
Psalms 25 — Shew Me Thy Ways — An Alphabet of Trust, the Prayer to Be Taught, and the Secret of the LORD

Psalm 25: an acrostic prayer of David — a psalm of trust and penitence in which the poet lifts up his soul, pleads not to be ashamed, asks to be taught the Lord's ways, begs pardon for the sins of his youth, and rests in the covenant intimacy of those who fear the LORD. A wisdom-shaped lament, undated, from the Davidic collection of Book I of the Psalter.

Psalm 25 is a prayer, but it is a prayer with a hidden discipline running underneath it. In Hebrew, this psalm is an *acrostic*: each verse begins, in order, with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet — *aleph, beth, gimel*, and so on down through the twenty-two letters. English cannot show you this, and that is worth stopping over, because the form is not decoration. It is theology made of shape. An alphabetic acrostic is a prayer that goes *A to Z* — it signals completeness, order, a soul brought into deliberate arrangement before God. When a heart is "enlarged" with trouble (v. 17) and the temptation is to pray in a formless rush, the acrostic quietly insists on the opposite: it walks the whole alphabet, takes every letter in turn, and refuses to let anguish become chaos. David is not merely feeling toward God here; he is spelling his way to God, one ordered step at a time.

Hebrew Word Studies

bosh (H954) (בֹּשָׁה) — **to be ashamed, be put to shame, be disappointed in one's hope vv. 2, 3, 20.** This is the verb that frames the psalm — it opens the petition (vv. 2–3) and returns to seal it (v. 20), so the whole prayer is bracketed by the fear of being *bosh*. The word does not mean feeling awkward; it means the collapse of a public hope, the humiliation of having trusted and been let down where everyone can see. That is why it belongs with covenant language: to trust the LORD and *then* be shamed would be to expose the covenant itself as unreliable. So David's plea is not thin — "let me not be ashamed" is "let it not turn out that trusting you was a mistake." Isaiah answers the fear directly: "they shall not be ashamed [*bosh*] that wait for me" (Isa. 49:23), and Paul lands the promise on Christ: "whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed" (Rom. 10:11, quoting Isa. 28:16). The opposite of *bosh* is not success; it is vindicated trust — the hope that held. Every soul that has ever wondered, in the dark, whether faith would prove foolish is praying David's verse.

lamad (H3925) (לָמַד) — **to teach, to learn, to train — to goad into knowing vv. 4, 5, 9.** This is the psalm's engine-verb, the request David makes more than any other. *Lamad* is beautifully practical: its root sense is connected to the ox-goad, the training of an animal to the yoke — teaching not as the passing of information but as the *forming* of a life until it moves the right way by habit. So "teach me thy paths" (v. 4) and "teach me" (v. 5) and "the meek will he *teach* his way" (v. 9) are not asking God for facts about the road; they are asking to be *trained* onto it, goaded gently until walking the Lord's way becomes second nature. The same verb stands behind Israel's charge to bind the commandments on the heart and "teach them diligently unto thy children" (Deut. 6:7), and behind the Servant's tongue "of the learned [*limmudim*]" in Isaiah (Isa. 50:4). It is the verb of the disciple — for a disciple is, at root, simply a *learner*. And note who gets the lesson: not the qualified, but the *meek* (v. 9). The prayer "teach me" is only ever answered in the posture of the teachable.

anav (H6035) (אָנָוּה) — **meek, humble, lowly, bowed-down, afflicted v. 9.** Twice in one verse the LORD's guidance is promised to the *anav* — "the meek will he guide... the meek will he teach his way" (v. 9). This is the same word that will one day describe Moses, "very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3), and the same quality the Beatitudes crown: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5) — a line that reads Psalm 25:9 and 25:13 together ("his seed shall inherit the earth"). Meekness in Hebrew is not weakness; it is *strength under yoke*, power that has consented to be led. The *anav* is bowed low enough that God can put a hand on the back of his neck and steer. That is why meekness is the condition of revelation throughout scripture: "learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29). Alma promises the mysteries of God to exactly this soul — they are "given to him that will not harden his heart" (Alma 12:9–10). The meek are not taught because they are good; they are taught because they are *low*, and only what is low can be led.

