

מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן בְּכַהֲנֵינוּ,
 וְשִׁמוּאֵל בְּקִרְאֵי שְׁמוֹ,
 קִרְאִים אֶל יְהוָה וְהוּא יַעֲנֵם.
 בְּעֲמוּד עָנָן יְדַבֵּר אֲלֵיהֶם,
 שְׁמְרוּ יְעֻדְתִּי וְחֻק גִּתִּן לָמוֹ.
 יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אַתָּה עֲנִיתָם,
 אֵל נִשְׂא הָיִיתָ לָהֶם,
 וְנִקַּם עַל עֲלִילוֹתָם.

◀ רִוְמָמוֹ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ,

וְהַשְׁתַּחֲוִי לְהַר קָדְשׁוֹ,

בִּי־קְדוֹשׁ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ.

תהלים צט

MOSES AND AARON AMONG
 GOD'S PRIESTS מֹשֶׁה

וְאַהֲרֹן בְּכַהֲנֵינוּ. Here both Moses and Aaron are called priests. Rashi explains that Moses served as High Priest during the seven days of Aaron's ordination (see his comment to Leviticus 8:28). But a midrash offers a more radical interpretation: that even after Aaron's ordination, Moses continued to serve as a High Priest for the forty years in the desert (Midrash on Psalms). Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888, Germany) adds that someone who teaches or inspires another to be able to experience the Divine may be called a priest.

AND SAMUEL AMONG THOSE WHO CALLED UPON THE DIVINE NAME וְשִׁמוּאֵל בְּקִרְאֵי שְׁמוֹ. Samuel served both as prophet and as an acolyte to the High Priest of his day, Eli. Moses and Aaron were of the tribe of Levi; Samuel represents the continuation of prophetic leadership unconnected to levitical lineage.

YOU SPOKE TO THEM FROM AMIDST THE CLOUD בְּעֲמוּד עָנָן יְדַבֵּר אֲלֵיהֶם. An image borrowed from the revelation at Sinai, where God spoke to Israel the words of the Decalogue from amidst the cloud that descended on the mountain (Exodus 19:18).

EVEN AS YOU PUNISHED THEM FOR THEIR TRANSGRESSIONS וְנִקַּם עַל עֲלִילוֹתָם. God's administration of justice knows no favorites. When Moses and Aaron sinned, they were punished—Moses and Aaron died in the wilderness and did not enter the Land of Israel. Nevertheless, they and all the faithful are held close by God even as their sins may be punished, as justice demands. In an alternative understanding, the verb could be revocalized as וְנִקַּם (*v'nikam*), which would mean “cleansed them”—that is, the phrase continues the thought begun in the first half of the verse, that God forgives the sins of righteous people. In this reading, justice includes forgiveness.

GOD'S HOLY MOUNTAIN לְהַר קָדְשׁוֹ. Literally, this refers to Zion, the Temple Mount, which is here identified with the sanctuary in the desert and the temporary sanctuary at the time of the judges. In the context of its placement here as part of the Friday night liturgy, the psalm suggests that our congregating together each Shabbat is a kind of sanctuary in time, when we too might experience a revelatory moment.

SONG OF SONGS 2:8–13 (*opposite page, far left*). The time for the lovers to be together has arrived; they are, imminently, to go out to lie down in the field together. The lover calls for his beloved to join him with the phrase *l'khi lakh*, “come away”—a phrase that resonates liturgically with the words of the chorus we are about to sing to greet Shabbat, *L'kha Dodi*. In the phrase *l'khi lakh*, we may hear an echo of God's call to Abraham, *lekh l'kha* (Genesis 12:1)—this time, formulated in the feminine. Similarly, the word “voice” (*kol*) anticipates the seven-fold repetition of the same word in Psalm 29, which follows.