

Embracing Our Heritage of Hebrew Worship

by Susan Potvin

The goal of all worship of God is to journey into the Holy of Holies - that intimacy with the Lord, which is deep, contemplative union with Him. But to do that, the Scriptures teach us that we are to break through with the “high praises (tehillah)” spoken of in Psalm 149: 6. The Hebrews understood the wide dimension of expression and action that was incorporated in their worship of the Lord. It was not an optional part of their expression, it was how they worshiped – with their whole body, mind soul and strength. They knew and experienced that the Lord is “enthroned upon the praises (tehillah)” of His people (Psalm 22:3). The Lord inhabits, dwells in, builds a throne and comes and sits in the high praises – the tehillah and halal praises - of His people. By understanding the more specific translation of all the words of worship, we (the modern day Church) are able to give ourselves permission to worship more fully, engaging our whole person as passionately as the Blessed Mother would have understood and expressed worship in her time. The news is, the Charismatics and Pentecostals did not invent this form of worship, nor does it have anything to do with personality (introvert/extrovert), or spirituality (contemplative/active).

As Catholics, we are very adept at expressing the acts of worship called “barak” (“to kneel down, to bless God as an act of adoration”) and “zamar” (singing songs that are already written down, accompanied by musical instruments). But let us not short-change ourselves! Let us employ all the expressions of worship that the Lord expects! Let us ask the Blessed Mother to help us worship the Lord as she did! When we do this, we will experience a new level of the Lord’s presence and power. We will experience a greater depth of freedom and intimacy with the Lord. Our goal of reverence before the Lord will take on a sense of awe like never before imagined.

Let us join with the psalmist and our Blessed Mother in a fuller expression of worship to the Lord. “I will bless (barak – kneel and adore) the Lord at all times, His praise (tehillah – spontaneous singing) shall be always in my mouth. My soul will glory (halal – spontaneous spoken praises) in the Lord..... O magnify (gadal – advance and boast) the Lord with me, let us exalt (rum – raise up boldly and aloud) his Name together.” Psalm 34:2-4

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The following definitions and Scripture references are all taken from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible and are notated with the reference number.

Verbal, Spoken Praise

Halal (1894) - the primary Hebrew word for praise where our word "Hallelujah" comes from - to praise, to make a show or rave about, to glory in or boast upon, to be clamorously foolish about our adoration of God

Psalm 113:1-3 - Praise (halal) ye the Lord, praise (halal) o ye servants of the Lord, praise (halal) the name of the Lord.

Psalm 150:1 - Praise (halal) the Lord! Praise (halal) God in his sanctuary; Praise (halal) him in his mighty expanse.

Psalm 149:3 - Let them praise (halal) his name in the dance: let them sing praises with the timbrel and harp.

Halal is used 165 times in the Old Testament.

Shabach (7623) - to address in a loud tone, to commend, to triumph, to exclaim, glory, shout... to adore, praise, to adulate

1 Chronicles 16:35 - Cry out....that we may give thanks to your holy name, and glory (shabach) in your praise.

Psalm 145:4 - One generation shall praise (shabach) thy works to another and declare thy mighty acts.

Psalm 63:3 - Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify (shabach) you.

Ruwa (7321) - to split the ears with sound, shout (for alarm or joy), blow an alarm, make a joyful noise, shout for joy, sound an alarm

Joshua 6:20 - So the people shouted (ruwa), and *priests* blew the trumpets; and when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted with a great shout and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight ahead, and they took the city.

1 Samuel 4:5 - As the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted (ruwa) with a great shout, so that the earth resounded.

Psalm 47:1 - O clap your hands, all peoples; Shout (ruwa) to God with the voice of joy.

Rinnah (7441) - a shrill sound, shout of grief or joy, gladness, proclamation, rejoicing, shouting, triumph, singing

Psalm 107:22 - Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing (rinnah).

Psalm 118:15 - The voice of rejoicing (rinnah) and salvation is in the tents of the righteous; The right hand of the Lord does valiantly.

Psalm 126:6 - He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing (rinnah), bringing his sheaves with him.

Sung Praise

Tehillah (8416) - is derived from the word *halal* - the singing of halals, to sing or to laud; perceived to involve music, especially singing; hymns of the Spirit.

Psalm 22:3 - Yet Thou art holy, O Thou who art enthroned upon the praises (tehillah) of Israel.

Psalm 33:1 - Rejoice in the Lord, o ye righteous, for praise (tehillah) is comely for the upright.

2 Chronicles 20:22 – The moment they began their jubilant hymn of praise (tehillah), the Lord laid an ambush against the sons of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; so they were vanquished.

Tehillah is used 57 times in the Old Testament.

