YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***Tehillim* (Series II)**

**Rav Elchanan Samet**

**Shiur#01: *Tehillim* 100 – "A Psalm of Thanksgiving"**

**The Difference Between the Praise of "All the Earth" and the Praise of "His People and the Sheep of His Pasture"**

1. A psalm of thanksgiving.

1 Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!

(2) Serve the Lord with gladness;

Come before His presence with singing.

2 (3) Know that the Lord He is God:

It is He who made us,

And we belong to Him;

3 His people, and the sheep of His pasture!

(4) Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,

And into His courts with praise:

4 Give thanks to Him,

And bless His name.

5 (5) For the Lord is good;

His steadfast love endures forever;

And His faithfulness to all generations.

Our working assumption in our interpretation of the psalms of *Tehillim* is that each psalm constitutes a literary unit that stands on its own.[[1]](#footnote-1) Our understanding of that literary unit does not depend on the heading given to it, nor is it conditioned on its relationship to adjacent literary units, even when the connection between the psalms is primal, and not merely the consequence of an editorial enterprise that juxtaposed two similar psalms.

Accordingly, the psalm's heading – "A psalm of thanksgiving" – will not be discussed in the body of this study. We will discuss the heading and its connection to the body of the psalm in the first appendix to this study, where we will also discuss the liturgical use assigned to this psalm. These two issues appear to be interrelated.

In the body of this lecture, we will similarly not discuss the fact that the psalm belongs to a set of six psalms (95-100) and the fact that it closes that set. This will be discussed in the second appendix, where we will raise the question of whether this fact has interpretative ramifications for our psalm, as well as whether our interpretation of this psalm can influence our interpretation of the preceding psalms. We will refer to the other psalms in this set whenever necessary even in the body of the study, but, as stated, the focus of the study will be Psalm 100 itself.

### I. Introduction: Psalms of praise in the book of *Tehillim*

Before discussing our psalm itself, we must discuss the literary category to which it belongs. The book of *Tehillim* is comprised of different types of psalms: psalms of supplication, psalms of complaint, psalms of thanksgiving, psalms of wisdom, and others. Psalms belonging to a particular category are similar to each other in their basic content and purpose, and this similarity is reflected both in their style – in the idioms that characterize this type of psalm – and in their structure.[[2]](#footnote-2)

One of the most prominent types of psalms in our book is psalms of praise. There are about thirty psalms of praise in the book of *Tehillim.* Although they are less numerous than the psalms of supplication, their significance in the book is reflected in the fact that the name of our book according to Jewish tradition is *Tehillim*, "psalms of praise."

Many psalms of praise in our book are characterized by the fact that they open with a command or a call that the speaker directs to all those who are present to praise God. Those who are present are called upon to make joyful noise, to sing, and to bless God, and sometimes mention is also made of various musical instruments. The next part of this type of psalm consists of a rationale that explains this call. This part usually opens with the word *ki*, "for, because," and in it the speaker describes God's greatness, His lovingkindness, or some other attribute of His, on account of which those present are being called upon to praise God.[[3]](#footnote-3)In several psalms of praise this framework (a call to praise – the word *ki* – the rationale) is repeated a second time in different words, and this repetition determines the structure of the psalm.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Psalm 100 is a psalm of praise that contains most of the aforementioned characteristics of these psalms of praise. It opens with a call inviting those present to praise God, both with joyful noise and with actions:

Make a joyful noise to the Lord…

Serve the Lord with gladness;

Come before His presence with singing.

 The call is followed by a rationale:

Know **that (*ki*)** the Lord He is God:

It is He who made us…

The continuation of the psalm (vv. 4-5) is also marked by the aforementioned characteristics of psalms of praise, and the framework (a call to praise – the word *ki* – the rationale) is repeated. Thus, we can say that Psalm 100 is clearly a psalm of praise.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Of course, our description of the characteristic features of a particular type of psalm is not intended to imply that all psalms of that type are identical or that they repeat themselves. Now that we have established that the psalm falls into the category of psalms of praise, we must deal with the more important question: What is **unique** about this particular psalm of praise, and what distinguishes it from other members of that category?

