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# Psalm 19

## Phase 1: ORAL



### Step 1: Listen

Listening to a guide translation and versions of the psalm

Listen well to the poem (notice content, emotions and interesting use of language). There are two guide translations in Appendix A:

1. **Hebrew-mirror** - copied from the Exegetical Layout and adjusted for minimal readability,
2. **Guide translation** - the literal, type 1 corresponding (but more readable) translation, exegetically the same as Hebrew-mirror.

**Activity:** Read the Hebrew-mirror and the Hebrew tight version in Appendix A. One reader per translation or one reader for all translations (as skills permit). Others to listen with closed books. Consider 'how to listen' – posture? With responses? In silence?



### Step 2: Familiarise

Explaining and discussing the meaning and beauty of the psalm

Get an overview of the poem (the big picture) - what's the main message? Who is involved? A poem must be understood as 'a whole' (unlike a story).

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE PSALM

After listening to the guide translations, please respond to any of the following questions:

- What do you like about the psalm?
- What do you find difficult?
- How does the psalm make you feel?
- Which verse do you find particularly important in this psalm?
- What does this psalm teach you about the LORD? What is the LORD like?
- Are there any noticeable repetitions in this psalm?





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## CREATIVE RESPONSES

### **Creative Activity 1: the beginning and the end of the Psalm**

Listen to vv.1 and v.14 and see how the Psalmist begins and how he finishes this psalm.

- Who (or what) does the Psalmist describe as speaking in v.1 and what do they speak about?
- Whose words and meditation is the Psalmist concerned about in v.14 and what does he pray for?

Psalm 19 moves from what the heavens speak about God in v.1 to the Psalmist's prayer for himself in v.14. As we study and learn the Psalm, we need to think about how each part of the Psalm contributes to this movement.

### **Creative Activity 2: From heaven to heart**

- Make a mime drama with actions for v.1 and v.14
- Have a narrator give the sense of v.1 and v.14 in their own words (and language) while the group performs appropriate actions.

## ENGAGING WITH THE WHOLE PSALM

**Facilitator:** address the following topics:

- *The participants in the psalm, the different “speakers” and “audiences”*
- *The historical background and the context of the psalm, the story behind the psalm, if relevant*
- *The theme of the psalm*
- *The flow of the psalm*
- *The potential big picture obstacles*
- *Emotion map*
- *The peak or peaks of the psalm*
- *The genre and purpose of the psalm*
- *Highly important poetic device(s) related to understanding the big picture*
- *How does the psalm point to Christ?*

### **The Flow of the Psalm**

The psalm divides into three main parts. In each part, the Psalmist seems to speak about something completely different.

The Psalmist introduces his main subject in the first line of each part and carries on speaking about this subject for a few verses before he shifts his focus towards the end of each part.

### **Activity: Identify the main subjects in each part of the Psalm.**

Read and listen to the English Literal translation of vv.1-4, vv.7-9 and vv.12-13. What is the Psalmist subject in each of these passages? Try and summarise what he says in each of them.

- vv.1-4. *The heavens declare the glory of God.* The Psalmist speaks about the heavens declaring the glory of God and the words of the heaven reaching everywhere.



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- vv.7-9. *The law of Yahweh is perfect giving rest to the soul.* The Psalmist speaks about the beauty of Yahweh's law, what it is like and what it does.

vv.12-13. *Who can discern his errors, forgive my hidden sins.* The Psalmist asks for forgiveness for his sins, both his hidden sins and his wilful sins, so that he may be blameless and innocent of great transgression.

### Shifts in Focus

Towards the end of each of the three parts, the Psalmist shifts his focus slightly. Read and listen to the English Literal translation of vv.1-6, vv.7-11 and vv.12-14. How does the Psalmist shift his focus towards the end of each part. Summarise what he says in the final verse of each part.

- vv.1-6. Towards the end of Part 1, the Psalmist shifts his focus from the heavens to the sun which crosses the heavens. [He says the sun is like a bridegroom, like a champion, that it crosses the heavens from one end to another and that nothing is hidden from its heat.]
- vv.7-11. In the main body of Part 2, the Psalmist speaks about the law. He uses 6 different terms to describe Yahweh's law: it is his *law*, his *testimony*, his *precepts*, his *commandment*, his *fear* and finally his *judgments*. In the final part of the Psalm, he focuses on Yahweh's judgments - although by extension he is also talking about the law (as a whole). What does he say about Yahweh's judgments? [They are very desirable, sweet and valuable.]
- vv.12-13. At the beginning of Part 3, the Psalmists asks to be forgiven and protected from his sins so that he may be blameless and innocent of great transgression. How does he shift the focus of his prayer at the end of the Psalm and how does he show his dependence upon Yahweh to answer his prayer. [He prays that his words and meditations may be pleasing to Yahweh, and he calls on him as his rock and redeemer.]

#### Activity: Chart the Flow of the Psalm

To keep track of what the Psalmist is saying in each part of the Psalm, start by making an initial chart with labels for his main subjects in each part and for his change in focus at the end of each part.

- Write each label on a board or a blank piece of paper in your own language.
- The labels in the third part should be from the Psalmist's point of view (first person). At the end of his prayer in this part, he shifts his focus from his sins to Yahweh as his rock and his redeemer so the labels for the third part should be *my sins* and *my rock and my redeemer*.

Put the main subjects on the left and the shifts in focus on the right, as follows:

The heavens
The sun
Yahweh's law
Yahweh's judgments
My sins
My rock and my redeemer



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## The Psalm as a Whole

- Yahweh's law is both the centre the Psalm and the governing thought of the Psalm.
- The Psalmist takes us from the heavens to Yahweh's law in the first part of the Psalm.
- After his meditation on the law in the central part, he then takes us from the law to his own prayer in the concluding part.

### Activity:

#### An Easy Question

Why do you think he calls Yahweh his rock and his redeemer at the end?

Choose which of the following answers is NOT correct

- A. Because he needs a rock and a redeemer in the face of God's law.
- B. Because he knows that he cannot make himself blameless and innocent on his own.
- C. Because he wants to finish the Psalm and cannot think of anything else to say.

#### A Harder Question

In Part 1, the Psalmist talks about what the heavens speak: *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky proclaims the works of his hands*. In Part 2, he talks about what Yahweh himself speaks and what he speaks is his law. He starts his description of Yahweh's law by saying that it is *perfect (or blameless)* and ends by saying his judgments (another term for his law) are *true and altogether righteous*.

In the Psalmist's final prayer, he asks that the words of his mouth and the meditations of his heart should be *pleasing (or acceptable)* to Yahweh who he calls *my rock and my redeemer*.

- What does the Psalmist's own speech need to *declare* to be in harmony with the speech of the heavens in Part 1?
- What must the meditation of his own heart be like to be in harmony with what he says about Yahweh's law in Part 2?
- Why do you think he calls Yahweh his rock and his redeemer at the end of his prayer? [He relies totally on Yahweh as the one who can make both his speech and his heart blameless by being his rock and his redeemer.]

## THE FLOW OF THE PSALM IN MORE DETAIL

We have already looked at the way the Psalm moves from the speech of the heavens in the first part of the Psalm to Yahweh's law in the central part and then from Yahweh's law to the Psalmist's prayer in the final part of the Psalm.

In this section we will look more closely at the way the Psalmist uses the images of the tent and the sun to move the focus from the speech of the heavens to Yahweh's law. We will then look more closely in the next section at how his description of the law leads to his prayer in the final part.

### From the Heavens to Yahweh's Law

#### The image of the tent in v.4



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In Part 1 of Psalm 19, the Psalmist shifts his focus from the speech of the heavens in general to the sun, in particular. He makes the transition by adding the line in v.4c: *in them, he has set a tent for the sun.*

The image of a tent in the heavens is more than just a nice way of switching focus from the heavens in general to the sun.

#### INSIGHT: Old Testament Context

In OT cosmology, the heavens were viewed as the dwelling place of God. The tent which he commanded Israel to set up in their camp, in which he would dwell with his people, came to be viewed as a copy or a mini-version of his heavenly dwelling.

With the image of God pitching a tent in the heavens for the sun, the Psalmist does (at least) two things:

- He introduces God as the one who takes the initiative. Previously he has described the heavens as speaking. He now turns to God as the one who acts - *he pitches a tent for the sun*. This prepares us for Yahweh (God using his covenant name) to be the speaker of his law in the second part.
- He introduces the sun as an image of the law which he gave to his covenant people Israel. God told Moses to place the summary of the law (the 10 commandments written on two tablets of stone) in his dwelling place with them, that is in the tent or tabernacle which he had instructed them to build.

#### The image of the sun in vv.5-6

In the two paired lines of vv.5-6, the Psalmist describes the movement of the sun across the heavens in a series of images. Because he places his description of the sun immediately before his description of the law, the Psalmist is implying that the law is like the sun.

What is the Psalmist implying about the law with each of his descriptions of the sun?

- With the description of the sun like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber? [Splendour]
- With the description of the sun like a warrior or champion rejoicing to run his course? [Power, joy]
- With the description of the sun going from one end of the heavens to the other? [It reaches everywhere].

