

Hallel in a Minor Key

Liturgy and Lyrics by Alden Solovy

Music by Sue Radner Horowitz

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.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
 אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ
 לְקַרְא אֶת הַהֲלֵל.

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

הַלְלוּיָהּ הַלְלוּ עַבְדֵי יי הַלְלוּ אֶת־שֵׁם יי.

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.

Hal'luyah hal'lu avdei Adonai, hal'lu et shem Adonai. הַלְלוּיָהּ הַלְלוּ עַבְדֵי יי הַלְלוּ אֶת־שֵׁם יי

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

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.

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.

Milifnei adon chuli aretz, milifnei Elo-ah Yaakov. מִלְפְּנֵי אֲדֹנָי חוּלֵי אֶרֶץ מִלְפְּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב.

Tremble, O earth, at the presence of God, at the presence of the God of Jacob. (Psalm 114:7)

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.

B'ruchim atem l'Adonai, oseih shamayim vaaretz. בְּרוּכִים אַתֶּם לַיְי עֹשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ.

May you be blessed by Adonai, Maker of heaven and earth. (Psalm 115:15)

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.

Et'haleich lifnei Adonai b'artzot hachayim. אֶתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי יי בְּאֶרְצוֹת הַחַיִּים.

I shall walk before Adonai in the lands of the living. (Psalm 116:9)

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.

Hal'lu et Adonai (chant or read)

Hal'lu et Adonai kol goyim, shab'chuhu
kol ha-umim. Ki gavar aleinu chasdo,
ve-emet Adonai l'olam. Hal'luyah.

הַלְלוּ אֶת־יְיָ, כָּל־גּוֹיִם; שִׁבְחוּהוּ
 כָּל־הָאֲמִיּוֹת. כִּי גָבַר עָלֵינוּ חַסְדּוֹ,
 וְאֵמֶת־יְיָ לְעוֹלָם הַלְלוּיָהּ.

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.

הוֹדוּ לַיְיָ כִּי־טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ.
 הוֹדוּ לַיְיָ כִּי־טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ.
 יֹאמְרוּ־נָא יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ.
 הוֹדוּ לַיְיָ כִּי־טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ.
 יֹאמְרוּ־נָא בֵּית־אֶהֱרֹן כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ.
 הוֹדוּ לַיְיָ כִּי־טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ.
 יֹאמְרוּ־נָא יְרֵאֵי יְיָ כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ.
 הוֹדוּ לַיְיָ כִּי־טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ.

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.

Min hameitzar karati Yah, anani vamerchav Yah.

מִן־הַמִּצָּר קָרָאתִי יְהוָה, עָנְנִי בַמְּרֹחַב יְהוָה.

In distress I called on Yah; Yah answered me and brought me relief. (Psalm 118:5)

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.

מִן־הַמִּצָּר קָרָאתִי יְהוָה, עָנְנִי בַמְּרֹחַב יְהוָה.

In distress I called on Yah; Yah answered me and brought me relief. (Psalm 118:5)

Pit'chu Li (sing)*Pit'chu li shaarei tzedek, avo vam odeh Yah.*

פְּתַח־לִי שְׁעַר־צֶדֶק אֲבֹא־בָם אוֹדֶה יְהוָה.

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 hoshiah na.***Ana Adonai hatzlichah na.***Ana Adonai hatzlichah na.***Ana Adonai hatzlichah na.***Ana Adonai hatzlichah na.*

אָנָּה יי הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא.
 אָנָּה יי הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא.
 אָנָּה יי הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא.
 אָנָּה יי הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא.
 אָנָּה יי הַצְּלִיחָה נָּא.
 אָנָּה יי הַצְּלִיחָה נָּא.
 אָנָּה יי הַצְּלִיחָה נָּא.
 אָנָּה יי הַצְּלִיחָה נָּא.

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

הַלְלוּיָהּ הַלְלוּ עַבְדֵי יי הַלְלוּ אֶת־שֵׁם יי.

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

*Closing Blessing**Baruch atah Adonai, Melech m'hulal batishbachot.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי מֶלֶךְ מְהֻלָּל בַּתְּשׁבָּחוֹת.

Blessed are You Adonai, Sovereign extolled with praises.

Hallel in a Minor Key

Words by Alden Solovy

Music by Sue Horowitz

Psalm 113:1

Dm Dm A7 Gm
 Praise God from the heights of re-joic-ing Praise God from the

6 A7 Dm A7 Dm Dm
 depths of de-spair Praise God from the plac-es in be-tween Praise God when

12 A7 Gm A7 Dm
 plague stalks our days Praise God when fear stalks our nights Praise God when

16 A7 Dm Dm C A7 Dm
 dark-ness de-scends We sing prais-es in a mi-nor key

21 F C F A7 Dm C A7 Dm C
 The key of heart-break With tropes of la-men-ta-tion, But still prai-

26 Dm A A⁺ 3 A A⁺ 3 A
 ses For beau-ty has not been lost And hope has not been de-feat-ed

31 A⁺ 3 A A⁺ A Dm C
 And love still shines A bea-con of to-mor-row Hal-le-

36 A7 Dm F C F A7 Dm C A7 Dm
 lu Yah, Hal-le-lu-av-dei A-do nai Hal-le-lu

Hallel in a Minor Key

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

46 Praise God from sor-row and pain Praise God from the plac-es in be-tween

51 Praise God when God feels dist-ant Praise God when God feels ab-sent

56 Praise God when dark-ness de-scends We sing prais-es in a mi-nor key

62 The key of heart-break With tropes of la-men-ta-tion, But still prai-

67 ses For beau-ty has not been lost And hope has not been de-feat-ed

72 And love still shines A bea-con of to-mor-row Hal-le-

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

Acknowledgments

Sue and Alden offer thanks to friends and colleagues who gave their time, skills, energy, and encouragement to the creation of this liturgy, with profound thanks to the teams at the Central Conference of American Rabbis and Ritualwell who supported the project.

Design: Scott-Martin Kosofky

Proofreading: Deborah Smilow

Hebrew and Transliteration: Asher Arbit

Musical Transcription: Chava Ireland

Musical Production: Eric Kilburn

CCAR Team: Rabbi Hara Person, Rabbi Betsy Torop, Rafael Chaiken, Raquel Fairweather

Ritualwell Team: Hila Ratzabi, Adva Chatter

Portions of “Hallel in a Minor Key” were first presented during a Ritualwell online event, “*Refuah Shleimah*: A Healing Ritual Marking a Year of Pandemic,” and portions were shared in a breakout session at the 2021 CCAR Convention held online, both in March 2021.

Permissions

“Hallel in a Minor Key” lyrics © 2021 Alden Solovy and www.tobendlight.com,
music © 2021 Sue Radner Horowitz.

“Psalm for Living and Dying” © 2021 Alden Solovy and www.tobendlight.com.

“Carry Me” © 2013 Alden Solovy from *Jewish Prayers of Hope and Healing*.

“In My Distress” © 2021 Central Conference of American Rabbis from *This Precious Life: Encountering the Divine with Poetry and Prayer*, available at <http://precious.ccarpress.org/>. Adapted with permission.