Zamar (2167) - to pluck the strings of an instrument, to sing, to praise; a musical word which is largely involved with joyful expressions of music with musical instruments.

Psalm 21:13 - Be exalted O Lord, in Thine own strength, so will we sing and praise (zamar) Thy power.

1 Chronicles 16:9 - Sing to Him, sing praises (zamar) to Him; speak of all His wonders.

Psalm 57:8-9 - Awake my glory; awake harp and lyre, I will awaken the dawn! I will give thanks to Thee, O Lord among the peoples; I will sing praises (zamar) to Thee among the nations.

Physical Actions of Praise

Yadah (3034) - to revere or worship with extended hands. To lift your hands unto the Lord. *It carries the meaning of absolute surrender as a young child does to a parent - "pick me up, I'm all yours".*

1 Chronicles 20:21 - "Give thanks (yadah) to the LORD, for His lovingkindness is everlasting."

Psalms 35:18 - I will give You thanks (tehillah) in the great congregation; I will praise (yadah) You among a mighty throng.

Isaiah 25:1 - O Lord, You are my God; I will exalt You, I will give thanks (yadah) to Your name; for You have worked wonders, plans formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness.

Yadah is used 114 times in the Old Testament.

Towdah (8426) - an extension of the hand, adoration; specifically, a choir of worshippers

Psalms 50:14 - "Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving (towdah) and pay your vows to the Most High;

Psalms 95:2 - Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving (towdah), let us shout (naria) joyfully to Him with psalms.

Psalms 100:4 - Enter His gates with thanksgiving (towdah) and His courts with praise (tehillah). Give thanks (yadah) to Him, bless (barak) His name.

Barak (1288) - to kneel down, to bless God as an act of adoration. When used in the scripture it implies, "expecting to receive a blessing from the Lord."

Psalms 34:1 - I will bless (barak) the Lord at all times, His praise shall continually be in my mouth.

Psalms 95:6 - O come let us worship and bow down; let us kneel (barak) before the Lord our maker.

1 Chronicles 29:20 - Then David said to all the assembly, "Now bless (barak) the Lord your God." And all the assembly blessed the Lord, the God of their fathers, and bowed low and did homage to the Lord and to the king.

Barak is used 330 times in the Old Testament.

Taqa (8628) - to clatter, slap hands together, clang an instrument, to become bondsman by hand clasping, blow a trumpet

Psalms 47:1 - Oh, clap (taqa) your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph!

Joel 2:1 - Blow a trumpet (taqa) in Zion, and sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; surely it is near.

Karar (3769) - to dance, whirl

2 Samuel 6:14 - Then David danced (karar) before the Lord with all his might; and David was wearing a linen ephod.

Machol (4234) - From chuw; a (round) dance -- dance(-cing).

Psalms 130:11 – You have turned for me my mourning into dancing (machol); You have loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness.

Psalms 149:3 - Let them praise His name with dancing (machol); Let them sing praises (zamar) to Him with timbrel and lyre.

Jeremiah 31:13 - Then the virgin will rejoice in the dance (machol), and the young men and the old, together, for I will turn their mourning into joy and will comfort them and give them joy for their sorrow.

Raqad (7540) - to stamp, to spring about (wildly or for joy), aloud, noise, shouted

Ecclesiastes 3:4 - A time to weep, and a time to laugh; A time to mourn, and a time to dance (raqad)

Chagag (2287) - to move in a circle, to march in a sacred procession, to observe a festival, to be giddy, celebrate, dance, to keep or hold a solemn feast (holiday), to reel to and fro

1 Samuel 30:16-17 - And when he had brought him down, there they were, spread out over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing (chagag), because of all the great spoil which they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah.

Psalms 42:4go along with the throng *and* lead them in procession (chagag) to the house of God, with the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.

Alats (5970) - to jump for joy, exult, be joyful, rejoice, triumph

Psalm 5:11 - But let all those rejoice who put their trust in you; Let them ever shout for joy, because you defend them; Let those also who love your name be joyful (alats) in you.

Psalm 9:2 - I will be glad and rejoice (alats) in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

Ps 68:3 - But let the righteous be glad; Let them rejoice (alats) before God; Yes, let them rejoice exceedingly.

Guwl (1523) - to rejoice, to spin round under the influence of any violent emotion

Psalm 96:11 – Let the heavens be glad and let the earth rejoice (guwl); Let the sea and what fills it resound.

Psalm 118:24 – This is the day the Lord has made; Let us rejoice (guwl) and be glad.

Psalm 149:2 - Sing (halal) to the LORD a new song, His praise (tehillah) in the congregation of the godly ones. Let Israel be glad (samach) in his Maker; Let the sons of Zion rejoice (guwl) in their King.