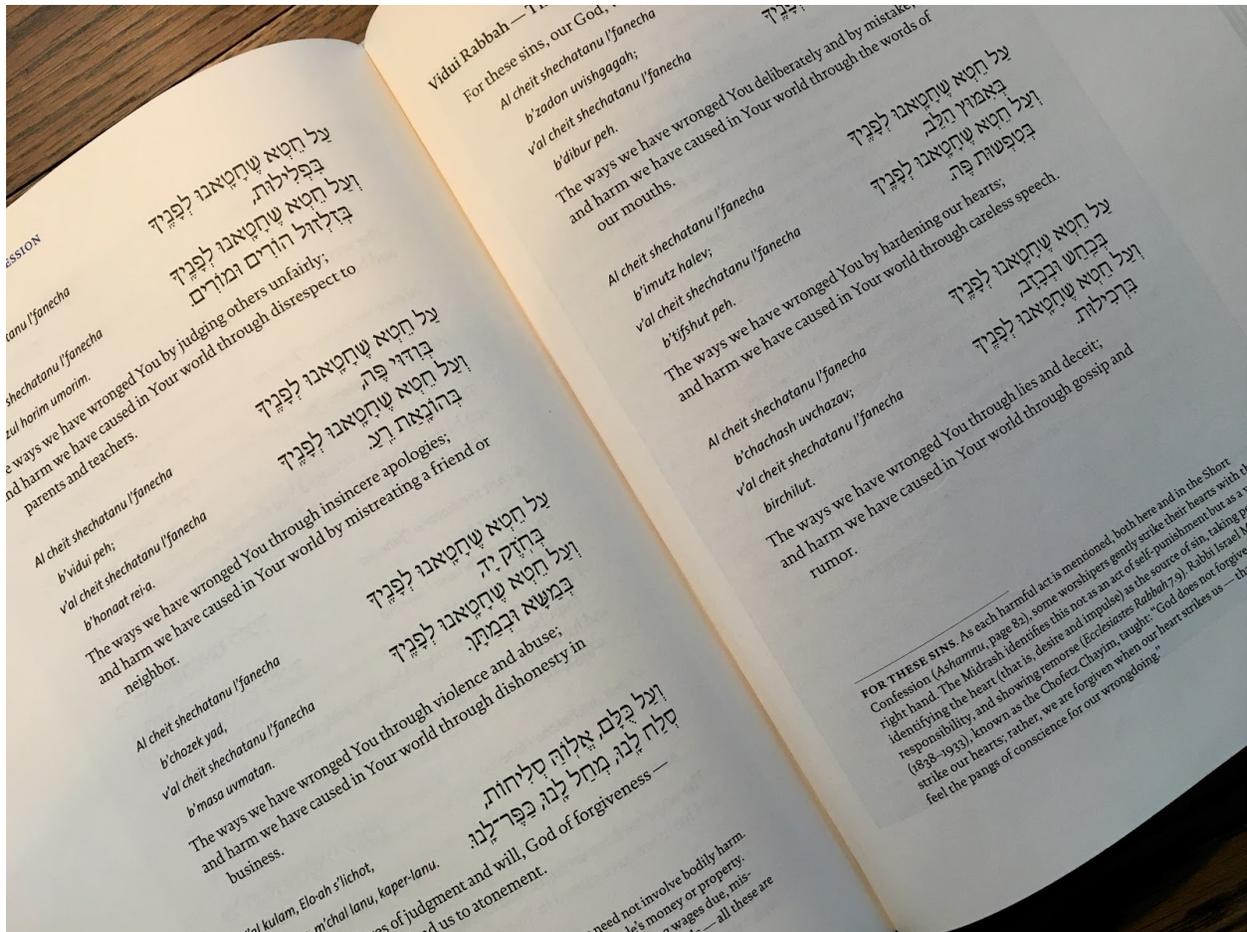
Source Sheet Psalm 27:11, pages 84–85

Psalm 27:11

הוֹרְנֵי יִי דַרְכְּךָ וּנְחֵנִי בְּאַרְחַ מִישׁוֹר לְמַעַן שׂוֹדְרֵי:

Make Your path apparent to me,
Guide me in the upright road
Because of those up ahead who lie in wait for me.

