

English Abstract

The Custom of Saying Tehilim

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In the times of the Holy Temple the Levites would each day sing hymnals from the book of Psalms. On occasions it was also accustomed to sing additional special hymnals. While towards the end of the Gaonic period there is also evidence of regular readings of the book. This is the source of the widespread custom amongst Jewish communities to recite Psalms daily and not necessarily referring to a specific date or due to a specific Holiday.

Indeed, it is challenging to pinpoint exactly when this custom came into mainstream practice, albeit not in a single day, gradually for different reasons the recitation took on permanence. For instance, it was seen as a powerful force to counter extreme circumstances including psychical and spiritual threats alike. With the passing of time Psalms took on the level of a prayer-book that had far reaching influence in the religious paradigm. For example, the decree of the Arizal to not learn holy scripture at night did not include recitation of Psalms.

In order to regulate the new daily reading the book of Psalms was partitioned in different ways in order to allow for short and complete readings. In order to counter what would inevitably be lost with the normalized daily reading, the addition of melodies and emphasis on certain elements, as Kavvanah or Devekut, even 'studying' of the Psalms, has evolved to the point of a right way of reciting.

The article discusses the incarnations of the custom in various aspects.