

תוכנית לימודים  
לספר תהלים  
חוברת למורה

**Teaching Sefer Tehillim**  
**Teacher's Guide**

Intended for Yeshiva High Schools.  
Lesson plans accompanied by  
worksheets and review sheets  
ready for printing.  
[www.tehillim.org](http://www.tehillim.org)

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מִכָּל-מְלַמְדֵי הַשִּׁכְלָתִי

כִּי אֶדְוֹתֶיךָ שִׁיחָה לִּי:

(תהלים קיט:צט)

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## Note to the Teacher:

This Guide is intended for High School level classes. It is not necessary to teach all or any of the introductory lessons, although Lesson 4 is particularly important. The Mizmorim can be taught in any order. These lesson plans are not meant as a substitute for each teacher researching and thinking about the meaning of each Mizmor and how best to teach it. Rather, these are suggestions which each teacher should feel free to add to and modify to suit their own classroom and teaching style.

# Introductions

## Lesson 1 – Name of Book, Structure

### Goal:

Students should begin to think about various aspects of Tehillim as whole so that when they learn individual Mizmorim they will have a sense of where it falls within the Sefer.

### Activity:

1. **Name:** Explain the derivation of the two names of this book. In Hebrew, this book is called ספר תהלים or just תהלים (plural of תהילה). In the Talmud it is abbreviated to תלים. This name comes from the root הלל which is also the root of הללויה. The English name Psalms comes from the Greek name of the book in the Septuagint (the translation made by the Jews of Egypt in the second century BCE) which is a translation of the word מזמר, meaning “a song.” In Hebrew, we also refer to each individual psalm as a מזמר and not as a perek.

2. **Discussion:** Ask students what they know about Sefer Tehillim. The purpose of this exercise is not to teach right and wrong answers yet but rather to get students thinking about the various issues connected with grasping Sefer Tehillim as a whole. Freely discuss the following: *Who wrote it? How do you know? Were all the Mizmorim written at once or over a long period of time? Were they written down right away or transmitted orally?* Even if there were some written versions, most people would not have access to them since writing was very expensive. Most people would memorize them and recite them by heart. *Is the author the same person as the final editor? What genre is it? Is it poetry? What are the poems about?* Most of them are praises, prayers, and thanks. Some psalms combine these themes and others don't fit neatly into any of these categories. Ps 1. is simply a statement about righteousness – a piece of wisdom directed from a sage to a student. Ps 150 is all praise. *Is it prophetic and what does that mean? Are the words of the book directed from man to God or from God to man?* Unlike most of Tanakh which is God's words directed to man, Tehillim are man's words directed to God. *Is there any order to the psalms or could you mix them up without losing anything?* It is not easy to discern any simple chronological or thematic order. However, there are groups of psalms that hold together such as the Shir haMa'a lot. There are also often linguistic connections from one Mizmor to the next.

3. **Five Books:** Now show the students some of the formal aspects of the book. The whole Sefer is split up into five books. Look at 41:14. Look for an indication in the Tanakh that the second book begins with 42:1 such as ספר שני written in the margin. Compare 41:14 with 72:18-20; 89:53; & 106:48. Have students write them on the board:

תהלים פרק מא (יד) בְּרוּךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִהַעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם אָמֵן וְאָמֵן :	תהלים פרק עב
(יח) בְּרוּךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵים אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲשֵׂה נִפְלְאוֹת לְבָדּוֹ :	
(יט) וּבְרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹדוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעוֹלָם וְיִמְלֹא כְבוֹדוֹ אֶת כָּל הָאָרֶץ אָמֵן וְאָמֵן :	
(כ) כָּלֹ תַפְלוֹת דָּוִד בֶּן יִשָּׁי :	
(ג) בְּרוּךְ יְיָ לְעוֹלָם אָמֵן וְאָמֵן :	תהלים פרק פט
(מח) בְּרוּךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן הָעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם וְאָמֵר כָּל הָעָם אָמֵן הִלְלוּ יְהוָה :	תהלים פרק קו

Notice how all of these pesukim are very similar. Each of them indicates the conclusion of one book of Tehillim. Why is the Sefer split up into five books? There is one hint in 72:20. *What does this mean that this is the end of David's songs if the whole book is made up of his songs?* In order to answer this question we need to analyze the psalm headings.

5. Have the class analyze the headings together. Some Mizmorim have no heading at all such as Pss 1 and 2. These psalms without a heading (anonymous psalms) are found at the beginning and end of Tehillim and also some in between. When they occur within Tehillim they often indicate that the Mizmor is attached to the one before it. Such is the case with Ps 10 which continues Ps 9 (in the Septuagint they are counted as one).

Ask students to find the first psalm which has a heading but which does not mention the name of David in the heading. It turns out to be 42 – the first psalm of book 2. Once they get the hang of it, have them continue scanning all the headings looking for patterns and groups. They should notice the following: Book 1 is all לדוד. Book 2 begins with 7 לבני קרח Mizmorim followed by 1 לאסף, and the rest are all לדוד. Book three has 11 לאסף Mizmorim, 4 לבני קרח, and a couple of others. Book 4 does not have any dominant pattern except for a couple of שירי חדש and שירו לה' headings. Book 5 contains a long section of שיר המעלות, 9 הללויה headings (the word הללויה never occurs in the first three books), and a small group of לדוד Mizmorim. See summary sheet.

Now we can understand why Ps 72 ends with the words “Here end of songs of David.” Almost all of the David psalms are concentrated in Books 1 and 2 while only a few are scattered in the last three books. Books 1 and 2 are collections of David psalms. What emerges from this analysis is that there are a number of groups of Mizmorim (לדוד, הללויה, שיר המעלות, לאסף, לבני קרח) which may originally have been independent units. These units came together to form books and the books came together to form the whole of Sefer Tehillim. Tehillim is therefore a collection or anthology of Mizmorim.

It is likely that there were many more poems written by David and others over the centuries which are not included in Tehillim. In fact, Sefer Shemuel includes three poems of David that are not recorded in Tehillim. Tehillim includes only those prayers and songs which have lasting significance. It will be our job to discover what about Tehillim makes it able to inspire so many people throughout so many generations.

## Psalms Headings for All Five Books of Tehillim