In order to clarify the matter, we must ask several questions:

1. Who is the speaker in our psalm calling upon others to praise God?[[6]](#footnote-6)
2. To whom is the speaker directing his appeal?[[7]](#footnote-7)
3. What is the nature of the praise under discussion? Is it "musical," or perhaps verbal, or maybe a physical act?[[8]](#footnote-8)
4. What is the unique rationale for this psalm of praise? What grounds are offered here to praise God – which of God's attributes or actions?[[9]](#footnote-9)
5. Does the psalm describe, or at least allude to, a response on the part of those called upon to praise God?[[10]](#footnote-10)
6. Is the appeal to praise God connected to a particular situation, or is it perhaps generalized and above time?[[11]](#footnote-11)
7. In a psalm in which the framework of the call to praise God and the rationale for doing so is repeated, we must examine the difference between the two units. What are the differences between them, and is there development between the first part of the psalm and the second part?[[12]](#footnote-12)

Paying attention to these questions will help the student understand the uniqueness of the psalm of praise under discussion and the message emerging from it.

### II. THe call to praise at the beginning of our psalm

In order to understand the uniqueness of our psalm, let us begin with the second question from among the list of questions raised in the previous section: To whom is the call to praise God directed? The answer to this question appears already in the first line of the opening stanza of the psalm:

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, **all the earth!**

It is clear that the intention is "all **inhabitants** of the earth," as is evident both from the various plural imperatives – "make a joyful noise" (*hari'u*), "serve" (*ivdu*), "come" (*bo'u*)[[13]](#footnote-13) – and from the content itself; the earth cannot be commanded to serve God and to come before Him, even by way of personification. But who are "all the inhabitants of the earth" to whom the appeal is directed?

Tzvi Peretz Chajes, in his commentary to the book of *Tehillim*, writes: "All the inhabitants of the Land of Israel." Amos Chakham in his *Da'at Mikra* commentary writes: "The imperative, 'Make a joyful noise,' is addressed poetically to all the inhabitants of the earth, but in practice it is directed at the congregation of celebrants who are going up to the Temple in a thanksgiving procession."

Common to both of these explanations is the assumption, based on the heading of the psalm, that our psalm "was apparently written as a prayer to be offered at the time of the sacrifice of a thanksgiving-offering" (as formulated by Chajes, and similarly by Chakham in his commentary to the words, "A praise of thanksgiving"). This assumption requires us to say that the call in the psalm is directed solely at Israel, and so both Chajes and Chakham, albeit in slightly different ways, narrow the meaning of the call "Make a joyful noise, **all** the earth." In this way, these commentators subjugate their interpretation of the psalm to its heading, dispensing with the simple and obvious explanation – that the appeal to all the earth should be understood literally as an appeal **to all of humanity** to make a joyful noise to God, to serve Him with gladness, and to come before Him with singing.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Such a universal appeal to all of humanity to praise God is typical of many psalms of praise.[[15]](#footnote-15)

We will now return to the first question from among the list of questions raised in the previous section: Who is the speaker calling out to the inhabitants of all the earth to make a joyful noise to God, to serve Him with gladness, and to come before Him with singing? This question can only be answered after we clarify the rationale offered by the speaker for his appeal to praise God.[[16]](#footnote-16)

### III. All of verse 3 as a rationale for the call to praise

The rationale for calling upon all the inhabitants of the earth to make a joyful noise to God, to serve Him with gladness, etc. is found in verse 3. This verse does not begin with the word *ki* alone, but with the phrase “*de'u ki*,” "know that," but this, of course, does not change the role of the verses that follow – to offer a rationale for the previous call.[[17]](#footnote-17)

According to the division of the psalm into verses, verse 3, which contains the rationale for the call that precedes it, consists of three components of that rationale:

Know

1. that the Lord He is God:
2. It is He who made us, and we belong to Him;
3. His people, and the sheep of His pasture.