What else in this Psalm has the Psalmist said reaches the ends of the world? [The speech of the heavens in vv.1-4.]

- Even before he mentions Yahweh's law, the Psalmist is implying that just as the speech of the heavens reaches the whole world so the same is true of Yahweh's law.

The Psalmist ends his description of the sun in vv.5-6 with the line, *and nothing is hidden from its heat.*

- What do you think he is implying about its heat by saying that *nothing is hidden from it*? Why might anyone want to hide from it? [It is a burning heat which no-one can hide from.]



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## From Yahweh's Law to the Psalmist's Prayer

In this section we begin by taking a closer look at the picture which the Psalmist builds up of Yahweh's law culminating in his focus on Yahweh's *judgments*, or *just rules*, in the last line. We will then look more closely how the Psalmist responds to his own understanding of the law in the rest of the Psalm.

### The Psalmist's description of the law in vv.7-9

In vv.7-9 the Psalmist describes Yahweh's law first by the general term *law* and then by five other terms which also refer to his law. For each line, discuss what the law tells us about Yahweh himself and how this knowledge helps us?

#### INSIGHT: Yahweh's law

In v.7a, *the law of Yahweh is blameless (or perfect) giving rest to the soul*. Yahweh's law is his revelation of himself to his covenant people and his requirements about how they should live as his people.

What does his *law* tell us about Yahweh himself in this line? How does this knowledge help us? [Yahweh himself is perfect and only in him can we find rest for our souls.]

#### INSIGHT: Yahweh's testimony

In v.7b, *the testimony of Yahweh is trustworthy making wise the simple*. The Psalmist refers to Yahweh's law as *his testimony* because his law is a witness to himself and his presence as well as being his instructions for his covenant people. In the Book of Numbers, the 10 commandments are called the *testimonies* and the ark of the covenant which contained them, *the ark of the testimony*. In v.7b, as in Psalm 119 (v2 and elsewhere), Psalms 99:7 and 132:12, Yahweh's testimonies are something which he commands to be kept.

What does his *testimony* tells us about Yahweh himself in this line? How does this knowledge help us? [Yahweh himself is trustworthy, and this knowledge gives wisdom to the simple person (which the proud person cannot know).]

#### INSIGHT: Yahweh's precepts

In v.8a, *the precepts of Yahweh are upright, giving joy to the heart*. The Psalmist refers to the content of Yahweh's law as his precepts because his precepts describe his character, his ways and his acts, and are also what he commands his covenant people. In Psalms 103 and 111, just as he is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, just as he is faithful and just, so he also commands his people to be the same (Psa 103:18 and 111:10, see also 119:3-4).

What do his *precepts* tells us about Yahweh himself in this line? How does this knowledge help us? [Yahweh himself is upright, and this knowledge gives joy to the heart.]

#### INSIGHT: Yahweh's commandment

In v.8b, *the commandment of Yahweh is pure, giving light to the eyes*. The Psalmist refers to Yahweh's entire law as *his commandment*. In Deuteronomy, Moses also described the law (as a whole) as Yahweh's commandment. In Jesus's summary of the law in the New Testament (Matt 22:37-40 and parallels quoting Deut.6:4 and Lev.19:18) he says the greatest commandment of



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the law is the command to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind and that the second is like it, to love your neighbour as yourself.

What does Yahweh's commandment tell us about Yahweh himself in this line? How does this knowledge help us? [Yahweh himself is pure. The heart of the God's law is that we should love him. The love of God is pure because he is pure. In 1 John, the apostle John affirms that God is light. If we follow the commandment to love God, and therefore also our neighbour, John tells us, we walk in the light. In the words of Psalm 19:8b *the commandment of Yahweh is pure giving light to the eyes.*]

#### INSIGHT: The fear of Yahweh

In v.9a, *the fear of Yahweh is clean, enduring forever*. The fifth term which the Psalmist uses to describe the law in v.9a, is different to the others. While the other terms refer more-or-less directly to Yahweh's law, the fear of Yahweh refers to his law indirectly. In this line the knowledge of Yahweh in his law - his revelation of himself - causes his people to fear him.

- Why do you think that the knowledge of Yahweh in his law causes his people to fear him why does the Psalmist say that that this fear is *clean, enduring forever*?

#### INSIGHT: Yahweh's judgments

In v.9b, *the judgments of Yahweh are true and righteous altogether*. The final way in which the Psalmist describes Yahweh's law in v.9b is as *his judgments*. The word is derived from the Hebrew noun meaning justice (*mishpat*). In his speech in Deuteronomy, Moses uses the same word to describe the content of the law which God gave his people on Mt Sinai (mostly in combination with other words which he uses to describe the content of the law including *statutes, commandments and testimonies*.)

- Elsewhere in the Old Testament, Yahweh's *judgments* may refer to a variety of things more-or-less connected with the idea of justice (including his judgment decisions as well as his acts of judgment). In the Psalm 19, however, the Psalmist's description of Yahweh's law in the previous verses indicates that *Yahweh's judgments* in v.9b refer to the laws which together make up his law. Having referred to Yahweh's law in the previous lines as his *testimony*, his *precepts*, his *commandment* and as *the fear of him*, the Psalmist brings his description of the law to a climax by highlighting the justice of his laws - and therefore of his entire law. The term is variously translated in English translations as his *ordinances, or rules or just decrees*.
- How does the Psalmist describe Yahweh's *judgments* in this line? What does his description tell us about Yahweh law as a whole and about Yahweh himself? [He is just, true and totally righteous.]

#### The Psalmist's response to Yahweh's law in vv.10-11

The Psalmist's description of the law in vv.7-9 explains why he goes on to say that it is so desirable, and sweet and so valuable in warning and offering reward in vv.10-11.

#### Activity. The desirability, sweetness and value of the law

Listen as a group to vv.7-9 again.



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- Each member of the group should pick out one thing that they think is *more to be desired than gold, than much fine gold*.
- Each member of the group should pick out one thing that they think is *sweeter than honey and honey from the comb*.

The group should say how they think Yahweh's judgments and by extension his whole law warns Yahweh's servant and what is the reward that there is in keeping them.

### The Psalmist's prayer in vv.12-14

The Psalmist's description of the law in vv.7-9 begins with the statement that *the law of Yahweh is perfect (or blameless)* and ends with the statement that *the judgments of Yahweh are true and altogether righteous*

- What two kinds of sins is the Psalmist concerned about in vv.12-13?
- What does the Psalmist ask for in vv.12-13
- How is the Psalmist's knowledge that Yahweh's law is *perfect (or blameless)* and that his judgements are *true and righteous altogether* reflected in his prayer in vv.12-13?
- In the final part of his prayer, in v.14, the Psalmist asks that the words of his mouth and the meditations of his heart should be pleasing or acceptable to Yahweh. Why does he call him his rock and his redeemer? [Because he knows that he cannot be blameless or righteous on his own and need Yahweh to be his rock and his redeemer.]

### 5 bridges

Before we make a more detailed chart of the flow of the Psalm, let's look at the way the Psalmist shifts his focus between stanzas. He uses a similar technique with each shift.

In the chart of the Psalm which you made in Step 2, the Psalmist shifts his focus five times in all. The sequence of focus shifts is as follows,

#### Focus shifts in Psalm 19

From The Heavens to The Sun

From The Sun to Yahweh's Law

From Yahweh's Law to Yahweh's Judgments

From Yahweh's Judgments to My Sin

From My Sin to My Rock and My Redeemer

The Psalmist introduces each of the shifts in focus given above with a more or less explicit bridging device. The five different bridges all have the following characteristics:

- They bring each stanza to a conclusion as well as introducing what the Psalmist is going to speak about in the following stanza.
- They all involve a slowing, or an extension, of the poetic rhythm.
- Each bridge acts as a signpost to the Psalmist's underlying thought and direction of travel in the progression of the Psalm.





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### Bridge 1: From The Heavens to The Sun

We have already looked at the way the Psalmist uses the image of the tent at the end of his first stanza as a bridge to introduce his description of the sun in his second stanza.

#### Activity. The rhythm of the additional line in v.4.

A reader should read vv.1-3 emphasising the parallel lines in each verse.

- on the first line, the group should rock forward on one foot.
- on the second line, the group should rock back.
- The reader should then continue with v.4, but in this case should emphasise the addition of the third line.
- As before the group should rock forward for the first line and back for the second but it should then rock forward again for the added third line, *in them he has pitched a tent for the sun.*

### Bridge 2: From The Sun to Yahweh's Law

We looked in Step 2 at how the Psalmist finishes his description of the sun in vv.5-6 with a special focus on the heat of the sun which then acts as a bridge to the next stanza about Yahweh's law.

#### Activity. The rhythm of the additional line in v.6.

- A reader should read v.5 emphasising the parallel lines. On the first line of v.5, the group should rock forward on one foot, on the second, it should rock back.
- The reader should then continue with v.6, but in this case should emphasise the addition of the third line.
- As for v.5, the group should rock forward for the first line and back for the second. But it should then rock forward again for the added third line *and nothing is hidden from its heat.*

### Bridge 3: From Yahweh's Law to the Psalmist praise of Yahweh's law

The Psalmist begins Part 2 with a series of 6 lines which describe Yahweh's law

Listen to vv.7-11. See if you can hear the break and slowing of the rhythm in the sixth line about Yahweh's judgments.

