Introduction to the Liturgy  
Alden Solovy

How do we sing God’s praises during catastrophe or pandemic? How do we sing God’s praises after a profound personal loss? On sacred days of communal rejoicing, we are nonetheless asked to set aside our sorrows to praise God. Those praises are embodied in Hallel.

Hallel (“praise”), Psalms 113–118, is sung or recited in the synagogue on all festivals (including intermediate days), as well as Rosh Chodesh (the new month), on all eight days of Chanukah, and, in recent years, on Yom HaAtzma-ut, Israel Independence Day. Hallel is also recited during the Pesach seder.

The development of this liturgy began with a question: How can we sing God’s praises fully as we move into a second year of COVID-induced, socially distanced Passover seders? Rereading all of my prayer writing about the pandemic, I came across a line in my piece called “These Vows, A COVID Kol Nidrei” which reads: “How I wish to sing in the key of Lamentations?” From there, the idea for “Hallel in a Minor Key” was born. Each of the Psalms in the classic Hallel rubric is represented in this liturgy with at least one line from the text.

Because of the importance of music, both in public recitation of Hallel as well as personal connection with liturgy, I sought someone to craft music for the opening prayer-poem that carries the same name as the entire liturgy, “Hallel in a Minor Key.” I listened to a lot of Jewish music online, starting with my small circle of musician friends. When I heard Sue Radner Horowitz’s Pitchu Li, my search was over.

This is our gift back to the Jewish world for all the many blessings you have bestowed upon us. We offer it with a blessing.

Introduction to the Music  
Sue Radner Horowitz

The idea of writing music for “Hallel in a Minor Key” was intriguing from the moment I heard it. Taking a piece of compelling poetic liturgy and setting it to music at the request of the poet is a composer’s dream.

A few things to note about the music: The song begins in a minor key, but mid-chorus, with words of hope, it switches to a major key. This reflects our prayer—and the classic Jewish belief—that sorrows can be the doorway to greater love, peace, and eventually, to growth, healing, and joy. For the melody in the chorus, I reviewed Eichah trope, the music used to chant Lamentations on Tishah B’Av, and there are hints of influence of that trope written into those lines of the music.

Sheet music for the song can be found at the end of this service. You can hear a recording of the music at www.suehorowitz.com. Note that while the recording is in A minor, the sheet music is in D minor to enable easier singing. My rendition of Pitchu Li, written prior to this liturgy, is also envisioned as part of “Hallel in a Minor Key.” That music can be found on my album “Eleven Doors Open.” Alden and I encourage you to add music or additional readings that would add meaning to your worship.
Opening Blessing (recite)

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam,
asher kid’shanu b’mitzvotav, v’tzivanu
likro et haHallel.

Praise to You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe,
who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to sing hymns of praise.

Hallel in a Minor Key (sing; sheet music is found at the end of this service)

Praise God from the heights of rejoicing.
Praise God from the depths of despair.
Praise God from the places between.

Praise God when plague stalks our days.
Praise God when fear stalks our nights.
Praise God when darkness descends.

We sing praises in a minor key,
The key of heartbreak,
With tropes of lamentation,
But still praises,
For beauty has not been lost
And hope has not been defeated,
And love still shines,
A beacon of tomorrow.

Hal’lu yah ha’lu avdei Adonai, hal’lu et shem Adonai.

Hallelujah. O servants of Adonai give praise; praise the name of Adonai. (Psalm 113:1)

Praise God from joy and blessing.
Praise God from sorrow and pain.
Praise God from the places between.

Praise God when God feels distant.
Praise God when God feels absent.
Praise God when darkness descends.

We sing praises in a minor key,
The key of heartbreak,
With tropes of lamentation,
But still praises,
For beauty has not been lost
And hope has not been defeated,
And love still shines,
A beacon of tomorrow.

A Psalm for Dying and Living  (read)

Hallelujah,
A song for dying and living.
Infinite One,
Who granted me a finite span of time,
Grant me an easy death,
A simple death,
A quiet death.
And let every memory
Of me that remains
Resound
With joy and love.

Infinite One,
Who granted me a finite span of time,
Grant me a beautiful life,
A meaningful life,
A full life.
And let every memory
That I live
Resound
With joy and love,
Hallelujah.

hal'luyah hal'lu avdei Adonai, hal'lu et shem Adonai.

Hallelujah. O servants of Adonai give praise; praise the name of Adonai. (Psalm 113:1)
Carry Me (read)

God, carry me today,
With Your love,
Your grace,
Your wisdom and strength.

God, carry me today,
With Your power,
Your justice,
Your holiness and law.

God, carry me today
Through stormy winds and rough seas,
The obvious and unforeseen
Challenges and losses,
The uneven flow of my emotions,
My fears and my shames.

Today, God on high,
I will not succeed alone.
I will not survive alone.
I need Your majesty and might,
Your dignity and righteousness,
To carry me through the day ahead.
With You as my Rock and Shield
I will face this day with an answer
To loneliness and dread,
Misgivings and mistakes,
To stand with courage and freedom
Against misfortune and deceit.

God, carry me today.
Give me healing hands,
A quiet mind,
Gentle speech
And a forgiving heart.
Let me feel You in my chest.
Let me feel You in my limbs.
Let me feel You by my side.