We will try to explain the three components in this verse, beginning at the end with component no. 3, and working back to the beginning. The words, "His people, and the sheep of His pasture," which undoubtedly refer to the People of Israel, cast special interpretive meaning upon what precedes them and upon the rationale as a whole.

First, we must understand the meaning of these words in themselves – "His people, and the sheep of His pasture" – which seem to be disconnected from any context. Each of the first two components is an independent sentence, whereas the third is not a sentence at all.

Some commentators did not relate in any way to this difficulty, nor did they offer any commentary whatsoever to these words.[[18]](#footnote-18) Amos Chakham in his *Da'at Mikra* commentary offers two suggestions (both of which are based on commentators that preceded him), which connect these words to the previous words in the verse and thus make them part of the whole sentence:

1. "His people, and the sheep of His pasture" – These words are a continuation of what was said above: He made us… into His people and into the sheep of His pasture.

2. According to another explanation, the word *anakhnu*,"we," is connected both to the preceding word and to the words that follow: And we belong to Him. We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.

The Seforno explained the verse in accordance with the first interpretation. The Radak and *Metzudot* offered an explanation similar to the second interpretation, without doubling the word *anakhnu*: "'And we belong to Him' – we are special to Him, so that we are called His people and the sheep of His pasture" (*Metzudot*).

Now we move on to interpret the middle component of the rationale: "It is He who made us, and we belong to Him." The plain meaning of these words is: **He created us,** and therefore we belong to Him. But the connection between the third component in the verse and the second component does not allow us to accept such a universal interpretation; this explanation does not accord with the words "His people, and the sheep of His pasture" which appear at the end of the rationale. The commentators were aware of this, and therefore they explained the second component as also relating to the people of Israel and their superiority over the other nations. In other words, "It is He who made us," refers not to all of humanity, but rather to the people of Israel:

**Radak**: "It is He who made us” – He raised us up and exalted us, like: “It is the Lord who made Moshe and Aharon” (I *Shemuel* 12:6, which means: He appointed them as leaders).

**Meiri**: "It is He who made us” – that is to say, He fixed us and made us perfect.

**Amos Chakham**: "It is He who made us” might mean: He made us into a nation (cf. I *Shemuel* 12:22: "Because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people").

According to each of these and similar explanations, the words, "It is He who made us, and we belong to Him," should be understood as an introduction to the words that follow: "His people, and the sheep of His pasture."

We must now explain the first component of the rationale – "Know that the Lord He is God." The simple understanding is that of Amos Chakham in his *Da'at Mikra* commentary: "Take to heart that the Lord is God, and accept His lordship over you." Here too, however, the understanding that the speakers are the people of Israel and that their rationale in the continuation involves their having been chosen from among all the other nations, is liable to lead to a more precise interpretation of the words: "Know that the Lord, **who is God of Israel,** He alone is God."

The discussion regarding the rationale in verse 3 with its three components provides us with an answer regarding the first in the series of questions that we raised in the previous section: Who is the speaker in this psalm who calls for the praising of God? According to what emerges from verse 3 in its entirety, the speakers in the psalm who use the terms "who made us" and "we" are "the people of God and the sheep of His pasture." If so, the people of Israel are the speakers in the psalm, who call upon all the inhabitants of the earth to make a joyful noise to the Lord.

According to this, we can formulate the call for praise and its rationale in our psalm as follows: Israel turns to the inhabitants of "all the earth" and calls upon them to make joyful noise to the Lord, to serve Him with gladness, and to come before Him with singing, because the Lord who is their God is the only God, and He made them His chosen people, the people that belongs to Him, the sheep of His pasture.

