

The Metaphors of Pathway & Refuge

Seeing the Psalms Through Metaphor and Simile

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The Metaphor of the Pathway

- Pathway connotes **movement** and **direction**.
- The psalmist describes the righteous person as one who is on the move. He “walks” and she “seeks.”
 - **The Righteous & the Wicked are Distinguished by Their Respective Paths (1:1, 6).**

*Blessed is the person who does not **walk** in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the **path** of sinners... For the Lord knows the **way** of the righteous,
But the **way** of the wicked will perish.*

- The path chosen signifies conduct and destiny (2:12).

*Kiss the Son, that He not be angry and you perish on the **way**,
For His wrath may be kindled quickly.
How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!*

- **The Path is Torah (119:1)**

*Blessed are those whose **way** is blameless,
Who **walk** in the **Law of the Lord**.*

- Designates the Behavior on the Path (119:3, 5, 14).

*They also **do no injustice**;
They **walk** in His **ways**.*

*Oh that my **ways** may be established
To **keep Your statutes!***

*I have rejoiced in the **way** of **Your testimonies**...*

- **The Path is the way of divine directions (119:33, 102)**

*Teach me, the way of **Your statutes**, Lord,
And I shall comply with it to the end.*

*I have not turned aside from Your judgments,
For **You Yourself have taught me**.*

- **Enlightened understanding (119:32, 99-100)**

*I shall run the way of Your commandments, For You will **enlarge my heart**.*

*I have **more insight than all my teachers**, For Your testimonies are my meditation.
I **understand more than those who are old**, Because I have complied with Your precepts.*

- **Torah is the Only True Path in the Midst of Many Dead Ends (119:29)**

*Remove the false way from me, And graciously grant me **Your Law**.*

- **The Path is Fraught with Danger, Traps, Struggle, and Distress (23:4-5; 86:11,13; 138:7; 142:3-5)**

*Even though I walk through the **valley** of the shadow of **death**, I fear no **evil**, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my **enemies**...*

*Teach me Your way, Lord; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name.
For Your graciousness toward me is great, And You have saved my soul from **the depths of Sheol**.*

*Though I walk **in the midst of trouble**, You will revive me; You will reach out with Your hand against the **wrath of my enemies**, And Your right hand will save me.*

*When **my spirit felt weak** within me, You knew **my path**. In the **way where I walk** They have hidden **a trap** for me. Look to the right and see; For there is **no one who regards me favorably**; There is **no escape** for me; No one cares for my soul. I cried out to You, Lord; I said, "You are my refuge, My portion in the land of the living."*

Many psalms plunge the reader into the arena of hostile conflict. Though saturated with themes of refuge and Torah, most of the psalmic prayers are not uttered in "the mystical half-light of a gothic cathedral, or in the monastic oasis, or the silent chambers of the soul." Such prayers are not given from under the shadow of God's wings or within God's mighty fortress, but rather "out of the depths" and from "narrow straits". The laments are from outside the locus of God's protective care and from within the crucible of conflict and affliction. – William P. Brown

- Still, the Path leads to salvation (37:23-24, 31-34; 116:8-9)

*The steps of a man are established by the Lord, And He delights in his way.
When he falls, he will not be hurled down, Because the Lord is the One who holds his hand.*

*The Law of his God is in his heart;
His steps do not slip.
The wicked spies upon the righteous
And seeks to kill him.
The Lord will not leave him in his hand,
Or let him be condemned when he is judged.
Wait for the Lord and keep His way,
And He will exalt you to inherit the land;
When the wicked are eliminated, you will see it.*

For You have rescued my soul from death, My eyes from tears, And my feet from stumbling. I shall walk before the Lord In the land of the living.

- To Walk the Path is the Result of Covenant Between the Psalmist & God (44:17-18)

*All this has come upon us, but we have not forgotten You,
And we have not dealt falsely with Your covenant.
Our heart has not turned back,
And our steps have not deviated from Your way...*

- The Path Shares Stories of God's Gracious Deeds Toward Previous Travelers (44:1-3, 7)

*God, we have heard with our ears, **Our fathers have told us The work that You did in their days**, In the days of old. You with Your own hand drove out the nations; Then You planted them; You afflicted the peoples, Then You let them go free. For by their own sword they did not possess the land, And their own arm did not save them, But Your right hand and Your arm and the light of Your presence, For You favored them.*

- The Psalmist Has Tried His Own Path (119:26, 67)

*I have told of my ways, and You have answered me;
Teach me Your statutes.*

*Before I was afflicted I went astray,
But now I keep Your word.*

Pathway & Refuge

- If *Pathway* connotes **movement** and **direction**, then *Refuge* implies **destination, permanent residence, security, protection – home**.
- “A path, by definition is something on which one walks and is on the move. *Refuge is a domain into which one enters and where one, God willing, remains.*”
- Together, Pathway and Refuge make up the psalmist’s life’s focus and concerns.
 - **The Direction of the *Pathway* is Set Resolutely Toward *Refuge* – the Center of God’s Protection (23; 84:1-7; 43:3).**

The Lord is my shepherd,

I will not be in need.

² *He lets me lie down in green pastures;*

He leads me beside quiet waters.

³ *He restores my soul;*

He guides me in the paths of righteousness

For the sake of His name.

⁴ ***Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,***

I fear no evil, for You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

⁵ *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;*

You have anointed my head with oil;

My cup overflows.

⁶ *Certainly goodness and faithfulness will follow me all the days of my life,*

And my dwelling will be in the house of the Lord forever.

How lovely are Your dwelling places, Lord of armies!

² ***My soul longed and even yearned for the courtyards of the Lord;***

My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.

³ *The bird also has found a house, And the swallow a nest for herself, where she may put her young: Your altars, Lord of armies, My King and my God.*

⁴ ***Blessed are those who dwell in Your house! They are ever praising You. Selah***

⁵ ***Blessed is the person whose strength is in You, In whose heart are the roads to Zion!***

⁶ ***Passing through the Valley of Baca they make it a spring;***

The early rain also covers it with blessings.

⁷ ***They go from strength to strength, Every one of them appears before God in Zion.***

Send out Your light and Your truth, they shall lead me;

They shall bring me to Your holy hill

And to Your dwelling places.

- **In Some Ways the Pathway is Destination and Refuge is Ever-Present on the Journey**

“Pathway” and “refuge” are the tectonic plates that give coherent shape to the Psalter’s rugged landscape...Do not persons of faith today think of themselves as on a journey, one having a destination they call “home” that is not entirely of this world? Yet do they not also find themselves linked together in community, “at home” with each other, as they continue to live and grow in faith? Indeed, how is a path formed except by the passage of many feet by those who have gone before? And what is sanctuary without the gathering community? The journey of faith is filled with painful wrenchings, yet surprising gifts. The Psalms imagine a world that is at once relentlessly real and stridently hopeful, a journey *within* the fray that is also “homeward” bound.

- William P. Brown