

Lesson 3 – Musical Performance

Goal:

Students will think about the musical performance of Tehillim. They will see pictures of instruments and hear examples of what Tehillim might have sounded like when sung. Finally, students should appreciate the way music can communicate emotions in a way that words alone cannot.

Activity:

1. *What types of instruments were used during the times of David and Shelomo?* Students should be able to name all the instruments mentioned in Mizmor 150.

What did these instruments look like and how did they sound? Show pictures on the powerpoint slides for lesson 3 or print them out. These pictures are from archaeological finds of figurines playing instruments or pictures of instruments painted on clay objects. These are not necessarily Israelite objects but they are probably very similar to what was used in the Bet Hamikdash.

How would this music sound? Arachaologists have found one ancient poem in the Ugaritic language that also has musical notation. Scholars have tried to decipher this notation. Play their reconstructed song for the class found at: <http://www.amarantypublishing.com/hurrian.htm>. You can also play some modern renditions of Tehillim to see how Tehillim can ingerate with contemporary musical styles.

2. See source sheet. Read Ibn Ezra on the power of poetry and music. Then read Mishnah Tamid 7:3 on how music was integrated into the Avodah. Also point out the Shir Shel Yom that was recited each day of the week in the Bet Hamikdash and that is still part of our siddur. See Mishnah Tamid 7:4.

3. *How did Tehillim sound when they were sung in ancient times?* We do not know for sure. However, we can get some hint at to how they might have been chanted based on the Ta'amim (cantillation marks) and the way they are sung in various communities today. Bring a recording by a Hazzan of your community of the Tehillim being recited.

What are Ta'amim? Can you point them out? Choose any Mizmor and have students find the Ta'amim for each word. Explain how they work and that the Ta'amim for Tehillim, Mishle and Iyov use a different system than the rest of Tanakh.

Why do you think these three books have a different system of Ta'amim? Because they are all poetic. In fact, the first two prose chapters of Iyov use the regular Ta'amim and then the book switches to Ta'ame Emet (the Ta'amim of **אֵימֶת**, **מִשְׁלֵי**, and **תְּהִלִּים**) when the poetry begins in Perek 3. You can compare the two systems of Ta'amim by looking at Tehillim 18 and its parallel in 2 Samuel 22.

If you don't have time to teach the names of all the Ta'amim, students should at least be able to recognize the most important ones. Sof Pasuk is the strongest break. The next strongest break is the **עולה ויורד**. Have students look up Mizmor 115:12. The first **יִבְרַךְ** has a Ta'am above the Bet and below the Resh. Together these two signs make up one Ta'am called **עולה ויורד** (it has that name because it appears both above and below the word).

The second half of the Pasuk is then split into two by the next strongest Ta'am, the אתנח, which is under the word ישראל. Try looking for these Ta'amim in more Pesukim and see if they accurately indicate the logical breaks in the Pasuk.

Tehillim as Song

הקדמת רבי אברהם אבן עזרא לספר תהלים Introduction of Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra to Tehillim

נאם אברהם ברי מאיר נ"ע בן עזרא הספרדי:
ברוך השם השם כח באזן הנטועה להבין כל שמועה וכחה קשור בכח הנשמה העליונה. לא ככח העין, כי גם ביום ובלילה לא נעדר כחה, והיא שומעת משש קצוות, ולא יחשכנה מסך או קיר. ולולי האזנים לא נברא ניב שפתים, כי מי שומע? והדברים כגופות והטעמים כרוחות. והנה יש קול מענג וקול משומם, וכאשר ינשא הטעם במאמר, אז יגדיל לעשות עד שיכעיס האוהב וירצה האויב, ואף כי אם היה על דרך שיר. ואם יתחבר עם שיר נגון בכלי, אז יראה פלאים. כי הנה רוח רעה, שאין מחלה קשה ממנה, כנגן דוד איש האלהים בכנור לפני שאול אז רוח לו. ועוד "והיה כנגן המנגן ותהי עליו רוח אלהים" (מלכים ב ג: טו). וכאלה רבות עם שירי חול, אף כי שירי קדש והם שירי השם.

Thus says Abraham, the son of R. Meir (his soul rest in Paradise) Ibn Ezra the Spaniard:
Blessed be the Lord who gives power to the ear that is implanted to understand every sound, and whose power is connected with that of the higher soul – not like the power of the eye, for its virtue is lacking neither by day nor by night, and it hears from all six directions, and is not obstructed by veil or wall. Moreover, were it not for the ears, speech would not have been created, for who would hear it? The words are like bodies and the meanings like spirits. There are sounds that delight and sounds depress; when the meaning of the speech is lofty, it may do great things, even angering one's friend or appeasing one's enemy – all the more so if it is said poetically; and when instrumental music is joined with the poem, then will marvels be beheld. Consider an evil spirit (and no disease is worse than that): when David the man of God played on the lyre before Saul he found relief. Moreover: "As the musician played, the spirit of the Lord came upon him" (2 Kings 3:15). There are many such incidents with profane songs, and all the more so with sacred songs – the songs of God.

Mishnah Tamid describes how songs were integrated into the Bet haMikdash Avoda משנה מסכת תמיד ז: ג

תקעו והריעו ותקעו באו ועמדו אצל בן ארזא אחד מימינו ואחד משמאלו שחה לנסך והניף הסגן בסודרין והקיש בן ארזא בצלצל ודברו הלויים בשיר הגיעו לפרק תקעו והשתחוו העם על כל פרק תקיעה ועל כל תקיעה השתחויה זה הוא סדר התמיד לעבודת בית אלהינו יהי רצון שיבנה במהרה בימינו אמן:

The deputy high priest stood on the horn of the altar with the flags in his hand, and two priests on the table of the fat with two trumpets in their hands. They blew a *teki'ah*, a *teru'ah* and a *teki'ah*, and then went and stood by Ben Arza, one on his right hand and one on his left. When he bent down to make the libation the deputy high priest waved the flags and Ben Arza struck the cymbals and the Levites chanted the psalm. When they came to a pause a *teki'ah* was blown, and the public prostrated themselves; at every pause there was a *teki'ah* and at every *teki'ah* a prostration. This was the order of the regular daily sacrifice for the service of the house of our God. May it be God's will that it be built speedily in our days, Amen.