### IV. Difficulties with the rationale offered in verse 3

 Is this rationale in the mouths of the people of Israel a reasonable one? Is the rationale that God made us His chosen people, "His people, and the sheep of His pasture," appropriate to be given to the other nations as a reason for them to make joyful noise to God and serve Him?

 Those familiar with the book of *Tehillim* will quickly answer that, indeed, in several psalms Israel calls upon all the nations to praise God for the deliverance that was brought to the people of Israel alone.

In Psalm 117, the shortest psalm in the book of *Tehillim*, and one of the psalms of *Hallel*, we find:

1. O praise the Lord, **all you nations;**

Praise him **all you peoples.**

1. For His love **for us** is great:

And the truth of the Lord endures forever. Halleluya![[19]](#footnote-19)

 And in Psalm 66:8-9, we read:

(8) O bless our God, **you peoples,**

 And make the voice of His praise to be heard.

(9) Who has kept **our soul** in life,

 And has not suffered our foot to be removed…

 In Psalm 98, which belongs to the set of six psalms which is closed by our psalm, it says:

1. A psalm. O sing to the Lord a new song;[[20]](#footnote-20)

For He has done marvelous thing: His right hand, and His holy arm have gained Him the victory…

1. He has remembered His love and His truth towards **the house of Israel**;

**All the ends of the earth** have seen the salvation of our God.

Finally, let us consider psalm 47:[[21]](#footnote-21)

(2) O clap your hands, **all you peoples;**

Shout to God with the voice of triumph…

(4) He subdues peoples **under us,**

 And nations **under** **our feet.**

(5) He chooses **our inheritance** for us,

 The pride of Yaakov, whom He loves.

This motif of calling upon the nations to praise God for the love He has shown His people Israel is, indeed, common in the book of *Tehillim.*

However, there is a fundamental difference between the rationale for calling upon the nations to praise God in our psalm and the rationales for similar calls in the aforementioned psalms. In all the psalms referred to above, the call to the nations is justified by the love that God has shown His people Israel through historical events **that took place in the presence of those nations,** and generally also in connection with them.[[22]](#footnote-22) This is not the case with respect to the rationale in our psalm. Here we are dealing with the intimate relationship between God and Israel, with His choosing them as His special people ("It is He who made us"), with Israel's belonging to God ("and we belong to Him"), and with the continuing relationship between God and His people ("His people, and the sheep of His pasture"). This intimate relationship is not exposed to the eyes of the nation and is not a reason because of which those nations will praise God. It is therefore difficult to argue that its hidden existence constitutes a rationale for calling upon the nations to make joyful noise to God and to serve Him with gladness. In any event, such a rationale has no parallel in the other psalms of praise in the book of *Tehillim.*

This is not the only difficulty rising from the rationale in verse 3. The two difficulties that we already dealt with in the previous section have not been resolved:

1. The simple explanation of the words "It is He who made us" is that "He created us." The other explanations offered for these words as relating to the formation of the people of Israel – based on the words that appear later in the psalm – are somewhat forced.
2. The words "His people, and the sheep of His pasture" still seem to be disconnected and without a context, and the exegetical attempt to connect them to what is stated before them does not change this sense.

The Ibn Ezra seems to have detected this problem, and he therefore chose a different interpretation:

And the words "His people" refer back to "Know."

The Ibn Ezra views the words "His people, the sheep of His pasture," which stand on their own in the verse, as words of address. According to him, they really belong at the beginning of verse 3, in juxtaposition to the command "Know." The verse then is to be understood as follows:

His people, and the sheep of His pasture!

Know that,

The Lord He is God;

It is He who made us, and we belong to Him.

But if, as in his view, the rationale in verse 3 is directed to Israel, he must say that the appeal that precedes it – to make joyful noise to the Lord, to serve Him with gladness, and to come before Him with singing – is also directed at Israel, as we cannot separate the appeal from its rationale! This, however, contradicts our conclusion in section II, that the call in our psalm is directed at all of mankind – "all the earth."[[23]](#footnote-23)

We cannot, then, accept the Ibn Ezra's explanation, which involves rearranging the verses, but his explanation advances us toward a different resolution of the problems in verse 3.

