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How to Gain Wisdom of Heart: The Meaning of the Rhetorical Structure of Psalm 90

The request for wisdom of heart that can be found in Psalm 90:12 conveys in a certain sense the essence of the spiritual search on which that the authors of the Old Testament Wisdom Books embarked. In the end, they arrived at the conclusion that true knowledge can be attained only as a gift from the Creator. The question that remains, however, is: how man can receive this knowledge? The analysis of Psalm 90 presented below is an attempt to respond to this question. This analysis focuses particularly on the literary structure of Psalm 90 because, by coming to a better understanding of the way in which the sections and respective elements of the poem relate to each other, one arrives at the psalm's deeper meaning. In this regard, the psychologist Hubert Hermans' valuation theory is particularly helpful.

Key words: Psalm 90, rhetorical analysis, emotions in the OT, God's wrath, epistemology of OT.

In his book *Wisdom Epistemology in the Psalter: A Study of Psalms 1, 73, 90, and 107*, J. Kartje ponders how wisdom literature (especially the psalms) constructs its epistemology. One of the book's chapters is dedicated to the study of Psalm 90 because this particular poem is described as a "wisdom psalm," and it plays an important role in the Psalter's structure as the opening unit of its fourth book. The author concludes that this psalm speaks about an extraordinary, divine knowledge that human beings cannot obtain by means of their own faculties but that they can receive as a gift.¹ Kartje's analysis, however, does not

¹ See J. Kartje, *Wisdom Epistemology in the Psalter: A Study of Psalms 1, 73, 90, and 107*, Berlin-Boston 2014, 130-131.

include the role of the language of emotions that imbue this poem—an important oversight that is key to understanding the modality by which divine knowledge is communicated to humans. This study will pay particular attention to Psalm 90's literary structure as the key to interpreting it properly.

Rhetorical Analysis

Exegetes disagree about the literary structure of Psalm 90. For a certain period of time, they generally agreed with S. Schreiner² and P. Auffret's³ observations that the structure of the poem is concentric and that vv. 11-12 are the center. E. Zenger⁴ and M. Tate's⁵ commentaries propose essentially the same structures, even though their interpretations differ slightly. In the recent decades, however, these interpretations have been called into question. For example, S. Terrien proposes dividing Psalm 90 into three strophes (vv. 3-6, 7-9, 11-15), with addition of a separate *introit* (vv. 1-2) and *postlude* (vv. 16-17), which he admits is unusual.⁶ B. Weber divides the psalm into three regular strophes (vv. 1-6, 7-12, 13-17) and argues that the second strophe is the center of composition.⁷ T. Tułodziecki makes a very similar proposal, but he asserts that the transitions between the strophes occur in vv. 1-6, 7-11, and 12-17. In addition, he includes v.12 in the last strophe because the verse begins with a series of imperatives that are characteristic of the last part of the poem.⁸ P. Van Der Lugt essentially upholds Weber's division of Psalm 90 into thirds. According to Van Der Lugt, although the structure of Psalm 90 has concentric aspects, "the composition as

² S. Schreiner, "Erwägungen zur Struktur des 90. Psalms," *Bib* 59(1978): 80-90.

³ P. Auffret, "Essai sur la structure littéraire du Psaume 90," *Bib* 61(1980): 262-276.

⁴ E. Zenger, "Psalm 90," in: *Psalms 2*, eds. F. L. Hossfeld, E. Zenger, Minneapolis 2005, 420.

⁵ M. E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Nashville 1990, 437-439.

⁶ See S. Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*, vol. 2, Grand Rapids 2003, 642-645. The author divides the last strophe into two parts: v. 11-12 and v. 13-15.

⁷ See B. Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen II. Die Psalmen 73 bis 150*, Stuttgart 2003, 117-120.

⁸ See T. Tułodziecki, "'Dzisiaj kwiatem, jutro słomą' – tajemnica ludzkiego przemijania w Ps 90," *Verbum Vitae* 24(2014): 73-94.

a whole has a *linearly* alternating scheme that does more justice to its design than a concentric scheme.”⁹

The aforementioned interpretations arise from the different methodologies that each author uses to analyze Psalm 90. For now, exegetes have not come to a consensus on the structure of Psalm 90. It is clear, however, that the section that proponents of the concentric scheme consider pivotal begins with the rhetorical question *mī jōdē*^a (“who comprehends?”). This literary feature usually marks the transition between the different sections. In fact, almost all exegetes think that the rhetorical question (*‘ad mātāj* “how long?” v. 13) is the transition. With this in mind, it is clear that vv.11-12 form a separate section, which leaves one to ask: Is this really the turning point of the entire composition?