M'lipeon E'dor Y'hov' Y'arah M'lipeon Eloha Y'hudah.
Tremble, O earth, at the presence of God, at the presence of the God of Jacob. (Psalm 114:7)

B'ruchim atem l'Adonai, oseih shamayim vaaretz.
May you be blessed by Adonai, Maker of heaven and earth. (Psalm 115:15)

A'tehaleich lifnei Adonai, b'artzot hachayim.
I shall walk before Adonai in the lands of the living. (Psalm 116:9)
Hal’lu et Adonai (chant or read)

Hal’lu et Adonai kol goyim, shab’chuhu
kol ha-umim. Ki gavar aleinu chasdo,

Praise Adonai, all ye nations; extol God, all ye peoples.
For great is God’s steadfast love toward us;
Adonai’s faithfulness endures forever. Hallelujah. (Psalm 117:1–2)

Hodu L’Adonai (chant and repeat)

Each line shown in bold type is read or sung by the leader.
The congregation responds with the indented lines.

Hodu laAdonai ki tov, ki l’olam chasdo.
Hodu laAdonai ki tov, ki l’olam chasdo.
Yomar na Yisrael, ki l’olam chasdo.
Hodu laAdonai ki tov, ki l’olam chasdo.
Yomru na veit Aharon, ki l’olam chasdo.
Hodu laAdonai ki tov, ki l’olam chasdo.
Yomru na yirei Adonai, ki l’olam chasdo.
Hodu laAdonai ki tov, ki l’olam chasdo.

Praise Adonai for God is good, God’s loving-kindness endures forever.
Let Israel declare: God’s loving-kindness endures forever.
Let now the house of Aaron say: God’s loving-kindness endures forever.
Let them that revere Adonai say: God’s loving-kindness endures forever. (Psalm 118:1–4)
In My Distress (read)

I called out in my distress,
To You,
Holy One,
Who heals and loves,
And sometimes
Refrains.

What, then, is this prayer?
What, then, is my open heart?
I lay bare before You,
And You hold space for my grief,
For my sorrow and love,
For my confusion and wonder.

This life is a journey,
An uneven road,
Paved in light and shadow,
In darkness and daybreak,
So that when my footsteps falter,
I am drawn back to You.

I called out in my distress
To find the glory of holiness
I could not see.
The holiness that abandoned me.
The love I could no longer find.

You who hears prayer,
Accept my tears as expiation,
As incense on the altar of life,
As a guilt offering to the ones I love.

Let my trust in You never fail,
Nor my hopes fade,
For You are the source of healing.
The source of hope.
The source of faith.

I called out in my distress.
And my heart,
Still yearning,
Prays for rest.

Min hameitzar karati Yah, anani vamerchav Yah.
In distress I called on Yah; Yah answered me and brought me relief. (Psalm 118:5)
Pitchu Li  (sing)

Pit’chu li shaarei tzedek, avo vam odeh Yah.
In distress I called on Yah; Yah answered me and brought me relief. (Psalm 118:19)

Ana Adonai  (chant and repeat)

Each line shown in bold type is read or sung by the leader.
The congregation responds with the indented lines.

Ana Adonai hoshiah na.
Ana Adonai hoshiah na.
Ana Adonai hoshiah na.
Ana Adonai haatzlichah na.
Ana Adonai haatzlichah na.
Ana Adonai haatzlichah na.

Please Adonai, save us.
Please Adonai, save us.
Please Adonai, grant us success.
Please Adonai, grant us success. (Psalm 118:25)

Hallel in a Minor Key  (sing refrain)

Hal’leyah hal’lu avdei Adonai, hal’lu et shem Adonai.
Hallelujah. O servants of Adonai give praise; praise the name of Adonai. (Psalm 113:1)

Closing Blessing

Baruch atah Adonai, Melech m’hu’al batishbachot.
Blessed are You Adonai, Sovereign extolled with praises.
Praise God from the heights of rejoicing
Praise God from the depths of despair
Praise God when fear stalks our nights
Praise God when darkness descends
We sing praises in a minor key
The key of heartbreak
With tropes of lamentation,
But still praises
For beauty has not been lost
And hope has not been defeated
And love still shines
A beacon of tomorrow
Hallelujah, Hallelujah, avdei Adonai
Hallelujah

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et ha sheim A-do-nai
Praise God from joy and blessing

Praise God from sorrow and pain Praise God from the places in between

Praise God when God feels distant Praise God when God feels absent

Praise God when darkness descends We sing praises in a minor key

The key of heartbreak With tropes of lamentation But still praises

For beauty has not been lost And hope has not been defeated

And love still shines A beacon of tomorrow Halle

lu Yah, Hal-le-lu av-dei A-do-nai Hal-le-lu et ha sheim A-do-nai
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Biographies

Alden Solovy spreads joy and excitement for prayer. An American-Israeli liturgist, lyricist, poet, author, and educator, Alden is the Liturgist-in-Residence for the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies. Based in Jerusalem, he teaches prayer and spirituality throughout the world. His books include This Grateful Heart: Psalms and Prayers for a New Day, This Joyous Soul: A New Voice for Ancient Yearnings, and This Precious Life: Encountering the Divine with Poetry and Prayer, all published by CCAR Press. His work is anthologized in more than twenty volumes across the religious spectrum. See his work at www.tobendlight.com. Alden can be reached at alden@tobendlight.com.

Sue Radner Horowitz is a singer-songwriter who believes in the healing power of community singing. A successful Jewish touring artist with four albums of original music, Sue is regularly featured at national conferences and serves congregations and communities throughout the United States with prayer and song. Her songs have been included in publications and compilations including Ruach, CCAR Haggadot, Manginot and Chazak V’ematz. Sue leads songwriting workshops and is the founder and facilitator of the Jewish Songwriting Cooperative Retreat. She is a regular on Jewish Rock Radio as well as folk radio stations. Hear her work at www.suehorowitz.com, where she can also be reached.