##### V. A new explanation of verses 3-4

The resolution that we will propose for the difficulties discussed in the previous section (as well as other difficulties not discussed there) involves detaching the words, "His people, the sheep of His pasture," from the rationale that precedes them in verse 3, and seeing them instead as the beginning of a new call in verse 4. The Ibn Ezra's sense that these words stand on their own and are not a continuation of what came before them is, indeed, correct. His understanding that these words are words of address is also correct: "You, God's people, and the sheep of His pasture…." But his rearrangement of the words in the verse and his attachment of these words to the beginning of verse 3 seems incorrect. In our opinion, these words are located in their proper place, but they serve as words of address that open the call that appears immediately afterwards in verse 4!

This, indeed, is the way we wrote these words at the beginning of stanza 3 in our transcription of the psalm at the beginning of this study:

His people, and the sheep of His pasture!

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,

And into His courts with praise.

 This solution does not accord with the Masoretic division of the verses, as it joins the end of verse 3 to verse 4 which follows it, but it appears less problematic than mentally moving these words to the beginning of verse 3.[[24]](#footnote-24)

How does our proposal affect the meaning and interpretation of the psalm?

First**,** it will become clear, according to our proposal, that the second call to praise God, in verse 4, is not directed at the same audience to which the first call was directed:

The first call:

1. Make a joyful noise to the Lord, **all the earth**
2. Serve… come…

The second call:

1. **His people, and the sheep of His pasture!**
2. Enter… give thanks… and bless…

The first call is addressed to all of humanity – "all the earth" – whereas the second call is addressed to the people of Israel – "His people, and the sheep of His pasture."

Second**,** assuming that the speaker calling upon the two different audiences in our psalm is the same party, it follows that the speaker is **not the people of Israel** calling upon the nations to make joyful noise to the Lord. Now that we have detached the words, "His people, and the sheep of His pasture," from the words that precede them, "It is He who made us, and we belong to Him," there is no longer any basis for the conclusion that the speaker in the psalm ("It is He who made us," "we") is the people of Israel. Moreover, it is the people of Israel **who are called upon** to praise God in the second call, and therefore it follows that it is someone on the outside who is calling to the people of Israel.

Who, then, is the speaker with regard to the two appeals in our psalm? There is no escaping the conclusion that it is "the psalmist."

Third**,** detaching the words, "His people, and the sheep of His pasture," from the rationale for the first call in the psalm allows us to read the rationale in its plain sense. This drastically changes the meaning of this rationale: The psalmist who calls upon "all the earth" to make joyful noise to the Lord (the psalmist, and not the people of Israel) rationalizes his call with two arguments that are indeed universal, as is appropriate for a call to all the nations:

1. "Know that the Lord He is God" – He alone is God, and it falls upon you to accept His lordship.

2. "It is He who made us, and we belong to Him" – He created us, all of mankind, and we belong to Him by virtue of the fact that we are His creations.[[25]](#footnote-25)

The use of the first person plural ("He made us"; "we") stems from the fact that the psalmist who turns to all of the nations includes himself among the members of humanity, all of whom were created equally by the one and only Creator.

All of the problems that we raised in the previous section with respect to the content of the rationale included in verse 3 and with respect to the interpretation of its words are resolved according to our proposal. In the sections that follow, we will see that our proposal clarifies the structure of the psalm, as well as its overall meaning and uniqueness in relation to similar psalms of praise.

(To be continued next week.)