- The first five lines of vv.7-9 all follow exactly the same pattern in the Hebrew poetry
- Each line starts by identifying a particular aspect of Yahweh's law and naming it as Yahweh's.
- Each line then contains a description of what the different aspects of Yahweh's law are like as well as what they do.
- In the sixth line, however, the Psalmists brings his description of Yahweh's like to a climax by breaking his rhythm. He starts v.9b with the same pattern as the first five lines but then breaks his rhythm by describing a second thing that Yahweh's judgments are (rather than what they do).
- The focus on the total righteousness of Yahweh's judgments in the final line is then the bridge, or transition point, to his praise of the law in vv.10-11, as more desirable than gold, as sweeter than honey and as valuable in warning and offering reward to Yahweh's servant.



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*Law - of Yahweh - blameless - giving rest - (to the) soul  
 Testimony - of Yahweh - trustworthy - making wise - (the) simple  
 Precepts - of Yahweh - upright - giving joy - (to the) heart  
 Commandment - of Yahweh - pure - giving light - (to the) eyes  
 Fear - of Yahweh - clean - standing - forever  
 Judgments - of Yahweh true - they are righteous altogether.*

#### Bridge 4: From Yahweh's just laws to My Sin

Listen to the Psalmist's description of Yahweh's just laws in Stanza 4 (vv.10-11) and see if you can hear how the Psalmist changes his rhythm in the final two lines.

*They are more desirable than gold than much fine gold  
 They are sweeter than honey than drippings from the comb  
 Also your servant is warned by them,  
 In keeping them is great reward.*

The Psalmist breaks his rhythm in the second pair of lines in number of ways,

- He makes them an addition to his previous statements by beginning them with the word *Also*.
- He switches subject from Yahweh's judgments to Yahweh's servant. Note the switch from the subject pronouns in the first pair of lines (*they are more desirable...they are sweeter*) to the object pronouns in the second pair (*...is warned by them, in keeping them...*).
- He also switches to direct speech to Yahweh introducing his prayer in the next stanza.

#### Bridge 5: From My Sin to My Rock and My Redeemer

The Psalmist begins his prayer in Part 3 with a question and answer in 2 lines (v.12). He then immediately slows (or 'extends') his rhythm in v.13 with 3 lines in the Hebrew poetry.

- As with the bridge at the end of v.11, the word *also* makes it clear that these lines are an addition to what he has said before,

*Also, from wilful sins hold back your servant  
 Let them not rule over me then I will be blameless  
 and innocent of great transgression.*

Most English translations translate the three lines of v.13 as four lines. The effect, however, is the same. The extended rhythm prepares us for the Psalmist's shift in focus in the final verse. The complex structure of the final verse gives prominence to the Psalmist's reliance on Yahweh in two ways:

- The first two lines end with the phrase *before you* which introduces the Psalmist's address to Yahweh in the final line.
- The final line is the first and only time he addresses Yahweh by name in the Psalm.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Previously he has only addressed Yahweh as his servant not by his name (v.11 *Also by them is your servant warned...* and v.13 *Also from wilful sins, protect your servant...*)



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## UNLOCKING SOME OF THE BIG PICTURE OBSTACLES TO THE PSALM

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### SEGMENTATION OF THE PSALM

The stanza division that this guide recommends is shown in below in chart form. The main subject of each stanza is shown in blue. The bridges at the end of Stanzas 1 to 5, and the concluding focus in Stanza 6, are shown in red.

#### **Stanza 1, vv.1-4. The speech of the Heavens**

Bridge (v.4c) *in them, he has pitched a tent for the sun.*

#### **Stanza 2, vv.5-6. The Sun**

Bridge (v.6c) *...and nothing is hidden from its heat.*

#### **Stanza 3, vv.7-9. Yahweh's Law**

Bridge (v.9b) *...The judgments of Yahweh are true; they are righteous altogether.*

#### **Stanza 4, vv.10-11. Yahweh's Judgments**

Bridge (v..11) *...Also by them is your servant warned, in keeping them is great reward.*

#### **Stanza 5, vv.12-13. The Servant's prayer**

Bridge (v.13c) *...then I will be blameless and innocent of great transgression.*

#### **Stanza 6, vv.14. The Servant's concluding request**

Focus (v.14c) *...Yahweh, my rock and my redeemer.*

### FINAL SUMMING UP

To summarise the Psalm, discuss the following questions:

- What is the main point or message of the psalm?
- What does this Psalm teach you about the LORD?
- How can you or your church use this psalm?
- What heading or title would the group suggest for this psalm?



### Step 3: Internalise

Absorbing the big picture of the psalm

'Get the poem inside yourself' (feel the emotions and be able to recall the main ideas).



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Look at the whole psalm so that you can experience it and retell the message. This is not an attempt to memorize the psalm, but to be able to understand the whole message and to express it in the target language. Aim to do at least the first two activities.

## CREATIVE RESPONSES

First, do Internalisation Activities 1-5 as a whole group

**Internalisation Activity:** Listen to Psalm X being read again. Note all the words you hear which speak of God's power, or which are very intense/extreme language.

**Internalisation Activity:** Say each line of the psalm in the right order, as a group. Use your own words; there's no need to have it precisely right. Then let one or two persons say each line of the psalm, again in the right order

**Internalisation Activity:** Then, as a group, make gestures for each line and again say all the lines in order, but this time with gestures. Use mime/gestures to show the emotion and action.

**Internalisation Activity:** Lastly, as a whole group, use the popcorn method. Each line, in the right order, is said by a different person. Do this a second time to further reinforce.

**Internalisation Activity (optional):** The storyboard method: draw pictures of each event in the psalm as they unfold.

Then divide the group into two or three groups

**Internalisation Activity:** Skits—act out what's happening in each of the lines. Make a little drama. Encourage them to use facial expressions, body language, motions, and movement to try to experience the emotions and the sequence of events. This psalm lends itself well to a skit.

**Internalisation Activity:** Memory song, chant or memory aid to help remember the psalm. Consider making a short poem of the song in the local language or Language of Wider Communication to help you remember the different actions in order. This song is only to help everyone remember each stanza in sequence (and the lines in sequence if it is a short psalm)

Other options

### The heavens speak

#### Speech and communication in vv.1-4

In v.1, the Psalmist speaks about the heavens declaring and the sky telling...

- Write on a board all the ways you in your language that you refer to speaking and communication - declaring, proclaiming, shouting, whispering, saying, informing etc... Include any figurative language or ideophones that you can think of.
- Listen to vv.1-4 and identify all the different words, expressions and images in vv.1-4 which refer to speaking and communication.
- In v.1, what two things do the heavens and the sky say about God?





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- In v.3, the Psalmist says that the heavens do not have speech nor words and that their voice cannot actually be heard. He seems to say the opposite thing in vv.1-2 and in v.4. How do you make sense of what he is saying?
- In vv.1-4 if the heavens have no actual speech or words, where are actual words from God to be found later in the psalm? [Yahweh's law, vv.7-9.]

### In praise of the sun

In v.5, the Psalmist compares the sun to a bridegroom coming out from his chamber and to a champion, or mighty man, who rejoices to run his course. In v.6, he goes on to describe the movement of the sun across the heaven.

- In what way is the sun like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber? [splendor, glory]
- What does a champion or a warrior rejoice about when he runs his course? [power]
- What is it about the sun's movement across the sky that the Psalmist especially wants to emphasise? [reach, nothing escapes heat]

#### Activity 1: A mime drama about the sun

Act out a drama with four short scenes to describe the sun.

- The sun like a bridegroom coming out from his chamber in splendour,
- The sun like a champion rejoicing in his strength to run his course,
- The sun going from one end of the heavens to the other. (One way of acting this might be to use your arms to show the way the sun crosses the sky.)
- And finally, the heat of the sun reaching everything. (You could use your arms again to show the way the heat of the sun spreads out everywhere).

### Yahweh's law (vv.7-9)

In vv.7-9, did you notice that in each line he says that each thing is *of Yahweh* - it is *the law of Yahweh, the testimony of Yahweh, the precepts of Yahweh, the commandment of Yahweh, the fear of Yahweh* and the *judgments of Yahweh*?

#### Activity 2: Yahweh's law and Yahweh himself

Read out vv.7-9 for the group to hear. After each line the group should try giving the sense in their own language but replacing the term for the law with a phrase to indicate Yahweh himself.

- Start in v.7a with *Yahweh himself is blameless reviving the soul*, then continue through the other lines in the same way.
- In v.9a, the group can just change the phrase *the fear of Yahweh* to *the fear of Yahweh himself*
- When you think about Yahweh as the one who gives the law and reveals himself in the law, how does it change the way you feel about the law?

### The rhythm of vv.7-9

In vv.7-9, listen to the way that the lines follow the same rhythm or pattern. Listen for the slight change in rhythm in the last line which brings the set of 6 lines to an end.