This study begins with an analysis of part V of Psalm 90, since it is the most straightforward. Verses 13-17 are made up of five segments, all of which are bimember except for the last, which is trimember.¹⁰ The first three segments form one piece, and each segment characteristically begins imperatively with the letter š or ś (note that the imperative in the second member of the first segment does not begin with this letter).¹¹ The connection between the second and third segments is marked well, since the median terms “day” (*jôm*) and “to rejoice” (*śmḥ*) and the antithesis between the extreme terms “goodness” (*hesed*) and “evil” (*rā ‘āh*) form a chiasmic pattern. Thus, the structure of the entire piece is ABB’. The other piece is made up of only two segments: a bimember (v. 16) and a trimember (v. 17). The first segment contains a clear chiasmus. The second segment has an ABB’ structure, while the third member practically repeats the second. The word pair *p’l/m śh* (the meaning of both terms is “working, doing”) links the two segments. In my opinion, each piece should be considered a separate part even though they are connected. The expressions *jhwḥ* (v. 13a) and *‘ādōnāj ‘ēlōhēnū* (v. 17a) notably form the *inclusio*. The repeated noun *‘ābādēkā* (“your servants” v.13b.16a) is the initial term of both parts.

Unlike part V, the first verses of Psalm 90 are more complicated. Some authors have studied the link between vv. 1b-2 and argue that the initial verses constitute one piece composed of two segments (one

⁹ P. van der Lugt, *Cantos and Strophes in Biblical Hebrew Poetry III. Psalms 90-150 and Psalm 1*, Leiden-Boston 2014, 13-26.

¹⁰ In order to avoid confusion, this author uses R. Meynet’s terminology and methodology of rhetorical analysis in the following part of this article. See R. Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis. An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric*, Sheffield 1998.

¹¹ See P. van der Lugt, *Cantos and Strophes*, 21.

bimember and one trimember), which form a chiasmic structure.¹² I would argue, however, that this structure should include v. 3 because this single segment piece connects better to the verses that precede it than those that follow it.¹³ The relationship between the pieces is built upon the contrasts between the expressions *ʾādōnāj* “Lord” and *ʾēl* “God” (extreme terms of the first piece), on the one hand, and *ʾēnōš* “mortal man” and *bʿne ʾādām* “sons of Adam” (the final terms of each member in the second piece), on the other.¹⁴

Psalm 90, part II is made up of vv. 4-20. In this part, the particle *kî*, which marks the transition between the three separate pieces (vv. 4-6, 7-8, 9-10), repeats three times. The first piece is made up of three segments, which form a concentric structure around v.5a. The first and the last segments are trimember while the central is unimember. In the first segment, the two final members constitute a chiasmus, with nouns *jôm* “day” and *lajlāh* “night” serving as the extreme terms. The first member (v. 4a) is connected to the final members by the two aforementioned terms, which parallel the words *šānîm* “years” and *ʾašmūrāh* “night-watch,” which belong to the same semantic field—namely, different measures of time. Thus, the structure is ABB'. In the third segment, the two initial members are almost completely symmetrical, while the third member is related to them by antithetical parallelism: the initial term “morning” (vv. 5b, 4a) corresponds to *ʾereḅ* “evening” (v. 4b), while the verbs *ḥlp* and *jwš* “to renew, to blossom” correspond to the verbs *mwl* and *jbš* “to be cut, to wither.” Thus, in this instance, the structure is AA'B. Both segments are related to each other as follows: the word-pair “day/night” in the first segment corresponds to the word pair “morning/evening” in the third. In addition, there is assonance between *ʾlp* (v. 4a) and *ḥlp* (v. 5b), which may be considered the initial terms of both segments. The central segment contains the expression *šēnāh* “sleep,” which sounds almost identical to *šānāh* “year.”

