Rabbi Hayyim Angel Publishes New Book on the Psalms

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Rabbi Hayyim Angel

It is with great gratitude that I announce the publication of my new book, *Psalms: A Companion Volume* (New York: Kodesh Press, 2022). Copies may be ordered at https://www.amazon.com/Psalms-Companion-Hayyim-Angel/dp/1947857843/ref=sr_1_1?crid=P4H1YGIXAHJR&keywords=hayyim+angel&qid=1654697463&sprefix=h
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I thank the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and sponsors for making the publication of this volume possible. The book presents in-depth studies of several psalms and also identifies several central themes of Psalms. It serves as an entry point for people of diverse backgrounds.

Here is an excerpt from the Foreword to the book:

About fifteen years ago, I was chatting with my then seven-year-old nephew. At that time, my nephew was a second grader in a local Yeshiva Day School. Although we had been discussing baseball, he suddenly interjected that "it matters what the words of the Torah mean, but it does not matter what the words of the prayers mean."

I was thunderstruck by this innocent yet profound observation. My nephew was reflecting what his religious education silently conveyed: His school devoted significant class time to learning the meaning of the Torah's words, yet prayer remained little more than a rote recital. (Update: my nephew, now 22, has developed a singular prayerful soul and elevates his community regularly by leading prayer services.)

That conversation triggered a deep memory. My journey with the Book of Psalms began when I was an eighteen-year-old yeshiva student in Israel after High School. Early in my first year, I noticed that many of the rabbis as well as students seemed genuinely connected to their prayers and were in no hurry to race through the prayers and move on with their day. Whatever they were experiencing was completely foreign to me. I suddenly felt a profound void in my understanding of prayer after a lifetime of Jewish education. So I took a Book of Psalms off the shelf and began reading it with an English translation and rabbinic commentary. Given that the prayer book is replete with psalms, this seemed like the best place to begin.

That turned out to be a life-transforming experience. I was mesmerized by the God-intoxication, the authenticity, the staggering courage and honesty, and the fiery religious passion in the psalms. Although prayer in school had been a mechanical exercise, I now was experiencing a world of genuine prayer.

When I began teaching advanced undergraduate Bible courses at Yeshiva University in 1996, I chose to teach Psalms as my second course. Engagement with the biblical text, classical commentaries, and contemporary scholarship was a markedly different experience from my initial encounter with Psalms at age 18. In this new setting as a teacher, learning preceded prayer.

Learning Psalms is quite unlike learning every other biblical book. Our goal remains one of Torah learning, but in Psalms that agenda must be a means to an ends, resulting in more authentic prayer. It is my hope and prayer that this companion volume will serve as a tool to enable readers of all backgrounds to understand the psalms, and through that learning to connect more to God through the experience of prayer.