*The law of Yahweh is blameless reviving the soul.*



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*The testimony of Yahweh is trustworthy making wise the simple.*

*The precepts of Yahweh are upright giving joy to the heart.*

*The commandment of Yahweh is pure giving light to the eyes.*

*The fear of Yahweh is clean enduring forever.*

*The judgments of Yahweh are true, they are righteous altogether.*

### Activity 3: Search for a pattern

See if you can identify a good pattern or rhythm in your language which will sound good for these 6 lines. (This will help in your oral translation of the psalm in the next step.)

### Translating Yahweh's law

Drawing on the introduction to the meaning of the different terms towards the end of Step 2, try and decide on the way you will translate the terms in your language.

### Activity 4: find a rendering for each term

- As you look at the meaning for each term - put your rendering of the term in your language on a board.
- The terms *law*, *testimony*, *command*, and *fear* are all singular in the Hebrew text. The singular is important because it means the Psalmist is talking about the different things in an all-embracing way.
- The terms *precepts* and *judgments* (which we take to refer to his *just laws*) are both masculine and plural. The plural is important because each is referring to a group of specific things which together describe Yahweh's law.

### In praise of Yahweh's law (vv.10-11)

Listen again to the ways in which the Psalmists praises the *Yahweh's judgments*, his *just laws*, in vv.10-11. He praises them - and by extension Yahweh's law as a whole - in 3 different ways.

- In v.10a, he says that *they are more desirable than gold* and then intensifies the comparison by adding *than much fine gold*.
- In v.10b, he says *they are sweeter than honey* and again intensifies the comparison by adding *than drippings from the comb*.
- In v.11, he adds something different when he says *by them is your servant warned* and then along with the warning they contain, *in keeping them there is great reward*.

### Activity 5: A mime drama about Yahweh's judgments

Act out another drama with words to show how desirable and how sweet are Yahweh's judgments.

- For v.10a, take out an imaginary piece of gold from your pocket and place it on a table to indicate how desirable they are. Intensify the comparison by taking out many pieces of imaginary fine gold from all your pockets and from your bag to pile on top of the first piece of gold.



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- For v.10b, dip your finger in an imaginary pot of honey and put it to your tongue to show how sweet they are. Intensify the comparison by lifting up an imaginary honeycomb and catch the drippings falling into your mouth.
- For v.11a-b, mime the action of receiving a warning by them and of finding a great reward in keeping them.

### Yahweh's servant

What are the two kinds of sins which the Psalmist is concerned about in vv.12-13?

- What is the difference between these two kinds of sin?
- Make a list of hidden sins on one side of a board and of wilful sins on the other side.
- What desire does he express in v.12 and then repeat in v.13?

### The servant's final prayer

Read v.14 in the Hebrew-mirror translation and then perform a mime to express the Psalmist's request with gestures.



## Step 4: Explore and compose

Explore the Hebrew and local poetry and compose a song

### EXPLORING HEBREW AND LOCAL POETRY

**For the facilitator:** in this step, address the following topics to explore in Hebrew poetry:

- 1) Repetition of words, images, and sounds
- 2) Handling the Hebrew parallelisms
- 3) Figures of speech, like metaphors, personification
- 4) Rhythm, verse length, beat
- 5) Word order, clause order
- 6) Poetic devices that emphasize and mark something as important

Once the artist-translators have sufficiently internalised and drafted the psalm in the workshop setting, compose a song, poem, rap, chant, or prayer to capture as much of the psalm as possible.

#### 1. Poetic devices- repetitions of words, images, and sounds

**Activity:** Trace all the words that are repeated. Then all the concepts/images.

#### 2. Poetic devices - main Images or metaphors of the Psalm

- Metaphors, metonyms, similes, personifications, hyperboles, merisms,

**Activity:** Can you identify any images, similes or metaphors?





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### 3. Rhythm

**Activity:** Listen to the psalm again and in groups, and get a feel for the rhythm. Are the lines short or long?

### 4. Irregular word order

- Fronting of nouns before the verbs in Hebrew is particularly in focus here

**Activity:** Look at the Flower Garden or the Hebrew-mirror, and identify all the verses that have irregular word order, mostly (in English) nouns put before the verbs.

### 5. Highlighting poetic devices

**Activity:** Look at the Flower Garden in Appendix C or the Hebrew-mirror in Appendix A, and identify all the verses that have highlighting devices.

## COMPOSING A SONG

**For the facilitator:** several considerations, like the big question when to start doing the song

- 1) *When to start composing a song? The guide writer and facilitator have some freedom when. Either at the end of step 4, or after step 5. There are pro's and con's to each option. One advantage of doing it in Step 4 (before the detailed exegesis) is that the team starts to think about poetry. They only start to think about poetry once they start composing a song. The risk is that when they compose something early, before step 5, that they settle on a melody they like, but need to change it or even abandon it after getting the more detailed exegetical insights. The advantage*
- 2) *Some other considerations: what about memory aid, the poem or song made at the end of Step 3?*
- 3) *Another option is to only compose a nice tune and song on one stanza with not any serious exegetical issues. That tune can then be used for the rest of the psalm at the end of Step 5. Experience with shorter sections, like one or two stanzas at a time, to compose.*
- 4) *The team needs to learn some song-writing skills.*
- 5) *It is not necessary to use the same tune for every stanza. Sometimes 3-4 tunes can be used for long psalms.*

Note the poetic devices used in the Hebrew mirror or in the Flower Garden (Appendix C). What is the psalmist trying to achieve? Consider what poetic devices are used in the local language to achieve the same functions.

**Activity: NOW, COMPOSE A SONG!** Participants are to choose a style or genre that is relevant for the psalm, and to set the whole psalm or sections to a rhythm or music. The song needs to cover all the main stanzas, but doesn't need to be correct in every detail (that comes later in Step 5)



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**Activity:** Make a recording of the composition(s).



## Step 5: Draft

### Translating stanza-by-stanza

Listen to the poem again. Orally create stanza-by-stanza a first draft of the psalm in the target language, trying to capture the poetic elements and essential details of the meaning. To take full advantage of the oral form, avoid reverting to written Biblical text at this point.

**Activity:** Divide into smaller groups and let one in each group read through guide translation #2: Hebrew-tight (or play a recording) while others translate. The oral draft can at that point be recorded and/or immediately written down (Step 6 merged with Step 5).

### STANZA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Often it speeds the work to have different groups do different stanzas. If you do this, make sure you all hear the psalm from top to bottom and to make suggestions to other groups when you come together...

#### Stanza 1: Verses 1-4

1 The heavens are declaring the glory of God,  
the work of his hands is proclaiming the sky.

2 Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night shows knowledge.

3 There is no speech and there are no words,  
not is heard their voice.

4 In all the earth goes out their sound,  
and in the ends of the world their words.

For the sun he has put a tent in them.

1 The heavens declare the glory of God,  
the sky proclaims the work of his hands.

2 Day after day pours forth speech,  
night after night displays knowledge.

3 There is no speech nor are there words,  
their voice cannot be heard.

4 Yet their sound goes out into all the earth,  
their words to the ends of the world.

In them, he has pitched a tent for the sun.

#### Discuss:

**Verse 1.** The Psalm begins with a chiasm in the Hebrew poetry in which the Psalmist inverts the phrase order of the first line (subject - participle verb - object phrase) in the second line (object phrase - participle verb - subject.)

*The heavens - are declaring - glory of God  
works of his hands - are telling - the sky.*



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See if you can find a poetic structure with a similar dramatic effect to start the Psalm.

**Take care** with who or what is speaking in each line and try to capture the rich variety in the way the Psalmist refers to speech and communication.

- In v.1a, it is the heavens which declare...
- In v.1b it is the sky which tells...
- In v2a, it is day then day which pours forth speech and in v2b night then night which reveals knowledge.
- In v3-4 the speaker is once again the heavens (although in v3 they have no actual speech or words).

**Verse 3** begins with the surprise statement that *There is no speech are there are no words*. The Psalmist is saying that the heavens don't actually speak or articulate words. Verse 3b reinforces his point, *their voice is never heard*. In v.4, the Psalmist nevertheless insists that *their voice goes out into all the earth*. You may want to make the contrast in the statements in v.3 and v.4 clear in some way. One way of doing this would be to start v.4 with a connector like *Yet..., But still, However..., Nevertheless...*

**Verse 4.** Try to find a change in rhythm to express the switch to God as the actor in the third line, *for the sun, he (God) has pitched a tent in them* (the heavens).

**Creative activity:** Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

## Stanza 2: Verses 5-6

5 And he, like a bridegroom he is coming out of his chamber,

he rejoices like a champion to run his course.

6 From the ends of the heavens, his going out and his circuit up until their ends, and nothing is hidden from his heat.

5 And he, he is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,

he rejoices like a champion to run his course.

6 His going out is from one end of the heavens, His circuit all the way to the other end, and nothing is hidden from his heat.

### Discuss:

**Verse 5** picks up its subject, the sun, from the bridging line at the end of v.4. Find a way of keeping the connection.