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. This, of course, does not apply to a psalm about which it can be proven that it is part of a psalm that was divided into two – for example, psalms 42-43, which are in fact a single psalm. In this rare situation, when the matter has been proven, we must relate to the literary unit as a whole. The same is true in the reverse case. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. "Form criticism" is a branch of biblical criticism founded by Hermann Gunkel (Germany, 1862-1932). Gunkel dealt extensively with the classification of the psalms in the book of *Tehillim* in a commentary that he wrote on the book and in the introduction to it that he wrote toward the end of his life. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Gunkel (see previous note), in his introduction to the book of *Tehillim*,refers to the call to praise as "an introduction of praise," and he refers to the rationale as "the body of praise," which he sees as the main part of the psalm. About half of the psalms of praise in *Tehillim* have this or some similar form. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. An example of such a psalm (disccussed in our book) is Psalm 47, which has the characteristics features that we mentioned, with the addition of certain features that are unique to that psalm. Another example of such a psalm, which is close to our psalm and belongs to the same set of six psalms mentioned above, is Psalm 96. In that psalm as well the characteristic framework appears twice:

The first half:

The call to praise (1-3):

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth…

The rationale (4-7):

**For** (*ki*) the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised…

The second half:

The call to praise (7-12):

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength…

The rationale (13):

