TEHILIM # 113 (Halel): In which way do we Jews, praise HaShem?

Tehilim 113

The Text

1. Halleluyah! Praise HaShem, you who are His servants; praise the name of HaShem. **2.** Let the name of HaShem be blessed, from this moment and forevermore. **3.** From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of HaShem is praised. **4.** HaShem is exalted above all the nations; His glory towers above the very heavens. **5.** Who is like HaShem our God – the One who sits enthroned on high, **6.** yet stoops down to behold both the heavens and the earth? **7.** He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap, **8.** to seat them among princes – among the princes of His own people. **9.** He settles the barren woman in her home as a joyful mother of children. Halleluyah!

Commentary

This psalm opens the Hallel – the sequence of praise that Jews recite on the most joyous occasions of the Jewish calendar. Its placement at the very beginning is no accident. Before any celebration can get underway, we pause to ask a fundamental question: *What kind of God are we actually praising here?* The psalm answers that question with quiet power, moving from the broadest possible picture – all of humanity, all of time, the

entire span of the earth – down to the most intimate human experiences imaginable.

Who should praise? HaShem's servants. Not the mighty or the accomplished, but those who stand in a living relationship with Him.

What should be praised? His *name* – which in Jewish thought means not just a label, but His presence as it makes itself felt in the world and in history.

When? From this moment on, forever – without pause, without end.

Where? From sunrise to sunset – everywhere, in every corner of the world.

Having painted that universal picture, the psalm makes a fascinating observation. HaShem is praised by *all the nations* – because anyone, anywhere, who looks up at the night sky and marvels at its order and beauty is, in some sense, giving honor to its Creator. The cosmos is legible to every human being. This kind of praise – call it the praise of wonder, or of philosophical awe – is not limited to the Jewish people. It belongs to all of humanity.

But then the psalm asks: *Who is like HaShem our God?*

And here is where things get interesting. What sets HaShem apart, the psalmist says, is not simply that He dwells on high – it's that He also *looks down*. He is not a remote, indifferent Creator who built the universe and then stepped away. He pays attention. He is moved by what He sees. He reaches into the dust and lifts out the person nobody noticed. He hears the silent grief of a woman who longs for a child.

That combination – infinite transcendence *and* intimate involvement – is what makes Jewish praise unlike any other.

Other peoples can honor God as the architect of the cosmos. What Israel proclaims is that the very same God who is beyond all comprehension is also present in the smallest, most personal corners of human life. Our praise is distinctive because our *experience* of God is distinctive: we find Him not only in the grandeur of the heavens, but in the quiet moments where His hand tilts the scales of ordinary life.

The two images at the end of the psalm – the poor man raised to sit among princes, and the barren woman who becomes a happy mother – carry more weight than they might first appear to.

Notice the detail about the poor man: he isn't elevated among strangers in some foreign land. He rises to honor *among his own people*, the very community that once knew him in his poverty. That kind of reversal is far more striking than simply starting fresh somewhere new. Jewish tradition reads this as a portrait of the Exodus – the moment a nation of slaves became the Am HaShem, so glorified that Egypt itself would one day seek their friendship and alliance in the time of King Solomon.

The barren woman, in prophetic literature, is a familiar image for the Land of Israel herself. While her children – Bene Israel – wander in exile, she sits empty and waiting, like a mother whose home has gone quiet. She only truly comes alive when they return.

So the psalm ends not just with praise, but with hope. Just as HaShem once lifted us from the depths of Egypt and made us into something extraordinary, may He do so again – bringing Bene Israel home to their Land, and ushering in the full redemption through Melekh HaMashiach, speedily in our days.