- Although the Hebrew text drops the verb 'to be' in the opening line of v.5 (*And he (is) like...*) you may want to use it. If you do this, experiment with reinforcing the connection with v.4c by starting with an emphatic pronoun (*And he, he is like...*)
- You may also want to experiment with removing the connector *And* and start the line with a double pronoun *He, he is like...*
- You might even want to name the sun again in v.5a (*And) the sun, he is like...*



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**Verse 6** contains a chiasm in which the locative phrase, *from the ends of the heavens* is front-shifted to the beginning of the first line and is mirrored by the locative phrase *up to their ends* at the end of the second line.

- a. *From the ends of the heavens - his going out,*
- b. *his circuit - up to their ends*

- Try to make your translation of the first two lines of v.6 a tight unit (as in the Hebrew text) to give prominence to the final line as an additional statement: *and nothing is hidden from his heat.*

**Creative activity:** Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

### Stanza 3: Verses 7-9

<p>7 The law of Yahweh is blameless reviving the soul.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The testimony of Yahweh is trustworthy making wise the simple.</p> <p>8 The precepts of Yahweh are upright giving joy to the heart.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The commandment of Yahweh is pure giving light to the eyes.</p> <p>9 The fear of Yahweh is clean standing forever.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The judgments of Yahweh are true they are righteous altogether.</p>	<p>7 The law of Yahweh is blameless, giving rest to the soul.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The testimony of Yahweh is trustworthy, making wise the simple.</p> <p>8 The precepts of Yahweh are upright, rejoicing the heart.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The commandment of Yahweh is pure, giving light to the eyes.</p> <p>9 The fear of Yahweh is clean, enduring forever.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The judgments of Yahweh are true, they are righteous altogether.</p>
--	--

#### Discuss:

**Verses 7-9.** Keep the same sentence structure through the 6 parallel lines. You do not have to follow the structure of the Hebrew poetry. You should determine what is the best way to express the lines in your own poetry.

- If you have already started Psalm 119, make sure your rendering of the 6 different terms is consistent.
- It is important to keep the repeated reference to Yahweh in each line.
- Each of the first five lines contains a description of what the different aspects of Yahweh's law are like as well as what they do.
- The sixth line starts the same way but then breaks the pattern with a full verb in the second half *they are righteous altogether*.

**Creative activity:** Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.



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#### Stanza 4: Verses 10-11

10 They are more to be desired than gold,  
and than much pure gold.

They are sweeter than honey,  
and drippings from the comb.

11 Also your servant is warned by them,  
in keeping them is great reward.

10 They are more desirable than gold,  
than much pure gold.

They are sweeter than honey,  
than drippings from the comb.

11 By them also is your servant warned,  
in keeping them there is great reward.

#### Discuss:

**The pronouns *they* and *them*** in v.10 and 11 should refer to Yahweh's *judgments* (his *just decrees*)

**Verse 11 and Verse 13.** In the Hebrew text, both verses begin with *gam* 'also'. Keep the idea of adding something to what has been already said in both verses.

**Verse 11.** In the Hebrew poetry, the first line of v.11 ends *...by them* and the second line begins *in keeping them...* Try to find a good balance between the lines in your translation.

**Creative activity:** Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

#### Stanza 5: Verses 12-14

12 Errors who can discern?  
from hidden faults make me innocent.

13 Also from the proud, hold back your servant,  
let them not rule over me, then I will be  
blameless,  
and innocent of great transgression.

14 Let them be pleasing, the words of my  
mouth and the meditation of my heart before  
you,  
Yahweh, my Rock and my Redeemer.

12 Who can discern his errors?

Make me innocent of hidden faults.

13 Keep your servant also back from wilful sins,  
let them not rule over me, then I will be  
blameless,  
innocent of great transgression.

14 May the words of my mouth  
and the meditation of my heart  
be pleasing to you, Yahweh, my Rock  
and my Redeemer.

#### Discuss:

**Verses 12-13.** The Psalmist speaks of two kinds of sin. *Hidden sins* are sins which he does not recognise as sins. Think of examples that you would include in this category of sins and then decide how to refer to them. The second kind of sins are sins of pride. In contrast with hidden sins, these are sins which the Psalmist knows about but does anyway. They are *wilful sins* in the sense that he does them in his pride, putting his will above Yahweh's will. So he asks Yahweh to hold him back or restrain him from these kinds of sin.

**Verse 12-13.** There are two ideas in vv.12 and 13 which are closely related but need to be kept distinct.



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- The first is the idea of **innocence**... Try and keep the two references to being innocent in vv.12-13. In v.12b, the psalmist asked *to be made* or *declared innocent* of hidden sins. In v.13c, he expresses the desire *to be innocent* of great transgressions.
- The second is the idea of **being perfect** (or **blameless**). In v.13b, the Psalmist starts by saying *then I will be perfect/blameless...* and continues the line *and innocent of great transgression*. You should use the same word here as in v.7 where the Psalmist says *The Law of Yahweh (is) perfect (or blameless)*.

**Creative activity:** Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

### **Activities:**

- 1) Listen again to the recordings of each verse or section.
- 2) Think about how to include relevant parts from previous steps and to use ideas from the previous creative activities.
- 3) Put everything together to make a poetic oral representation of the complete psalm, and then record it.



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## Phase 2: TEXT



### Step 6: Transcribe

Make a written draft

**Activity:** Transcribe the recording/s of the oral draft onto paper or a computer.

Before moving on to the checking steps, check the transcribed draft for the following. This should be done as a whole group, looking at the psalm projected onto a screen or wall. Doing this now will help the exegetical and poetical checks that follow to stay focused on essential matters.

1. **Versification:** put the verse numbers into the psalm.
2. Check that the number of the psalm, and any **superscription**, are in place at the top. (Superscriptions are often left out completely according to team policy, but they are recommended to be put in the written text but not the song.)
3. Put in the **stanza breaks** (blank lines usually).
4. Correct the **punctuation**, in particular finding out where the sentences should end. Different groups use different approaches. Our recommendation is to use capital letters only for the beginning of sentences, not for the beginning of each poetic line.
5. Correct the **spelling**. You may find that there is a lot of discussion over this. The group needs to have consistency but also needs to abide by any government guidelines.
6. Raise any questions you have about the **back translation** at this point. The back translation just needs to be comprehensible; it does not need spell checks etc. You, the facilitator, are the only person who needs it. However, without a good back translation you cannot understand what is going on. As a bonus, at least a couple of exegetical questions you've prepared usually turn out to be unnecessary after this step.
7. Check the **line divisions** (this refers to how the power is broken up into lines and where to make those breaks).



### Step 7: Contents Check

Checking exegetical faithfulness

Check the exegesis of the oral translation. Consider whether the correct meaning has been translated and if the wording used can be improved. The purpose of this step is to check the content of your draft for faithfulness and trustworthiness.

**Activity:** Review the draft translation in detail, using the oral recording of Step 5 or the transcription of Step 6. Do an exegetical check by comparing the draft with the guide translations given in Appendix A and the exegetical layout in Appendix B and adjust the text as necessary.



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## EXEGETICAL CHECKLIST

Give special attention to:

- Stanza 1. The different words for speaking and communicating in vv.1-4
- Stanza 1. The contrast between there not being any speech or words and nothing being heard in v.3 and yet the heaven's voice going out into all the world in v.4.
- Stanza 2. The terms for bridegroom, warrior/champion/mighty one, the athlete's course and the sun's circuit.
- Stanza 3. The distinction between the different terms for the law.
- Stanza 4. The pronouns should refer to Yahweh's judgments (the last of the 6 descriptions of Yahweh's law in vv.7-9).
- Stanza 5. The idea of the question Who can discern his errors? being answered by a request Make me innocent of hidden faults.
- Stanza 6. Do not collapse into one the two ideas in v.14 of the words of my mouth and meditations of my heart
- Stanza 6. The rendering of rock and redeemer



## Step 8: Poetry Check

Compare and weigh the poetic features

Check if the Hebrew poetry is all accounted for in the translation through equivalent poetic features in the target language. Consider if the poetry of the translation can be improved, for example, look at the length of lines and the use of rhythm and ideophones.

**Activity:** Consider the poetic features of your translation. Do they reflect the purpose of the Hebrew poetic features, drawing attention to the correct parts? Experiment a bit with different word-orders and see what sounds the most beautiful, the most poetic.

## POETIC CHECKLIST

Give special attention to:

- The slowing down and or extension of the rhythm in the bridging devices in v.4, v.6, v.11, v.13 and the ending device of v.14 (see notes in Step 5).
- The inversions and word order shifting to give balance between lines a and b eg in v.1, 6, 11, 14.
- The parallelism between the 6 lines in praise of Yahweh's law in vv.7-9.
- The intensification in the descriptions of Yahweh's judgments as more to be desired than gold, than much fine gold and as sweeter than honey, than drippings from the comb.



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## Step 9: Finalise

Preparing the final version of an authenticated translation

Prepare the final version which will serve as an authorized translation, that in turn will serve as the basis for performing the psalm in the community (audio, visual and written).

**Activity:** Re-check the spelling of your transcription, the punctuation, in-setting, and the layout of paragraphs to represent stanza segmentation.