Mishkan HaNefesh for Yom Kippur, pages 86–87



Connecting Psalm 27:11 to the *Machzor*, “They Are Waiting,” pages 84–85

Reading the Photograph

The Photo

- Do you recognize this photo? How did you recognize it?
- What emotions or memories does it evoke?
- Why isn’t the photo straight on the page? Why aren’t we looking at a photocopy of the pages or at the books themselves?

All of this is to shift our perspective and help us see the page, the book, our sins, and ourselves differently, to look more closely at the details rather than just the familiar or the big picture.

The Sins

This amazing double page spread literally spreads out sins that wait for us. Notice how it:

- Identifies sins with words (more of them than any other type)
- Includes sins with our key relationships (those alive and deceased)
- Highlights sins we commit in the world and at work
- Reminds us of sins that are failures of judgement

The Refrain

The refrain of this central prayer is cut off. Why? Perhaps it’s too soon to ask for forgiveness—we haven’t done the work yet—and perhaps the refrain is too familiar to us—we might stay with it rather than the sins that are waiting.

The Footnote

This is a powerful and provocative embodied practice. Consider trying it. Can the gentle tapping with an open palm, rather than punitive pounding with a closed fist, prompt you to consider:

- Am I home? Am I awake?
- Can I feel the life beating in my heart? How will I use that gift?
- Can I coax my heart to open a bit more, to receive blessing and to grant forgiveness?

Additional Writing Prompts

- What is waiting for you when you open the *machzor*?
- What sins are waiting for you on Yom Kippur?

Conclusion

Perhaps conclude with singing the refrain, *vaal kulam*, as motivational preparation. Regardless of your congregational/communal practice, listening to varied melodies can open the words and our hearts in different ways.

Craig Taubman

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LF4GT_7bhkA

This is more traditional from Ner Shalom

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TObaRJ Rc6CE>

Opening Your Heart with Psalm 27

RABBI DEBRA J. ROBBINS

“Just Breathe”

Source Sheet Psalm 27:12, Pages 58–59

Psalm 27:12

אַל־תִּתְּנֵנִי בְּנַפְשׁ צָרִי כִּי קִמוּיָבִי עֵדֵי־שָׁקֶר וַיִּפַּח חָמָס:

Do not hand me over to the lust of my adversaries—
For false witnesses have risen against me,
Puffing violently!

Genesis 6:11

וַתִּשְׁחַת הָאָרֶץ לְפָנַי הָאֱלֹהִים וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ חָמָס:

The earth became corrupt before God; the earth was filled with lawlessness.

Genesis 2:7

וַיִּצֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים
וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנַפֵּשׁ חַיָּה:

Adonai formed the human from the dust of the earth. God blew into the nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living being.

Genesis 1:31

וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה־טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר
יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי:

And God saw all the Divine had made, and behold, it was very good, and there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

Psalm 27:12, Jewish Publication Society translation

Do not subject me to the will of my foes...

Psalm 27:12, Robert Alter translation

Do not put me in the maw of my foes...

Psalm 27:12, Pamela Greenberg translation

Don't give me over to the breath of my fears...

Discussion Questions for Psalm 27:12, “Just Breathe,” pages 58–59

It is important to remember that every translation is an act of interpretation. This is why it can be helpful and even essential to compare different places in the Bible where the same word is used and to compare, side by side, various translations.

- Why, of all the words that were possible choices, do you think the Psalmist chose the word *hamas*, the same word to describe the world in Noah’s time?
- What do you think the Psalmist was trying to communicate by choosing the same word *yipach*, for breathe/puff/fill [with air] that is used to describe God’s work in the creation story of Genesis?
- How do the various translators make the verse more or less accessible/relevant to you with their word choices? What are the benefits and shortcomings of each?
- How do these keywords from our core stories in the Torah, about the goodness of humanity and our potential to do wrong, connect us not only to the words of Psalm 27 but to the eternal challenges and blessings of all people?

Opening Your Heart with Psalm 27

RABBI DEBRA J. ROBBINS

“The Goodness of God Looks Like...”

Source Sheet for Psalm 27:13, pages 62–63

Psalm 27:13

לֹא־הָאֵמַנְתִּי לְרֹאֹת בְּטוֹב־יְיָ בְּאֶרֶץ חַיִּים:

Had I not the faith
That I would see the goodness of God in the land of life...

Genesis 1:31

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה־טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי:

And God saw all the Divine had made, that it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Numbers 24:5

מֵה־טוֹבוֹ אֹהֲלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכַּנְתֶּיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

How good are your tents [descendants of] Jacob, your dwelling places [people of] Israel.

