

Psalm 4 is a counseling letter sent upward to the God who ultimately rights all causes and outward to those whose response to distress has been doubt and reproach, distrust and anxiety--the life-attitude that takes away one's free space and joy, and binds-imprisons-enslaves-oppresses-compresses one into a narrow space. As Jn.Donne developed metaphors [e.g., "No man is an island,...."], the heart of this thinksheet is the metaphor of space or room open/constricted...."Letter," I say, for we do not have the correspondence, and are constricted into recreating the situation-in-life from this single piece (or possibly also the companion morning psalm, the previous). Is the speaker one person or the nation? We don't know, but there's a lesson in that: our individual/social distinction is too strict. What about the time-references (past/present/future)? Trouble on that, too: Hebrew "tenses" are not tenses at all, but "types" of action--so translations differ vastly on this psalm. What, then, can we be sure of? What is most important: the singer's attitude, discernible in his addresses and images (metaphors). Keep these matters in mind as you meditate on the translation I made for the thinksheet: *O God, Vindicator of my trust, Savior God, when in a narrow place I cry to you, you answer and set me again in open*space. When I am beset, hemmed in, cramped, constricted, confined, bound, tied up, shut up, oppressed, distressed, you make room for me again! You make an opening for exodus out from exile and prison, dishonor and reproach--out into a broad and open place where, relieved of stress within and distress around me, I am free to begin again, free on free soil to develop anew. When troubles close in on me and I feel claustrophobic, I remember that in other such times, you closed in on my troubles and opened up the roomy space I needed, relieving me of my disabling fears and enlarging my powers to face my problems. When I was in the straits of Sheol, you set me at large, unbinding me from the powers of death. When my attention was tied to some passion narrowing awareness and forbidding wholeness, you set me free from compulsive fettering into decisional space. When I was only a package, you unbound me to become a person. When my heart was narrow with doubt, you made it wide with trust. When my mind was constricted with fear, you broadened it with courage. When my situation seemed hopeless, you expanded my options, widening my vision to see opportunities. When I was discouraged and despairing, despondent and depressed, you widened my heart with memory and hope. Well, Lord, here I am in trouble and distress again. Hear my cry, and be kind to me again.* That's the first verse. Now, with strength and perspective from prayer, he faces those who argue against trusting God--the disenchanting, discouraged, despairing, who in face of life's untowardnesses have narrowed themselves, buckling up instead of down. He witnesses to his religious experience, from which he derives both authority to confront them and love to call them out into the open, out into the wide world of confidence in God and in the life he is more eager to give than we are to receive. [2] *You leaders, when are you going to quit trying to change my glory, my trust in God, into shameful rebellion like yours? How much longer are you going to keep your heart shut up and closed in? How much longer will you trust worthless, vain, empty things that keep your heart narrow and guide you through lies to false goals? When are you going to resume the risks of trust, of truth, of love?* [3] *Know that the Lord graciously heard me in the past, and will do so now. Know that the Lord works wonders for hasids, those who accept and return his love. Real freedom is through loving obedience to the real covenant. Note here the "transpersonal" element coming into counseling; e.g., as "third-self intimacy," the last section of Muriel James and Louis Savary's excellent A NEW SELF (Addison-Wesley/77)...Vv.4f advises cooling one's anger, and way-laying further sinning, by giving yourself a good talking to [Heb., "meditation"] at night, then getting up in the morning for some new behavior with a new attitude. Vv.6f: As for those who want more-more outward prosperity from God, the psalmist witnesses to an inner trustful joy as superior even to the ecstasy of a rich harvest with its wild festival. The tack-on line, vs.8, summarizes the psalmist's life-attitude: The gift of inner shalom let's you drop off to sleep as soon as you hit the bed. So here's the rest of my translation: [4] *Go to bed**

*"Great" is the root meaning, and appears as "a great many"(vs.7), "a great harvest"(vs.8).