**Activity:** Re-check the essential accuracy of the back translation (not worrying about spelling).

**Activity:** In AVTT, ensure that the final text of your psalm is uploaded with a back translation, check that the recordings from different steps are in the correct place, and do a final audio recording.

**Activity:** If possible, copy the final written text into Paratext.

## Phase 3: PERFORMANCE



## Step 10: Perform

Performing the psalm in your community

Convert text into performance (dramatic reading/song/chant) to both perform and share this psalm, ensuring the main message comes through in content and style (the same emotional mood as the original poem in the Bible).

You now want to convert your written translation into a performance (song or chant) so that you can share it with your community. You need to make sure that the main message comes through in content and style (the same emotional mood as the original poem in the Bible). The genre - lament or praise or thanksgiving or other - should be similar to songs of the same genre in your culture.

### How can we pray the Psalm?

- By introducing himself as Yahweh's servant, the Psalmist invites other servants of Yahweh pray his prayer with him as co-servants.
- As co-servants, we can learn to pray the same prayer that he prays in response both to the heaven's speech in Part 1 and to Yahweh's law in Part 2.

### How does Christ fulfill the Psalm?



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Since the Psalmist's direction of travel in the Psalm is towards his prayer in Part 3, so the primary way in which Jesus fulfills the Psalm is in answer to that prayer.

- The Psalmist asks Yahweh to make him innocent of hidden sins and to protect him from wilful so that he might be *blameless and innocent of great transgression* (v.13). Jesus answers that prayer by taking our sins in his own body on the cross so that we might indeed be blameless and innocent of great transgression.
- The Psalmist concludes his prayer and the Psalm as a whole by calling out to *Yahweh, his rock and his redeemer* (v.14). When Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth, died on the cross and rose again he became for us the rock and the redeemer to whom we may also turn for salvation and redemption.

**Activity:** Complete a transcript and back translation for the lyrics of any song created by the team to be checked before recording.

## FINAL CHECKLIST

**In the end of each psalm, there should ideally be four products:**

1. Transcription: An authorized, authenticated, or officially written draft in AVTT and Paratext.
2. Dramatic Reading: A recording of a dramatic reading or recitation of the whole psalm, using the authenticated version word-for-word, recorded in AVTT.
3. Whole Psalm Performance: A recording of a performance of the whole psalm, using the entire authenticated version but with freedom to adapt it for authentic performance, including poetic and dramatic features beyond the authenticated version, recorded in AVTT.
4. Song or Hymn: A recording of a performance of part of the psalm including the main idea of the psalm (this could be from v 2 as mentioned in Psalm-specific ideas above), in the form of a song or a hymn, with or without drama, with freedom to adapt it for authentic performance and to make it easy to sing and remember, recorded in AVTT. An improved version of the Step 4 composition could be used here.
5. Chorus: A recording of a short chorus of a main verse of the psalm. Something catchy and highly memorable, recorded in AVTT.



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## Appendix A: Guide Translations

Hebrew-mirror	Guide Translation
For the director: psalm of David	<i>For the director of music. A psalm of David.</i>
1 The skies [are] proclaiming glory-of God and work of hands his [is] declaring the sky dome/sky expanse/firmament.	1 The heavens declare the glory of God, the sky proclaims the work of his hands.
2 Day to day bubbles out word, and night to night reveals-knowledge.	2 Day after day pours forth speech, night after night displays knowledge.
3 There is not speech and there are not words not it is heard voice their.	3 There is no speech nor are there words, their voice cannot be heard.
4 In all the earth it goes out voice their and at end of world words their. For the sun God made-tent in them	4 Yet their sound goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In them, he has pitched a tent for the sun.
5 and it like groom goes out from wedding chamber his, it rejoices like champion to run race.	5 And he, he is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, he rejoices like a champion to run his course.
6 From end of the skies [is] going out its and path its on-ends their and there.is.not [something] hidden from heat its.	6 His going out is from one end of the heavens, His circuit all the way to the other end, and nothing is hidden from his heat.
7 Law/teaching of YHWH [is] perfect, restoring of soul. Edict of YHWH [is] faithful, causing to be wise simpleminded.	7 The law of Yahweh is blameless, giving rest to the soul. The testimony of Yahweh is trustworthy, making wise the simple.
8 Precepts of YHWH [are] upright, causing to be glad heart. Command of YHWH [is] pure, causing to have light eyes.	8 The precepts of Yahweh are upright, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of Yahweh is pure, giving light to the eyes. 9 The fear of Yahweh is clean, enduring forever.





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9 Fear of YHWH [is] clean,  
lasting(standing) to forever.

Judgments-of YHWH [are] true,  
they are righteous completely.

10 The ones being precious than gold  
and than fine gold much  
and sweet than honey  
and honey of honeycombs.

11 Also servant your is warned by them;  
in keeping their [is] reward great.

12 Errors who sees;  
from hidden(pl.) acquit me.

13 Also from blatant(pl.) restrain servant your;  
don't-let them rule-over me.

Then I will be.blameless  
and I will be innocent  
from transgression great.

14 May they be to favor words of mouth my  
and pondering of heart my to before you,  
O YHWH, rock my and redeemer my.

The judgments of Yahweh are true,  
they are righteous altogether.

10 They are more desirable than gold,  
than much pure gold.

They are sweeter than honey,  
than drippings from the comb.

11 By them also is your servant warned,  
in keeping them there is great reward.

12 Who can discern his errors?  
Make me innocent of hidden faults.

13 Keep your servant also back from wilful sins,  
let them not rule over me, then I will be  
blameless,  
innocent of great transgression.

14 May the words of my mouth  
and the meditation of my heart be  
pleasing to you,  
Yahweh, my Rock and my Redeemer.



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## Appendix B: Exegetical Layout

### Genre

Psalm 19 is a wisdom psalm with a meditation on the law of Yahweh at its centre.

### Content

The Psalm divides into three parts<sup>2</sup> with a shift in focus at the end of each part.

In the first part, vv.1-6, the Psalmist speaks about what the heaven say about God. He finishes his description of the heavens with a special focus on the sun. The Psalmist uses the sun as an image for Yahweh's law which he then speaks about in the second part.

In the second part, vv.7-11, the Psalmist begins by praising the beauty of Yahweh's law. He does this in 6 parallel lines which describe what the law is, what it is like and what does. He starts by declaring the perfection of Yahweh's law and brings his praise of the law to climax by affirming the truth and the total righteousness of his judgments which he then praises in vv.10-11 as more desirable than gold, sweeter than honey and of value to Yahweh's servant in warning him and being the means of great reward.

In the third and final part, vv.12-14, the Psalmist identifies himself as Yahweh's servant. With the nature of Yahweh's law in mind from the second part, he requests Yahweh's forgiveness for hidden sins and his protection from wilful sins so that he may be blameless and innocent of great transgression. He then finishes the Psalm with the further request in v.14, that the words of his mouth and the meditations of his heart should be pleasing (or *acceptable*) to Yahweh who he calls upon as his rock and his redeemer.

### Context: Psalm 19 and the rest of the Psalter

If Yahweh's law is understood to be his whole and ongoing revelation of himself to his covenant people, then the whole Psalter is in one way or another a meditation on Yahweh's law. Psalm 1 begins the Psalter stating the blessedness of the one whose delight is in Yahweh's law. Psalm 96-100 end the Psalter with 5 psalms of praise to Yahweh. As meditations on Yahweh's revelation of himself in the law, Psalm 1, 19 and 119 (together with the Messianic psalms next to them, Psalms 2, 18 and 118) then form a kind of backbone to the whole body of psalms.

<sup>2</sup> The Expositors Bible Commentary affirms that "The psalm comprises three separate motifs brought together by the author into a unified *wisdom hymn*: creation praise (vv. 1–6), a wisdom psalm (vv. 7–11), and a prayer for forgiveness and acceptance (vv. 12–14)." The New International Commentary on the Old Testament divides the Psalm slightly differently but also proposes a threefold structure with the unifying theme of speech present in all, thus "vv.1-6 Creation's Speech - praise for God, vv.7-10 Torah's Speech - instruction of humanity, vv.11-14 Servant's Speech - prayer to God."





