SING TO THE LORD A NEW SONG

by Lois Silverman

Sing to the Lord a new song.

These are the joyful opening words of Psalm 149. How appropriate they are for an installation of the new officers of a religious organization like the Sisterhood of [name]/ [name]Branch of Women’s League for Conservative Judaism! They form the prayer that is in our hearts tonight.

For that is what a psalm really is—it is a prayer.

A prayer that is sung

A prayer that touches the deepest emotions of our being.

A prayer of longing, of joy, of thanksgiving, of praise, or of hope.

Tonight we:

Sing to the Lord a new song

His praises in the congregation of the faithful.

Let Israel rejoice in its maker;

let the children of Zion exult in their king.

Let them praise His name in dance;

with timbrel and lyre let them chant His praises.

For the Lord delights in His people;

He adorns the lowly with victory.

Let the faithful exult in glory;

let them shout for joy upon their couches,

with paeans to God in their throats....

This is the glory of all His faithful.

Hallelujah.

A psalm is a prayer and a poem. Unlike a European poem with which we are familiar, a psalm is not controlled by any set pattern of syllables, stress, or rhyme. Instead there are series of balanced lines in which a thought expressed in one line is paralleled, contrasted, or augmented in the following line.

A psalm is a prayer written to be sung or chanted often with two people sharing the recital—one chanting a line to which the other responds with the paralled, contrasted, or augented idea.

A psalm uses rich imagery from nature and common experiences which soar to God and to our heart.

A psalm is a unique poem as unique as each of our Sisterhood/Women’s League leaders.

Will the outgoing officers and board of the Sisterhood of [name]/ [name]Branch of Women’s League for Conservative Judaism, please stand. In Psalm 146 we hear:

Happy is the person who has the God of Jacob for his help,

whose hope is in the Lord his God,

maker of heaven and earth,

the sea and all that is in them;

who keeps faith forever;

who secures justice for those who are wronged,

gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets prisoners free;

The Lord restores sight to the blind;

the Lord makes those who are bent strand straight;

the Lord loves the righteous;

The Lord watches over the strangers;

He gives courage to the orphan and widow,....

In your term as members of the Sisterhood of [name]/ [name]Branch, you have striven to emulate these attributes of God. In service to our branch you have performed mitzvot to this end. On behalf of the members of the Sisterhood of [name]/ [name]Branch, I thank you and wish you continued good health, energy, and fulfillment.

Will my friend, [name], out -going president of the Sisterhood of [name]/ [name]Branch, please come forward:

We hear in Psalm 128:

Happy are all who fear the Lord,

who follow His ways.

You shall enjoy the fruit of your labors;

you shall be happy and prosper....

May the Lord bless you from Zion;

may you share the prosperity of Jerusalem

all the days of your life,

and live to see your children’s children.

May all be well with Israel.

With gratitude and love, you are discharged.

[out-going president’s remarks]

Will the incoming board of the Sisterhood of [name]/ [name]Branch please rise.

I install you, my friends, with the words of Psalm 101 in which King David sings:

I will sing of faithfulness and justice;

I will chant a hymn to You, O Lord.

I will study the way of the blameless;

when shall I attain it?

I will live without blame within my house.

I will not set before my eyes anything base;

I hate crooked dealing;

I will have none of it.

Perverse thoughts will be far from me;

I will now nothing of evil....

I cannot endure the haughty and proud man.

My eyes are on the trusty people of land,

to have them at my side.

Let these words be the watchwords that guide you in your duty during your term. You are installed.

Will the Sisterhood/Branch Treasurer, [name], and Branch, Financial Secretary [name], please come forward.

Listen to the words of Psalm 112, so that in handling the financial resources of our Sisterhood/Branch, you may use them as a guide:

Happy is the person who fears the Lord,

who is ardently devoted to His commandments.…

Wealth and riches are in his house,

and his beneficence lasts forever.

A light shines for the upright in the darkness;

he is gracious, compassionate, and beneficent.

All goes well with the one who lends generously,

who conducts his affairs with equity,

He shall never be shaken....

May your term in office be one of success and growth for all of us. You are installed.

[name], Recording Secretary, and [name], Corresponding Secretary, please come forward. For you, Psalm 19 expresses words which can guide you:

The heavens declare the glory of God,

the sky proclaims His handiwork.

Day to day makes utterance,

night to night speaks out.

There is no utterance,

there are no words

whose sound goes unheard.

Their voice carries throughout the earth,

their words to the end of the world....

May the words of my mouth

and the prayer of my heart

be acceptable to You,

O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Your duties involve communicating words to our members. Each word you write is important for the successful running of our Sisterhood/Branch. I install you knowing you will take these words into heart.