Before the Lord: **for** (*ki*) He comes, for He comes to judge the earth… [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The psalm's heading is liable to mislead us and bring us to categorize it as a psalm of thanksgiving, “*toda*.” The thanksgiving psalms in the book of *Tehillim* constitute a separate type, the characteristics of which we discussed in our study of Psalm 30 in our book (pp. 83-85). Occasionally, we find in thanksgiving psalms an appeal to those present to praise God for the good that He performed for the speaker in the psalm, as Amos Chakham *z"l* notes on verse 1 in our psalm: "Those who offer thanks to God generally praise Him in public, and they ask that the congregation join them in their thanksgiving and their joy." But in such a case, the appeal is **personal** and is justified by the **personal** salvation experienced by the psalm's speaker. The fixed characteristics of thanksgiving psalms include an account of the danger that had faced the person who is now offering his gratitude, an account of his prayer to God, and an account of his wondrous rescue. (In our study of Psalm 30, note 4, we noted the similarity between a psalm of thanksgiving and a psalm of supplication, and the way to distinguish between them). Thus, thanksgiving psalms always bear a personal seal, even if the thanks being offered is that of the congregation or the People of Israel as a whole. It is just the opposite in the case of a psalm of praise: It is not connected to a private individual or what happened to him. The grounds for praise are not some isolated event, but rather grand, or even cosmic events, or some general attribute of God applying to all of His creations, and sometimes the praise has no particular cause! [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. We do not always find an answer to this question in the psalm; when the speaker's identity is unclear, we hide behind the figure of the "psalmist." Sometimes, even when this is not explicitly stated, it is clear that the speaker is the People of Israel. This is the case in Psalm 47; see our book, pp. 158-159. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In Psalm 96 (see above, n. 4), the answer is clear. The call is directed to "all the earth" (vv. 1 and 9) and to "the families of the nations" (v. 7) – in other words, to all of mankind. But sometimes the call is addressed specifically to the People of Israel, as in the psalm that opens the set of six psalms, Psalm 95: "O come, let us sing of the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation," and once again in v. 6: "O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our maker." This is definitely proven by the rationale given for the second call (v. 7): "For He is our God; and we are the people of His pasture and the flock of His hand." [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. A call for musical praise: "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise. Sing to the Lord with the lyre; with the lyre, and the voice of psalm. With trumpets and sound of a shofar make a joyful noise before the Lord, king" (*Tehillim* 98:4-6). A call for verbal praise: "Sing to the Lord; bless His name… Declare His glory among the nations…" (96:1-3). A call for a physical act: "Bring an offering and come into His courts. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness…" (96:8-9). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. An example of a rationale connected to God's attributes is found in our psalm: "For the Lord is good; His steadfast love endures forever" (v. 5). A rationale connected to actions performed by God sometimes includes actions performed in the past. For example: "But the Lord made the heavens" (96:5). Sometimes it includes actions being performed in the present or that will be performed in the future: "For He comes to judge the earth" (96:13).    [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In Psalm 96:11-12 and in Psalm 98:7-8, nature is described as responding to the call for praise, even though the reference is to a human response. In Psalm 47, an allusion is made to the response of the nations to a call sounded by the People of Israel; see our book, pp. 158-160. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Some psalms of praise are clearly of an eschatological nature: The call to praise God is explained by God's appearance at the end of days to redeem His people and to judge all the nations. This is the case in Psalm 98, where in the first half the call to sing to God is explained: "The Lord has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations. He has remembered His love and His truth towards the house of Israel; all the ends of earth have seen the salvation of our God" (vv. 2-3). In the second half, the call to make joyful noise to God is explained: "For He comes to judge the earth; with righteousness shall He judge the world, and the peoples with equity" (v. 9). In Psalm 47, we find an account of God's coronation, in which the peoples are called upon to participate in an active manner. See our book, pp. 163-164, and note 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In Psalm 96, which was brought in note 4 as an example of a psalm of praise, there are clear differences both between the call in the first half (vv. 1-3) and the call in the second half (vv. 7-10), and primarily between the rationale in the first half and the rationale in the second half. (The second half has a component that has no parallel in the first half – a description of nature's response in vv. 11-12). In Psalm 47, we discussed at length the progress and development between stanza 1 and stanza 2 (pp. 166-172). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Commands directed at the earth itself in the manner of personification are, in fact, found in the poetic sections of the Bible, but then the appeal to the earth is formulated in the feminine singular: "Sing, O heaven, **and be joyful (*ve-gili*), O earth"** (*Yeshaya* 49:13). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Counter to the assumption of Chajes and Amos Chakham, it may be argued that the heading of our psalm does not necessarily attest to the purpose of the psalm's composition (as argued by Chajes), but rather to the practical use that was made of the psalm in the Temple. According to this, it may be supposed that the heading was written later than the psalm itself, and not by the psalm's author. However, there is no need for such or similar suppositions. From a methodological perspective, the psalm should be interpreted in acccordance with its content, and its plain meaning should not be distorted because of its heading. As we wrote in section VI and in note 4, our psalm is clearly a psalm of praise, and not at all a psalm of thanksgiving. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. In Psalm 96, the universal nature of which is exceedingly prominent, we find in the first call: "O sing to the Lord a new song: sing to the Lord, **all the earth"** (1)**;** in the second call in the psalm, we find: "Ascribe to the Lord, **O families of the nations"** (7), "…Tremble before Him, **all the earth"** (9). Similarly in Psalm 98, which in several ways is similar to Psalm 96, we find the first call to praise God: "O sing to the Lord a new song" (1), which should be understood, like the opening call in Psalm 96 with the very same words, as referring to "all the earth," as is explicitly indicated in the rationale for the call: "His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of **the nations"** (2); **"All the ends of the earth** have seen the salvation of our God" (3). The universal nature of the call to praise God is preserved also in the continuation of the psalm, in the second call: "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, **all the earth…"** (4), which is the very same call with which our psalm opens. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. In many psalms of the type of psalm of praise that we are discussing, the identity of the psalm's speaker becomes clear only well into the psalm. See, for example, what we wrote regarding Psalm 47 in our book, p. 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. This is important for understanding the structure of the psalm and for explaining it. We disagree here with what Amos Chakham writes in the conclusion to his commentary on the psalm: "The psalm contains seven commands: Make a jofyul noise, serve, come, know, enter, give thanks, and bless… Thus it turns out that the the command, "Know that the Lord He is God," is the middle command, constituting a verse unto itself, and the middle section of the psalm." This is incorrect: The first three commands are the first call in our psalm to praise God; the command, "know," is not part of the first series of commands, but rather the opening of the rationale: "know **that** (*ki*)." The next three commands are the second call to praise God, and after the second series there is a second rationale in verse 5: "**For** (*ki*) the Lord is good" (this time without an introductory imperative, but this makes no difference with respect to the role of this part in the psalm). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. For example, Rashi, Tz. P. Chajes. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. According to the Radak and the Meiri, the speaker who turns to the nations is the people of Israel, and the rationale for their appeal is: "'For His love for us is great' – to the point that He took us out from under your hand, which you did not believe could possibly happen, because of the length of our exile. Now give thanks and say all of you… that His word and promise to us to take us out of the exile is true" (Radak, and similarly Meiri). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. We already wrote at the end of section II and in note 15 that the call at the beginning of the psalm, "O sing to the Lord a new song," is an appeal to all the nations, like the similar call at the beginning of Psalm 96 and like the call in Psalm 98 itself in verse 4: "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, **all the earth."** [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. On the meaning of the rationale for the call to all the peoples to make joyful noise to the Lord in Psalm 47, see our book, p. 158 and note 4, and pp. 167-168. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. This is explicit in *Tehillim* 47:4: "He subdues **peoples** under us and **nations** under our feet." But the salvation of Israel, which is the subject of Psalm 98, is their salvation from the nations, and the same is true of Psalm 66. As for Psalm 117, see note 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The Ibn Ezra explains in verse 1 "that 'the earth' is a collective noun referring to all of its inhabitants." Thus, he also understands that the call in verses 1-2 is directed to all of humanity. If so, it seems that the Ibn Ezra does not view verse 3 as a rationale for the call in the previous verses, but rather a new matter. Our understanding is based on the fact that our psalm falls into the category of psalms of praise that are built of a framework consisting of a call to the congregation that is present to praise God, followed by a rationale. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. This is not the only case in which the division of the psalm into verses does not coincide with its division into stanzas. In Psalm 19, the end of verse 5, "In them He has set a tent for the sun," belongs to the next part of the psalm; see our book, pp. 47-48 and note 11. In Psalm 80, the beginning of verse 15, "Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts," belongs to the stanza that precedes it (vv. 9-14), and serves as a "repeating chorus;" see our book, p. 180 and p. 195. In Psalm 91, the first half of verse 9, "Because You O Lord are my refuge," stands on its own, whereas in the second half of the verse the speaker changes and a new section of the psalm begins; see our book, p. 224, and later in that same study, note 27. We will encounter this phenomenon again in later studies.