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## SUGGESTED HEADING

a. Summarise the content of the three parts of the Psalm, e.g. *The speech of the heavens, the law of Yahweh and the prayer of the Yahweh's servant* b. Focus on the revelation of God's glory in the heavens and the perfection of the law without referring to the Psalmist's response to this revelation, e.g. *The glory of God in the heavens and the perfection of Yahweh's law.* c. Choose either the first line of the Psalm as the title for the whole, *The heavens declare the glory of God*, or the first line of the central part about the law, *The law of Yahweh is perfect*, or summarise the Psalmist's prayer in the final part e.g. *The Psalmist prays that the words of his mouth and the meditations of his heart may be pleasing to Yahweh.*

### Coding for TAM Verbs and Hebrew features:

- Qatal perfective = blue
- Yiqtol imperfective = red
- Infinitive construct = purple
- Wayyiqtol waw+imperfective = pink
- Jussive/cohortative = light brown
- Imperative = brown
- Participle = green
- Weqatal = navy

לְמַנְצֵחַ מְזֻמֹּר לְדָוִד:	to.the.choirmaster psalm of.David.
הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד־אֱלֹהִים	<sup>1</sup> the.heavens <sup>3</sup> are.declaring <sup>4</sup> glory.of-EL
וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו מְגִיד הַרְקִיעַ	and.work of.his.hand is.telling the.firmament
יּוֹם לְיוֹם יִבְעַע אֱמָר	<sup>2</sup> day to.day <sup>5</sup> pours.out speech
וּלְלַיְלָה <sup>a</sup> לְלַיְלָה יִתְנַהֵר דַּעַת:	and.night to.night reveals-knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> **Heavens...** The *heavens* in v.1a and the *firmament* (or *sky*) in v.1b refer to roughly the same thing. If you don't have two words for to describe the heavens, try something like *dome* or *expanse* or *canopy* as a figure of speech in v.1b. The two lines of this verse act like a mirror to each other with *the heavens* at the beginning of the first line and *the firmament* at the end of the second line. Can you do something similar in your translation?

<sup>4</sup> **declaring... telling...** The participle verbs in this verse describe what the heavens declare and what they tell without any special reference to time. In English, *The heavens declare...* is better poetically than *The heavens are declaring...* and *the firmament tells...* is better than *the firmament is telling...*

<sup>5</sup> **day to day...** The most natural way to understand the Hebrew text in this verse is that the day and the night are the ones speaking: *Day to day* (or *day after day*) *pours forth speech*, *night to night* (or *night after night*) *reveals knowledge*.



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אִין־אָמַר וְאִין דְּבָרִים	<sup>3</sup> there.is.no-speech <sup>6</sup> and.there.are.no words <sup>7</sup>
בְּלִי נִשְׁמָע קוֹלָם:	not it.is.heard their.voice
בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ יֵצֵא קוֹם	<sup>4</sup> in.all-the.earth goes.out their.measuring.line <sup>8</sup>
וּבְקֶצֶה תֵּבֵל מְלִיהֶם	and.in.end.of world <sup>9</sup> their.words <sup>10</sup>
לְשֶׁמֶשׁ שָׁם־אָהֵל בָּהֶם:	for.the.sun <sup>11</sup> he.has.set-tent <sup>12</sup> in.them <sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> **alternative readings...** There are two main ways to understand this verse: The first is *There is no speech and there are no words; their voice cannot be heard*. This translation means that the heavens do not speak or use actual words and the heavens' voice is therefore inaudible - it cannot be heard. The second is *There is no speech and there are no languages where their voice is not heard*. This guide recommends the first exegesis in which the second line make an additional statement to the first (rather than the second line completing the first). See the notes on verse 3 in Step 5 for recommendations on how to translate the contrast between what the Psalmist says in verse 3 and verse 4.

<sup>7</sup> **no words...** When the psalmist says that the heavens have *no speech* and *no words* in this verse, he may be making a contrast with the *law* in vv.7-9. In the Hebrew text, the 10 commandments - the summary of the law - were sometimes referred to as Yahweh's *words*.

<sup>8</sup> **measuring line...** The word in the Hebrew text means *their line* (referring to a measuring line). Many translations, including the Greek translation of the Old Testament, think that the scribes missed out a letter by mistake and this word should refer to *their voice*. In Romans 10:18 Paul quotes this verse and refers to *their voice*.

<sup>9</sup> **world...** There are two Hebrew words which refer to the world in this verse. The first word is the general word for the earth. The second word is only found in poetry in the Old Testament. Do you have two words which you can use to refer to the world? If not consider repeating the same word or using a pronoun or demonstrative in the second line.

<sup>10</sup> **their words...** In the Hebrew text, the verb to go out in the first line of this verse is also implied in the second line: Their voice goes out in all the earth, their words (go out) to the end of the world.

<sup>11</sup> **for the sun...** In the Hebrew text, the phrase *for the sun* is put at the beginning of the line to give it prominence.

<sup>12</sup> **a tent...** See the comments in Step 2 about the way *the tent* which God has pitched in the heavens links the idea of the heavens in vv.1-4 to the law in vv.7-9.

<sup>13</sup> **in them...** *in them* refers to the heavens.



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וְהוּא כְּחָתָן יֵצֵא מִחַפְתּוֹ	<sup>5</sup> and.he <sup>14</sup> (he.is)like.a.bridegroom going.out from.his.chamber <sup>15</sup>
יְשִׁישׁ כְּגִבּוֹר לָרוּץ אָרְחָא:	he.rejoices like.a.mighty.man to.run (its).course
מִקְצֵה הַשָּׁמַיִם מוֹצֵא	<sup>6</sup> from.the.end.of the.heavens its.rising
וְתִקְוֹפָתוֹ עַל־קִצּוֹתָם	and.its.circuit over their.ends
וְאֵין נִסְתָּר מִחַמָּתוֹ:	and.there.is.nothing hidden from.its.heat <sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> **and he...** In Guide Translation 2, we repeat the pronoun *he* to maintain the transition in the Hebrew text between the sun introduced as an object at the end of v.4 and the sun as the subject in vv.5-6 (*And he, he is like...*). In many Bantu languages, a pronoun or demonstrative at the beginning of v.5 can keep the transition prominent. See the notes on translation in Step 5.

<sup>15</sup> **balance...** Try to achieve rhythmic balance between the two lines of v.5 which compare the sun to a bridegroom and to a champion or warrior. Try to keep a similar balance between the first two lines of v.6 describing the rising of the sun from one end of the heavens and its course all the way to the other and then maintain the rhythm in the the extra third line that nothing is hidden from its heat.

<sup>16</sup> **its heat...** In the culture of the Ancient Near East (when the Psalms were written), the sun was commonly worshipped as a god of glory, power and judgment. The name of the Babylonian Sun God was *Shamash* 'sun' - very close in sound to the Hebrew term *shemesh* 'sun'. In worship poetry of the time, the sun was compared to a bridegroom in glory because of the way it rises at dawn in the east shedding light on the earth. It was also compared to mighty warrior in the way it crossed the heavens from one side to another. Perhaps above all, the sun was worshipped as the god of justice and judgment whose light and heat fell on all mankind. By placing his description of the sun in vv.5-6 before his description of the law in vv.7-9, the Psalmist is stating poetically and very forcefully Yahweh is way superior to the Sun God worshipped by others. It is the law which Yahweh speaks which is glorious, mighty, all reaching and from whose heat nothing is hidden. Not the Sun God.



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תּוֹרַת יְהוָה תְּמִימָה מְשִׁיבַת נַפְשׁ	<sup>7</sup> law.of <sup>17</sup> YHWH <sup>18</sup> blameless <sup>19</sup> giving.rest soul
עֲדוּת יְהוָה נֶאֱמָנָה מְחַכֵּמַת פִּתְי	testimony.of <sup>20</sup> YHWH trustworthy making.wise (the)simple <sup>21</sup>
פְּקוּדֵי יְהוָה יִשְׂרִים מְשִׂמְחֵי לֵב	<sup>8</sup> precepts.of YHWH upright making.rejoice heart
מִצְוַת יְהוָה בְּרָה מְאִירַת עֵינַיִם	commandment.of YHWH pure giving.light (to)eyes
יִרְאַת יְהוָה טְהוֹרָה עוֹמֶדֶת לְעַד	<sup>9</sup> fear.of <sup>22</sup> YHWH clean enduring for.ever

<sup>17</sup> **law...** The law in the Old Testament refers to Yahweh's revelation of himself and of his requirements to his covenant people. The climax of that revelation was the set of laws which he gave to Moses on Mt Sinai. The term is also used to refer to the Pentateuch, the first 5 books of the Bible which describe the history of his relationship with his covenant people. Wider even than this, the term is used to describe his ongoing revelation of himself to his people. Discussing the term *torah* 'law' in Psalm 119, Hossfeld and Zenger comment "Ps119 is not primarily about a "silent" Torah, but one that "speaks". It is not primarily about an instruction of God once received, but about one that is actually ongoing - through the medium of the Torah, out of which God speaks" (H&Z, Vol II, p260.) In Psalm 19:7-9, the Psalmist focuses on six different elements or aspects of *the law of Yahweh*. Each he describes as *of Yahweh*. That is because Yahweh's law is all about Yahweh himself; it is his self-revelation, his word to his covenant people. *Law* is the appropriate term to describe that self-revelation because the giving of the law on Mount Sinai is the high point and the heart of his self-revelation in the Old Testament.

Yahweh's *law* is more than just the collection of individual laws which he gave to the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai. His *law* refers to the whole collection of laws as a single thing. Together they form his revelation of himself to his people as well as his requirement of how they should live in his covenant with them. In many Bantu languages, people speak more easily about *the laws* of their country than *the law* of their country. Don't just assume, however, that you never talk about *the law* of your country as a whole thing. Think about different ways you might refer to the law as a whole. Some Bantu languages do it by adding an extra element to the beginning of their word for a single *law* or by changing the beginning of the word altogether. Other Bantu languages can use the same singular word for *law* to refer to a specific law in certain contexts or to the whole law of their country, or their community, in other contexts.