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mad if you must, but stop short of open rebellion against God and life. Me, I go to bed peaceful: there may be, in that, something worth your thinking about. Meditating on God's power and justice, your anger may turn to fear in the presence of God. You may come to see your attacks on me as resistance to the God I trust. You may come to view your rage as an inadequate response to your life-disappointments. And if you do, you will stand in awe of the Holy One, and enter into a new and wider space. [5] At night, on your bed, talk with yourself about all this. Next morning, get up, and with a right spirit live your day--perform your religious and social duties with trust in God, who alone can make the openings you need. Seek the kingdom of God and the righteousness he gives, and the open places will be added to you. Only true repentance can bring you to true peace and true joy.

[6f] Lord, you know that many ask you for outward happiness. They say, "Give us more blessings, O Lord! Favor us with increased prosperity and affluence! Grant us more, more!" Many others whine, praying, "Lord, we haven't been getting the good we deserve. Turn your smile toward us." As for me, I enjoy whatever goods and happiness come my way; but my inner joy in God is more than even the highest outer ecstasy--for example, the festival when the harvest has been rich. I love to eat, but grain and wine can't compare with the inner nourishment of peace and joy.

[8] I can bring all I'm saying down to a single fact: when I retire, I'm gone as soon as I hit the bed. No insomnia from inner or outer fears. I drop right off. I go right to sleep. In God's shalom I lie down, and fall asleep at once. Because I live unafraid, in trust, in joyful faith. So I rest secure, not kept half awake by fears of impending or imagined dangers. My safety is in God, and in my trust. As for me, tonight and tomorrow are in God's keeping.

Now a few more notes on this that I call a counseling psalm:

1. Pss.3f are morning/evening companions of unbounded trust and religious fervor. At least in our cooler moments, we shall have some questions about details; but the trust and the love are at the heart of biblical religion, and we Jews and Christians, nor (in some form) any other human, neglect them only at our peril and loss.

2. The physical base [paradigm] of the dominant metaphor is the joyful feeling of coming out into big, open space after being confined--e.g., my walking out into our garden three times during the writing of this thinksheet! It's a useful metaphor for all forms of liberation--from our own turpitude and stupidity and anxiety and arrogance, and from the "-isms" (sexism, classism, racism, etatism[nationism, overblown claims of the general society]). After a session yesterday, and with no prompting from me vis-a-vis the image of this thinksheet, a counselee of mine said, in parting, "I feel as if I've got more space!" The God who is beyond-within and more than we are calls us not only to become more than we have been, but also to help others do the same; and this becoming requires more room than we have been inhabiting.

3. To speak theologically, the God who creates both time and space calls us to use and honor both. Revelation is historical, and history occurs within space- as well as time-extension. The Holy in the common is the here-and-now God struggling in heart and city and home and shop and court, in Jesus Christ, in the Spirit, in-through-beyond the Church, "for us," for the world.

4. \$2,500 was the pledges loss in one week when, mid-'78 on the church's outdoor bulletinboard, this appeared: "The rich must learn to live more simply if the poor are simply to live." Some folks take up too much room, and the Bible has much to say about this overclaim, this hubris, this greed. "Space" is a good social-gospel metaphor, and not just for housing! A great book on the humanization of space (precised in my #1173): Serge Chermayett and Christopher Alexander, COMMUNITY AND PRIVACY: TOWARD A NEW ARCHITECTURE OF HUMANISM (Anchor/65): a semitechnical exposition of "the principle of articulate and efficient jointing systems" (p.253), it relates (though not expressly) to Buber's "betweenness" and, in the book mentioned above, to "third-self intimacy." Vs.9 of our psalm refers to privacy in two words, one meaning "isolation, separation, privacy" and the other "security": our psalmist experienced, and was nurtured by, both solitude and society. Since humans need both, creating and maintaining this equilibrium in design science (home, church, city) is a solid principle.