The second piece of part II consists of two bimember segments. The first segment demonstrates complete chiasmic symmetry, while the second depicts parallel symmetry. The link between segments is established by the parallelism of the extreme terms *ʾap* “anger, nostril” (v. 7a) and *pānîm* “face” (v. 8b).

¹² See P. Auffret, “Essai sur la structure,” 263.

¹³ When listing the verbal repetitions within the strophes, van der Lugt omits v.3-4. See P. van der Lugt, *Cantos and Strophes*, 15. Auffret notes that the particle *kî* connects these two segments, but this claim is not particularly convincing. See P. Auffret, “Essai sur la structure,” 264-265.

¹⁴ The terms *ʾdnj* and *ʾdm* are assonant.

The final piece of part II is made up of three bimember segments. The first segment contains the word pair *jāmênû* “our days” and *šānênû* “our years.” In: the second segment, the final term of each member consists of a number and a noun *šānāh* “year.” It is difficult to establish any link within the last segment apart from the mere repetition of the particle *w^e* in the final terms. The connection between the first and second segments is clearly marked by the repetition of the term “day” at the beginning of each segment and the presence of different forms of the noun “year,” which appears four times (vv. 9b, 10ax2, 10b). As for the last segment, the terms *blm* (v. 10a) and *wrhbm* (v. 10c)¹⁵ correspond to each other alliteratively. To summarize, this piece has an AA'B structure.

Part II as a whole undoubtedly has a concentric structure because the relationship between the extreme pieces are marked clearly by the nouns “year” (vv. 4a, 9b.10ax2, 10b) and “day” (vv. 4b, 9a, 10a) as well as numbers (“thousand” v. 4a, “seventy” v. 10a, “eighty” v. 10b), which are repeated. There are also other terms related to the measurement of time. The link between the second and the third piece is also marked well by the verb *klh* “to consume” in the initial segments of both pieces (vv. 7a, 9b). In addition, terms related to God’s wrath (*’ap[̄]* v.7a, *hēmāh* v.7b, *’ebrāh* v.9a) are repeated.

Verses 11-12 make up part III of Psalm 90. These verses contain two bimember segments. In the initial segment, the final terms parallel each other because both of them refer to the emotion of anger (*’ap[̄]* and *’ebrāh*). The second segment seems not to contain or be linked together through parallelism. Instead, the entire part is linked together by the repetition of root *jd’* “to know” (vv. 11a, 12a) in the initial member of each segment.¹⁶ Thus, the entire psalm (passage) is composed of five parts.

The relationship between the five parts of Psalm 90 is equally interesting because these parts form the concentric structure ABXB’A.’ Parts I and V are clearly linked through the repetition of the term *’ādōnāj*, which forms the *inclusio* for the entire poem and is also the extreme term in the parallel composition of these two parts. In these two parts, the noun *b^ene* “sons” (vv. 3b, 16b) serves as a median term. In addition, the expressions *mā’ōn* “sanctuary” (v. 1b) and *nō’am* “beauty, pleasantness” (v. 17a)¹⁷ correlate closely. The expressions “man” and

¹⁵ See P. van der Lugt, *Cantos and Strophes*, 21.

¹⁶ See S. Schreiner, “*Erwägungen*,” 87.

¹⁷ Although these two terms certainly sound similar, the link between them is more profound than sound. As Levenson convincingly argues, in this context

“sons of Adam” (v. 3) find their counterparts in “your servants” and “their children” in v.16.

Parts II and IV of the poem are also clearly linked by the reappearance of the terms “year” and “day” (vv. 14, 15). The expression *babōqer* “in the morning” is also present in both parts (vv.5b, 6a, 14). Parts II and IV are also contain antithetical emotions. More specifically, the nouns that express God’s wrath in part II (*’ap̄*, *ḥēmāh*, *’ebrāh*) are balanced by the presence of the term *ḥesed* “goodness” in part IV. The same is true about the antithetical verbs *bhl* “joy” and *klh* “to be terrified (Ni.)” and “to come to an end, to be exhausted”¹⁸ in the fourth part.

Part III of Psalm 90 is related to the remainder of the poem. Terms *’ap̄* and *’ebrāh* appear in part II and in v. 11. Verse 12 begins with an imperative, a feature that is repeated in the verses that follow.