<sup>18</sup> **rhythm...** Try and keep a regular rhythm in the way in which the 6 lines describe different aspect of Yahweh's law.

<sup>19</sup> **blameless...** Try and keep the same word *blameless* (or *perfect*) to describe the what the law is in v.7a and what the psalmist wants to be in v.13b.

<sup>20</sup> **testimony...** The term in Psalm 119 singular. As with the other singular terms in vv.7-9 (*law, command, fear*), *the testimony of Yahweh* refers to his law as a whole. They each refer to something more abstract than their plural counterparts. For the sense of the term *testimony*, see the description of the 6 terms for the law in Step 2.

<sup>21</sup> **the simple...** In the Hebrew text, the object is singular; the simple (person) not the simple (people).

<sup>22</sup> **the fear of Yahweh...** The psalmist describes *the commandment of Yahweh* in v.8b and *the fear of Yahweh* in v.9a in very similar ways - the first as *pure*, the second as *clean*. In his law, Yahweh sets out the way that he wants his people to be clean so that they can live in his presence. Because he himself is holy and clean, he tells his people that they must be holy and clean. Moses linked the fear and the love of Yahweh together in Deuteronomy 10:12-13 when he said, "Now, Israel, what does Yahweh your God require from you, but **to fear Yahweh your God**, to walk in all His ways and **to love him**, and to serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, **to keep the commandments of Yahweh** and his statutes **which I am commanding** you today" (italics and bold added to highlight the link between fearing and loving Yahweh and keeping his commandments).



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מִשְׁפָּטֵי־יְהוָה אֱמֶת צְדָקוֹ יַחְדָּו:	judgments.of <sup>23</sup> YHWH true <sup>24</sup> they.are.righteous altogether
הַנְּחֻמִּים מְזֻהָב וּמִפָּז רַב	<sup>10</sup> they <sup>25</sup> .are.desirable more.than.gold and.than.pure.gold much
וּמְתוּקִים מְדַבֵּשׁ וְנֹפֶת צוּפִים	and.they.are.sweet more.than.honey and.drippings.of comb
גַּם־עַבְדְּךָ נִזְהָר בָּהֶם <sup>12</sup>	<sup>11</sup> also <sup>26</sup> your.servant is.warned by.them <sup>27</sup>
בְּשִׂמְרָם עֲקֹב רַב:	in.keeping.them reward great

<sup>23</sup> **judgments...** Following ESV, NIV and other major translations, we understand Yahweh's *judgments* (Heb. *mishpatim*) to refer to his *ordinances* or *just laws* - see the description of the 6 terms for the law in Step 2. Provided that you can employ a singular term in your language for the whole of God's *law* (Heb. *torah*), it is acceptable to translate the Hebrew term *mishpatim* with the plural *laws*, especially if the plural term in your language assumes or expresses the idea of justice. In this case, rendering the Hebrew term *mishpatim* as *laws* can stand alongside the other terms that the Hebrew Bible uses for Yahweh's law (or laws); in this Psalm, *his testimony, his precepts, his command, his fear*. Rendering the Hebrew term as *laws* in Psalm 19 is particularly appropriate because it is with this term that the Psalmist brings his description of Yahweh's law in vv.7-9 to a climax and from which he develops his meditation on the law in the rest of the Psalm. (Note that the use of *torot*, the plural of *torah*, is extremely limited in the Hebrew Bible as a whole. This provides the setting for the multiple different ways which the Hebrew Bible uses to refer the collection of laws which make up Yahweh's law - most richly developed in Psalm 119. The plural term *torot* is used once in the Psalms, in Psa 105:45, and that use may be explained by the fact that the Psalmist is speaking of Yahweh's *laws* before he gave the law to Moses at Mt Sinai - reflecting the use *torot* in Genesis 26:5; Exodus 16:28, 18:16, 20.)

<sup>24</sup> **true...** Most English translations render the Hebrew word *emet* as *true*. NIV84 is the exception with *sure*. In Psalm 19:9, NIV84 has *sure* instead of *true*. This rendering is attractive because it pairs with the Psalmist's description of Yahweh's testimony in v.7b as *trustworthy*. The Hebrew word *emet* is used in both senses in the Psalms. In Psalm 119, however, the other extended meditation on the law in the book of Psalms, *emet* always refers to *truth* while the word *emunah* is the term used to indicate *faithfulness* (See the use of *emet* in 119:43, 142, 151, 160 compared to *emunah* in Psa 119:30, 75, 86, 90, 138.)

<sup>25</sup> **they... them...** The plural pronouns *they* and *them* in the three bicola of vv.11-12 continue the reference to Yahweh's judgments from the final line of v.9 (albeit by extension, the Psalmist refers to the law as whole.)

<sup>26</sup> **also...** The Psalmist uses the same word *also* at the beginning of v.11 and v.13. In both cases, the word introduces a statement about something additional. The nature of the addition in the two verses, however, is slightly different. In v.11, the Psalmist adds a new and different description of why the law is so good. In v.13, by comparison, he adds a second kind of sin which he wants Yahweh to help him with. Try to keep the same word in your translation in both verses (unless the different kind of addition in each verse require different words).

<sup>27</sup> **by them...** Try to find a way of maintaining the balance between the two lines of v.11. In Guide Translation 2, we have mirrored the balance in the Hebrew poetry by maintaining the phrase *...by them* at the end of v.11a and the phrase *in keeping them...* at the start of v.11b.



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שְׂגִיאוֹת מִי־בִין	<sup>12</sup> errors <sup>28</sup> who discerns <sup>29</sup>
מִנְסֹתְרוֹת נִקְנִי:	from.hidden.faults declare.me.innocent <sup>30</sup>
גַּם מִזִּדִּים תִּשָּׂדֵךְ עַבְדְּךָ	<sup>13</sup> also from.the.proud <sup>31</sup> keep.back your.servant <sup>32</sup>
אַל־יִמְשְׁלוּ־בִי אֲזַ אֵיתָם	not-let.them.have.dominion-over.me then I.will.be.blameless <sup>33</sup>
וְנִקִּיתִי מִפֶּשַׁע רָב	and.I.will.be.innocent from.transgression great
יְהִי לְרֵצוֹן אִמְרֵי־פִי	<sup>14</sup> let.them.be acceptable the.words.of- my.mouth <sup>34</sup>

<sup>28</sup> **errors...** The word errors is frontshifted to the beginning of the line. This introduces the theme of the new stanza. The two kinds of error which the Psalmist refers to in v.12b and v.13a are the two categories of sin recognised elsewhere in the OT.

<sup>29</sup> **balance...** Try to find a way of maintaining the balance between the question in verse v.12a and the request in v.12b. Each line in the Hebrew text consists of two sound words: v.12a errors who-discerns, v.12b from.hidden.faults make.me.innocent.

<sup>30</sup> **innocent...** Try and keep the two references to *being innocent* in vv.12-13. In v.12b, the psalmist asked to be made or declared innocent of hidden sins. In v.13c, he expresses the desire to be innocent of great transgressions.

<sup>31</sup> **hidden sins and sins of pride...** The primary sense of the Hebrew word which we render as *wilful sins* is to proud or insolent people (*zedim*). Rendering the word as *wilful sins* in this psalm is justified because they stand in parallel to the hidden sins of the previous verse. *Wilful sins* are sins which you know about but still do. They are deliberate sins or presumptuous sins (which you assume you can get away with).

<sup>32</sup> **3 'sound lines'...** In the Hebrew (Masoretic) text, v.13 consists of 3 'sound lines': Keep your servant also from wilful sins / may they not rule over me then I will be blameless / and innocent of great transgression. The Hebrew poetry achieves its rhythm by using very few words. In the second sound line it also reduces its number of words by joining some words together into one 'sound word'. This gives a line with 4 words, followed by a line with 3 sound words and then a third line of 3 words. The result is a 4:3:3 pattern. You may be able to keep the pattern of 3 lines in your translation if you can find a suitable rhythm to do so. If not, you may find that the pattern of 4 lines we have used in Guide Translation A works better in your language. Experiment with what sounds best in your language.

<sup>33</sup> **blameless...** Try and keep the same word *blameless* (or *perfect*) to describe the what the law is in v.7a and what the psalmist wants to be in v.13b.

<sup>34</sup> **compound lines...** In the Hebrew text, v.14 starts with a pair of compound lines before the final address to Yahweh in the third and final line. (This is staircase parallelism with ellipsis of the verb in the second line.) *May.they.be.acceptable the.words.of.my.mouth / and.the.meditation.of.my.heart.before.you / Yahweh my.rock and.my.redeemer.* Guide Translation 2 renders v.14 in 4 lines which has a nice rhythm in English even though it loses something of the richness of the Hebrew poetry.



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



APP. A



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. B

<p>וְהִגִּינוּ לְבִי לְפָנֶיךָ</p>	<p>and.the.meditation.of my.heart to.your.face<sup>35</sup></p>
<p>יְהוָה צוּרִי וְגֹאֲלִי:</p>	<p>YHWH my.rock and.my.redeemer</p>

<sup>35</sup> **to your face...** the idiom means in your presence or before you.