Psalm 23:6

אֵךְ טוֹב וְחֶסֶד יְרַדְפוּנִי כָּל־יְמֵי חַיִּי וְשִׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית־יְיָ לְאָרְךָ יָמַי:

For certain, goodness and the love of your covenant
Will run after me all the days of my life,
And I shall abide in God's house
For long days,
Long, long days.

Psalm 133:1

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלֹת לְדָוִד הַיְהוָה מֵהַטּוֹב וּמֵהַנְּעִים שְׁבֶת אֲחִים גַּם־יַחַד:

A song of Ascendings. Of David.

Behold how good and how pleasant

Is the dwelling of brothers [and sisters] all together!

God's Goodness All around Us, Discussion Guide for Psalm 27:13, pages 62–63

Part I: Vocabulary Lesson

- How do the familiar biblical verses that are embedded in our prayers help deepen and expand the meaning of “*tov*” to be beyond “*good*”?
- What are some synonyms you could use when translating these verses?
- How will you experience this passage differently next time you read it or hear it read or sung?

All of these verses have multiple musical interpretations. Consider listening to them or singing together to connect with the word *tov* and discuss how each musical setting offers its own interpretation of goodness.

Part II: Let's Use It in a Sentence

1. Write on board Psalm 27:13 in English: Highlight/underline Goodness of God.
2. Write on the board: Describe a time/place when/where you saw the Goodness of God. (write this on the board too)
3. Read Psalm 27, verse 13, aloud in Hebrew.
4. Invite people into silence to think about the question (two minutes) or invite them to write (five minutes).
5. Share around the table or in small groups (two minutes each).
6. Read pages 62–63 aloud.
7. Feedback: What surprised you about the places/times when people saw the Goodness of God? How can you be more perceptive in the next month as we make our way toward Rosh HaShanah? During the High Holy Day season? All year long?

Opening Your Heart with Psalm 27

RABBI DEBRA J. ROBBINS

“Courage, Every Day”

Source Sheet Psalm 27:14, pages 68–69

Psalm 27:14

קִוֵּה אֱלֹהִים חֲזַק וַיֵּאֲמַץ לִבִּי וְקִוֵּה אֱלֹהִים׃

Wait for *Adonai*—

Fill your waiting with hope in *Adonai*;

Let your heart be strong and of good courage,

And wait hopefully for *Adonai*.

Mary Daly

Courage is like...a habit, a virtue: you get it by courageous acts. It's like you learn to swim by swimming. You learn courage by couraging.

Psalm 27:14, Jewish Publication Society translation

...be strong and of good courage...

Psalm 27:14, Rabbi Richard Levy translation

...let your heart be strong and of good courage...

Psalm 27:14, Rabbi Debra Robbins translation

...YOU are strong and (in addition) YOU WILL BE courageous of heart.

Ometz Lev/Heart Strength, Rabbi Marc Margolius

...simply observing the fact that we are afraid, without judging ourselves for that emotion, offers the possibility of acting in a way that is not determined by that fear. That is *ometz lev*—doing that which is right and just, even in the face of challenging emotions.

Babylonian Talmud, *Gittin* 70a

Three things diminish a person's strength, and they are:

Fear, traveling on the road, and sin.

The Gemara explains:

Fear, as it is written: "My heart flutters, my strength fails me" (Psalms 38:11).

Traveling on the road, as it is written: "He has weakened my strength on the road" (Psalms 102:24).

Sin, as it is written: "My strength fails because of my sin" (Psalms 31:11).

Discussion Guide for Psalm 27:14, Courage, Every Day, pages 68–69

Varied voices, from different places, times and perspectives can help to illuminate a verse of the Bible, invite and encourage us to add our own voices to the conversation.

Consider how the voices of:

- Mary Daly, 1928–2010, a Catholic feminist theologian writing in 2001;
- The rabbis in the Babylonian Talmud writing nearly two thousand years ago;
- Rabbi Debra Robbins writing in 2019;
- The Mussar tradition, the nineteenth-century Jewish Lithuanian discipline of ethical and spiritual living (which has experienced a revival in the twenty-first century);

speak to each other and to this verse from Psalm 27, as each seeks to understand how to have a strong heart and courage in the face of life's ever-present challenges, during this season and all through the year.