The structure of Psalm 90 explained above is essentially the same as the structure that Schreiner and Auffret describe. This study, however, treats vv. 1-2, v. 3, and vv. 15-17 as separate units.¹⁹ Verses 11-12 form the central part of the structure, which is framed intermediately by parts II and IV, which are subsequently framed by parts I and V. This structure is not well-balanced, which may be due to the longer process of redaction that several exegetes postulate.²⁰ This, however, does not negate the artistic structure of the composition in the Masoretic Text (MT).

The Meaning of the Structure

This analysis begins by focusing on the external frame of Psalm 90 (parts I and V). As seen before, part I is built upon the antithetical relationship between two pieces. The main contrast can be seen in the opposition between the image of the eternal God-Creator of the world and transitory man, who is destined to become dust. The

the meaning of the term *nō’am* refers to the epiphany of God in His deeds. See J. D. Levenson, “Technical Meaning for *n’m* in the Hebrew Bible,” *VT* 35/1(1985): 62-63.

¹⁸ The term *klh* can positively mean “to accomplish” in the sense of achieving a goal. Exegetes, however, often assume its negative meaning of “to perish”, “to be exhausted,” or even “to fail.” This second meaning is frequently used in connection with the God’s wrath. See G. Gerleman, *klh to be at an end*, in: *TLOT*, 795-797.

¹⁹ Both Weber and Van der Lugt also point out that the two final verses are connected in the substructure. See B. Weber, *Werkbuch*, 120; P. van der Lugt *Cantos and Strophes*, 21.

²⁰ See E. Zenger, “Psalm 90,” 420-421.

creatureliness of mankind is emphasized by the use of terms *ʿēnōš* and *ʿādām*, which can both be translated as “man,” “person,” “mankind,” or “humanity.” In: the Psalter (and also in Job) *ʿēnōš* signifies mainly human fragility, transitoriness, and mortality.²¹ This same word pair is present in Psalm 8:5: “what is man that you are mindful of him, and a son of man that you care for him?” In Psalm 8 as much as in Psalm 90 these terms highlight the ontological difference between humankind and God. While Psalm 8 presents God as the one who elevates man to a higher level, Psalm 90 shows God acting in the opposite way. When God says “Return”, man’s existence ceases, and he becomes *dakkā* “dust” (v. 3a). The word “dust” alludes to Adam and Eve’s sin in Genesis, where God says: “to dust you shall return.”²² Tułodziecki aptly expresses this concept of the frailty of the human condition (presented in part I of the Psalm 90) in the title of his paper: “Today a flower, tomorrow straw.”²³ God, on the other hand, remains immutable: “from eternity to eternity you are God.” God proves His power by the work of His hands: He has created “the mountains [...] the earth and the world” (v. 2). All of this emphasizes God’s transcendence: He existed before everything else came into being, and He will remain unchanged after everything ceases to exist. God’s relationship to the world is expressed in His act of creation. The psalmist presents this act through the mythic theme of a creation birth in which JHWH acts as mother (v. 2a) and as father (v. 2b).²⁴ In v. 1b, God is described as *māʿōn*. Although many authors have suggested that this text needs to be amended, this is certainly unnecessary. In his article, H. P. Müller argues that *māʿōn* can mean “help.”²⁵ In addition, the parallel places within the OT show that this noun can also signify both a “dwelling place” and a “hiding place” (cf., Jer 9:10; 49:33). The interpretation of this study follows Zenger’s assertion that “both connotations are at play.”²⁶ The word *māʿōn* suggests the existence of a relationship between God and men. It refers to God’s salvific actions upheld by tradition, which transmits the memory of these events “from generation to generation.” I would argue, however, that, while not negating the truth passed on through

²¹ See C. Westermann, *ʿādām* person, *TLOT*, 92.

²² In both cases, the terms used are different.

²³ T. Tułodziecki, “Dzisiaj kwiatem,” 73-94.

²⁴ See E. Zenger, *Psalm 90*, 421.

²⁵ See H. P. Müller, “Der 90. Psalm: Ein Paradigma exegetischen Aufgaben,” *ZThK* 81(1984): 269.

²⁶ E. Zenger, “Psalm 90,” 417.

tradition, the psalmist provokes the reader to reconsider whether and in what ways God has been a “dwelling place” and “help” to him or her.