In Appendix II to this study, we discuss what appears to be a difficulty for our proposal – a comparison between verse 3 in our psalm and verse 7 in Psalm 95 (as well as a comparison between verse 3 in our psalm and verse 13 in Psalm 79). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The *ketiv*, the way the word is written, *ve-lo* (with an *alef*) *anachnu*, means "and not us," and this almost dictates such an explanation. These words were explained, in accordance with the *ketiv* by R. Yosef Ibn Yachya (1492-1538, the son of an exile from Portugal,; his commentary to *Tehillim* has recently been published in *Mikra'ot Gedolot, Orim Gedolim*):

It is He who made us – we **humans.**

And not us – **we did not create ourselves,** which is the opposite of what the Egyptian [Pharaoh] said (*Yechezkel* 29:3): "My river is my own, and I have made it for myself."

The explanation of the verse based on the *ketiv* as countering the words of Pharaoh cited in *Yechezkel* appears in the commentaries of the Ibn Ezra and the Radak in the name of R. Sa'adya Gaon. This explanation is not found in R. Sa'adya's commentary to *Tehillim*, but rather in his philosophical tract, *Emunot Ve-De'ot* (ed. R. I. Kafih, p. 41).

Although Ibn Yachya explained these words as a universal rationale, this does not indicate anything about his understanding of the context as a whole. According to him, these words are directed specifically to the people of Israel. In this context, we will not present his explanation of the entire psalm. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)