Will [name], Education Vice President, please join me.

In Psalm 1, we hear:

Happy is the person who has not followed the counsel of the wicked,

or taken the path of sinners,

or joined the company of the insolent;

rather, the teaching of the Lord is his delight,

and he studies that teaching day and night.

He is like a tree planted beside streams of water,

which yields its fruit in season,

whose foliage never fades,

and whatever it produces thrives.

[name], as Education Vice President, it is your responsibility to plant the seeds of learning in each of us, and help those seeds yield fruit; you will help us to learn and then in turn teach what we have learned to our children and to each other. We know that learning never ends; that learning keeps us and our people vibrant and ever renewed in spirit. I know no one better for this task. I install you.

[name], please step forward to be installed as Program Vice President.

Psalm 78 seems to be written for the Program Vice President:

Give ear, my people, to my teaching,

turn your ear to what I say.

I will expound a theme,

hold forth on the lessons of the past,

things we have heard and known,

that our ancestors have told us.

As it says the psalm, you will teach; you will help us teach. You will draw on examples from the past and from these create new ways to present the universal ideals of our people. [name], it is my pleasure to install you as Program Vice President.

Will [name] come forward to be installed as Membership Vice President.

We are all familiar with psalm 133. We know it as Hiney ma tov u-ma na-im, Shevat ahim gam yahad.

How good and how pleasant it is

that friends dwell together...

There the Lord ordained blessing, everlasting life.

It is your challenging task to encourage women to join our Sisterhood/Sisterhoods and to retain active roles in our organization. You are installed.

Will [name], Torah Fund Vice President, join me on the bimah as I recite Psalm 122, A song of ascent. Of David.

I rejoice when they said to me,

“We are going to the House of the Lord.”

Our feet stood inside your gates, O Jerusalem,

Jerusalem built up, a city knit together,

of which tribes would make pilgrimage…

As Torah Fund Vice President, you will remind us of the importance of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America to the continuity of Judaism. Your teaching will help us become like the tribes of Israel—bound together for a purpose—our purpose, the future of Judaism. I install you as Torah Fund Vice President.

Will [name], Public Relations Vice President, please come to the bimah.

Hear the words of Psalm 9, a psalm of David:

I will praise You, Lord, with all my heart;

I will tell all Your wonders.

I will rejoice and exult in You,

singing a hymn to Your name, O Most High.

Your duties in publicizing and communicating will be done with a full heart and with joy and creativity. And, of course, with your trusty computer, too. May this psalm be an inspiration to you. You, my friend, are installed.

Will [name] Administration Vice President, please join me.

The words of Psalm 127 are appropriate for you:

Unless the Lord builds the house,

its builders labor in vain on it;

unless the lord watches over the city,

the watchman keeps vigil in vain.

In vain do you rise early

and stay up late,

and you who toil for the bread you eat;

He provides as much for His loved ones while they sleep.

It is your job to keep our “house” in order. Your many tasks and functions may be considered the traditional ones of Sisterhood including maintaining the synagogue kitchen, catering and such. But your job will also be helping our organization manage its relationship with the synagogue remembering that our Sisterhood’s purpose is to serve the synagogue, its members and its children.

Tonight we will install [name] as President of the Sisterhood of [name]/ [name]Branch of Women’s League for Conservative Judaism.

[Rabbi’s remarks]

Bette Siegel, please join me.

[name], you are about to join a very select sorority, that of the presidents of the Sisterhood of [name]/ [name]Branch of Women’s League for Conservative Judaism. As we enter the 21th Century, you will face new challenges undreamed of by your predecessors. But we know you will serve the women of the branch and kol yisrael well. On behalf of all the members of this group who have served before you, I have chosen a special prayer which expresses our wishes for you with love.

Psalm 20.

May the Lord answer you in time of trouble,

the name of Jacob’s God keep you safe.

May He send you help from the sanctuary,

and sustain you from Zion....

May He grant you your desire,

and fulfill your every plan.

May we shout for joy in your victory,

arrayed by standards in the name of our God.

May the Lord fulfill your every wish.

This is our prayer for you as it was a psalm of David for the leader.

My friend, with my love and my knowledge you will not have to face your challenges alone, I install you as President the Sisterhood of [name]/ [name]Branch of Women’s League for Conservative Judaism for the [dates] term.

[incoming President’s remarks]

So we end this installation of those leaders who will guide us into/in the 21st century with the words of Psalm 67—for the Leader.

May God be gracious to us and bless us;

may He show us favor,

that Your way be known on earth,

Your deliverance among all nations.…

May the earth yield its produce;

may God, our God, bless us.

May God bless us,

and be revered to the ends of the earth.