Part V of the poem is the response to the question above. Like part I, part V also contains a contraposition between God and men. In part V, however, the situation is different. Firstly, the terms used to describe men have changed: they are now referred to as *ʿābādēkā* “your [God’s] servants.” This description suggests that man relates to God in a way other than as a being created by Him; the word “servants” implies something more personal. Verse 16 also mentions the *pōʿal* “deeds” of God, a clear allusion to the act of creation described in vv. 1b-2. But here the psalmist asks for these deeds to be shown (*rʿh* [Ni.]) to him. In this instance, the psalmist is referring to the experience of participating in divine action, which is expressed in the positive terms *hādār* “glory” and *nōʿam* “favor” “on” men (cf. repetition of *ʿal* in vv.16b and 17a). This, therefore, conveys that both human and divine movements are somehow connected. In the last, twice-repeated plea of the poem (v. 17bc), the psalmist asks God to *kûn* “establish” the “work of our hands.” The verb *kûn* is frequently used in relation to the act of creation.²⁷ Here, it seems to mean that human actions supported by God are no longer transitory; rather, they are imbued with the divine. Thus, the divide between the divine and human world has been crossed: man has become the Lord’s collaborator.

The inner frame of Psalm 90 is made up of parts II and IV (vv. 4-10 and vv. 13-15, respectively). The juxtaposition of the terms used to convey negative (part II) and positive (part IV) emotions and the repetition of measures of time (day, year) connect these two parts. Even a cursory review of this poem clearly reveals that one of Psalm 90’s main themes is the passing of time, which makes man unhappy and his perspective on life negative (“toil and sorrow”). The central piece of part II contains and introduces another interesting detail: God Himself causes this sorrow when He shows and makes man aware of his faults (*ʿāwōnōt*), and hidden sins (*ʿālūmīm*). As B. A. Strawn convincingly asserts, the second term refers to the wrongdoings committed either unwillingly or even unwittingly.²⁸ The very fact that the transgression occurred is the real cause of the God’s wrath (another important topic in Psalm 90), while the mere knowledge of being a sinner (i.e., being unable to fully keep God’s covenant) makes man miserable. This state is expressed by two verbs: *bhl* and *khl*. The former in Niphal means “to be disturbed,

²⁷ See E. Gerstenberger, “*kûn* (Ni.) to stand firm,” *TLOT*, 779-783.

²⁸ See B. A. Strawn, “What It Is Like to Be a Psalmist? Unintentional Sin and Moral Agency in the Psalter,” *JSOT* 40/1(2015): 69-70.

dismayed, terrified, anxious” and “to be in a hurry.”²⁹ The primary meaning of the *khl* is “to consume,” but it can also signify “to come to an end, to be spent” or even “to perish, vanish, be destroyed.”³⁰ In the context of Psalm 90, these verbs convey the emotional experience of someone who is confused, fearful, and anxious – the feeling of being near death. Part II of the poem presents man’s two enemies: 1) God when He acts according to His anger, and 2) man himself when he realizes his own limitations. If he is strong, man can reach the age of eighty (v. 10b), but this does not change the fact that his life is nothing but “misery.”

Psalm 90 does not necessarily judge the passing of time as something negative. In part IV, a diametrical shift in the psalm’s tone occurs. In his prayer, the psalmist asks God to give him cause to “sing for joy” and “be glad” (*šmḥ* and *rnn*). The former is a generic term for joy in the MT. As a rule, the term does not refer to a sustained emotion, but rather to spontaneous joy expressed by loud cries, the clapping of hands, dance, etc. This term is used frequently in reference to religious activity or when describing an individual’s immediate reaction to God’s salvific action. The primary meaning of spontaneous joy is “to cry aloud,” and most often means a joyful exclamation. However, in some cases the term can be used to signify loud lament. Regardless of the specific meaning, the term emphasizes spontaneity and impetuosity.³¹

Thus, Psalm 90 speaks of two separate worlds of emotions. With regard to human sentiments, it refers to anxiety and distress in part II and a longing for overwhelming joy and pleasure in part IV. The psalmist also refers to God anthropologically and speaks about His feelings--His divine wrath and His “kindness” *ḥesed*, and he asks God to *nḥm*, meaning “to be sorry, to be moved to pity” or even “to repent.” Needless to say, the psalmist attributes to God a very broad spectrum of emotional states.

In the central part of Psalm 90, the verb *jd* “to comprehend” plays an important role, since it joins both of the segments that make up this part. In the first segment, the verb refers to knowledge of divine wrath,³² and in the second segment it is part of the psalmist’s plea:

²⁹ BDB, 96.

³⁰ Ibid., 477-479. See also the noun form *kālāh* “completion, complete destruction, annihilation,” and the adjective *kāleh* “failing with desire, longing.”

³¹ See P. Briks, *Radość Boga w Starym Testamencie*, Warszawa 2000, 54-61.

³² The text is unclear in v. 11b. It can be translated literally as: “and as your fear (is) your wrath.” This study, however, assumes that the force of the question “who comprehends?” from v. 11a carries over to v. 11b. If this is the case, then

“teach us to count our days” in order to “gain wisdom of heart.” Thus, “wisdom of heart” means the knowledge of both God’s actions and the meaning of man’s days. How, however, are these two different kinds of knowledge connected?

An Epistemology of “Wisdom of Heart”

In his book *Wisdom Epistemology in the Psalter*, J. Kartje focuses on the meaning of Psalm 90:12. He argues correctly that the verb *mnh* “to count” “entails not the simple act of counting, but rather an ordering – and thus an understanding – of the nature of things (primarily human beings) that only Yhwh may rightfully engage in.”³³ The psalmist asks God to give him this understanding because he cannot acquire it on his own. Kartje continues by discussing how God imparts this ability to humans.

A rhetorical analysis of the Psalm 90’s structure makes it clear that vv. 12 and 11 belong together. The rhetorical question posed in v.11, “who comprehends?,” can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it can simply imply the assumption that “no one can gain this kind of knowledge.” Yet, it can also express that this knowledge is attained only with difficulty. The latter seems more plausible because the psalmist asks God to give him this precise knowledge in the subsequent verse.³⁴ The reason why it is difficult to gain this knowledge is twofold. First, it requires *jr’āt* “fear (of God)” on man’s part. In wisdom literature, “fear of God” is understood to mean just, ethical behavior.³⁵ Second, the very idea of comprehending is not appealing in this psalm: for, who would want to comprehend and, thus, experience God’s wrath?

H. Hermans’ valuation theory is applicable to this analysis. The Dutch psychologist uses the expression “valuation” to refer to anything that a person finds important when narrating his story. Every valuation contains affective component, which expresses basic motives. There are two such motives: striving for self-affirmation and a longing to be united with someone or something else. When a person values something, he experiences emotions that express his basic motives. Valuation as the process of creating meaning consists in relating and

the meaning would be: “who comprehends ... your wrath according to the fear due to you?” See M. E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 435.

³³ J. Kartje, *Wisdom Epistemology*, 137.

³⁴ See J.L. Crenshaw, “The expression *mīyôdēa’* in the Hebrew Bible,” *VT* 36/3(1986): 277-278.

³⁵ See H.P. Stähli, *jr’ to fear*, *TLOT*, 748.

connecting events to each other. Thus, an individual's personal value system changes dynamically as new elements are integrated into previous elements. The social values system plays an important role in this process as the individual refers to it creatively: he can integrate single values into the personal value system or critique and reject them. This process is necessary in order to develop an autonomous and integrated self.³⁶

Herman's theory sheds light on the affects related to the inner state of the psalmist in Psalm 90. Negative emotions prevail in vv. 4-10, which denotes a frustration of one or both of the psalmist's fundamental motives. In this case, the first motive—the tendency toward self-affirmation—is being frustrated. The psalmist has achieved very few results in his effort to give his life meaning. In other words, he discovers that he can neither prolong his life, nor make his efforts last: they are as transitory as he himself is. In addition, God Himself convinces the psalmist of his inadequacy by showing him his sins. In vv. 13-17, on the other hand, positive emotions are prevalent. In this case, however, it is difficult to determine which of the fundamental motives is at play. The call in v. 17: "prosper the work of our hands" may once again point to the first motive: self-affirmation. On the other hand, the psalm alludes to a sort of communion between man and God, which suggests that the second motive—union with another—is at play here as well.

As he does with man, the psalmist also ascribes certain emotions to God in Psalm 90. One of Psalm 90's most important literary devices is anthropomorphism, which attributes human feelings and emotions to God. As with man, God exhibits predominantly negative emotions in vv. 4-10 and mainly positive feelings in vv. 13-17. With regard to God, the negative emotions do not and cannot refer to first basic motive because God's sovereignty over His creatures is immutable, so He in does not need to affirm Himself in any way. Human sin (as stated before in vv. 7-8, which constitute the central piece of part II) is the reason for God's wrath, which would seem to undermine His desire to enter into communion with man. In vv. 13-17, on the other hand, God's affective states include "compassion" and "kindness." According to Hermans, these kind of feelings point to the second basic motive: longing for union. In both instances, then, God's emotions are governed by His longing for a close relationship with man.

³⁶ See H. J. E. Hermans, E. Hermans-Jansen, *Autonarracje: tworzenie znaczeń w psychoterapii*, Warszawa 2000, 29-37.

What does this tell us about epistemology? Firstly, it tells us that, for the psalmist, emotive states play an important role in the process of cognition. The term *lēbāb* refers to man as a rational being, but its semantic field also includes man's desires and feelings.³⁷ Emotions are particularly evident in the realm of interpersonal relationships: without taking them into consideration it is not possible for a person to say that he knows someone else. Both positive and negative emotions have cognitive value. In this case, understanding the motives behind God's wrath enables us to understand better His desire to be close to man. It seems obvious that this kind of knowledge can be acquired only through personal experience, but Psalm 90 does not contain references to real or concrete events from the psalmist's life. Instead, it refers to an inner spiritual experience that is common to every person who recognizes himself as a part of a collective lyrical subject. Both sadness due to a person's awareness of his own transitoriness and joy as the consequence of seeing JHWH's glory are experiences that should be treated seriously. The resulting valuations are then integrated, become a part of the individual's self and thus enrich the person.

The ability "to count our days" mentioned in v. 12 is a difficult achieve, since it entails an individual's capacity to ascribe meaning to every experience in his life. The psalmist perceives how it is impossible for man to obtain this ability on his own, yet it is necessary in order to gain "wisdom of heart." This situation reveals how God is needed as a listener, meaning someone to whom one can narrate his own history. Thus, Kartje's argument that cognizance must be explained from a religious perspective is particularly clear in the verses and composition of Psalm 90. This cognizance, however, is not necessarily that of a mystical or even ecstatic nature. Rather, it is the introspection proper to every profound prayer. Its supernatural character can be ascribed to the fact that it occurs within a relationship with God. This dialogical dimension enables man to transcend the boundaries of his own self and to enter into a relationship with the transcendent world of values. God is the ideal listener, and His valuation is free of any and all error. Even God's anger communicates His profound desire to enter into communion with man. This final aspect, which can be called God's love for His creatures, is an indispensable element of knowledge. For, God's love permits mortal man to understand His intention to some extent and, thereby, to understand his own need for communion with God.

Although the psalmist did not have the knowledge of modern psychology at his disposal, he had a pragmatic understanding of what one

³⁷ See H. W. Wolff, *L'antropologia dell'Antico Testamento*, Brescia 1993, 63-73.

calls personal integration today. From the psalmist's perspective, the entire process of becoming fully integrated is possible only due to the God-given ability to "count our days aright." He points out that man's confrontation with the reality of life's evanescence and death reveals that he needs God as "the Great Companion" on the pilgrimage of life. For, God's presence helps man to accept and integrate these realities and thus liberates him from fear of death.

The rhetorical analysis of Psalm 90 above reveals that one of the most important features of the poem is the way in which it juxtaposes God and man's different emotions. This contrast is particularly clear in parts II and IV, which serve to create an "internal frame" around the psalm's center (vv. 11-12), which contains and is distinguished from the other parts by the verb *jd'* "to comprehend." When analyzing Psalm 90 in light of the insights of modern theoretical models of psychology, it is possible to come to a better understanding of how God and man and their positive and negative emotions coincide. The process of achieving "wisdom of heart" comes about through dialogue with God and, therefore, does not consist in the intellectual understanding of revealed truths, but rather in the experience of God's salvific presence.

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