sod (H5475) (סֹד) — **intimate counsel, confidential circle, secret assembly — the inner council of trusted friends v. 14.** The tenderest word in the psalm, and the KJV "secret" hides half its meaning. *Sod* is not primarily a hidden fact; it is a *company* — the small, trusted circle where confidences are exchanged and plans are laid. It can mean the council itself ("their assembly [*sod*]," Gen. 49:6) or the confidence shared within it ("a talebearer revealeth secrets [*sod*]," Prov. 11:13). So "the *sod* of the LORD is with them that fear him" means God admits the reverent into his inner circle — sits them at the council table and tells them his mind. Amos uses the identical word for prophetic revelation: the Lord "revealeth his secret [*sod*] unto his

servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). This is why the second half of the verse follows so naturally — "he will shew them his covenant": those inside the *sod* are shown the terms, let in on the relationship. The word turns the psalm from a plea for guidance into a promise of *friendship*. The God who teaches the meek (v. 9) does not merely issue directions from a distance; he brings the God-fearing soul close and confides. Abraham was called "the Friend of God" (James 2:23) for exactly this reason — the Lord would not do the thing at Sodom without telling him (Gen. 18:17). Psalm 25:14 offers that friendship to anyone who fears him.

yare (H3373) (יָרֵא) — **fearing, reverent, standing in awe — the God-fearer vv. 12, 14.** Twice in the covenant center of the psalm the promised soul is defined by *fear*: "the man that feareth [*yare*] the LORD" is taught (v. 12), and the *sod* belongs to "them that fear [*yare*] him" (v. 14). Biblical "fear of the LORD" is easily misread as terror; it is nearer to *awe* — the reverence that puts God in his rightful, staggering place and lets everything else find its proportion around him. It is not the opposite of love but its root: "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10), the first stone of a wise life. Crucially, the *yare* is not paralyzed by dread; he is drawn *closer* — verse 14 says the fear of the Lord is precisely what admits a soul into God's intimate counsel. Awe and intimacy are not opposites here; awe is the doorway to intimacy. The one who holds God in true reverence is the one safe to be let into the *sod*, because he will not treat the confidence cheaply. This is the paradox the whole psalm rests on: the more rightly you fear God, the closer he brings you.

tom (H8537) / yosher (H3476) (תָּם / יָשָׁר) — **integrity, wholeness, blamelessness / uprightness, straightness, being level and true v. 21.** These paired virtues close the psalm's petitions — "let integrity [*tom*] and uprightness [*yosher*] preserve me" (v. 21). *Tom* is *wholeness*: an undivided heart, a life with no double-dealing seam running through it — the same root that calls Job "perfect [*tam*] and upright" (Job 1:1) and that Jacob was, "a plain [*tam*] man, dwelling in tents" (Gen. 25:27). *Yosher* is *straightness*: a road with no crookedness, a life that runs level and true, the root behind "upright [*yashar*] is the LORD" (v. 8) and behind *Jeshurun*, God's affectionate name for upright Israel (Deut. 33:5). Set them together and you have the whole moral aim of the psalm: to be made *whole* and *straight*. But note the surprising grammar — David does not ask to achieve these virtues; he asks them to *preserve* him, to stand as his guard. The integrity God teaches becomes the integrity that protects. This is the deep logic of a taught life: character is not only the destination but the defense. "The integrity [*tummah*] of the upright [*yashar*] shall guide them" (Prov. 11:3) — the very qualities the Lord instills become the compass and the wall. A soul made whole and straight by God is a soul the world's nets have a harder time holding.

From the Chapter's Architecture

There is a genuine inclusio, too — a frame. The psalm opens with David lifting up his own soul (v. 1) and the plea "let me not be ashamed" (v. 2); it closes by returning to that same plea (v. 20) and then, in the appended final verse, widening from my soul to all Israel (v. 22). The prayer travels from the single self to the whole covenant people — from "unto thee do I lift up my soul" to "redeem Israel." I will not claim a full chiasm here; the acrostic form, not a mirror-symmetry, is what actually governs the structure, and it would be dishonest to impose a chiasm on a psalm whose real architecture is the alphabet. The artistry of Psalm 25 is completeness and order, not symmetry — and that is beautiful enough.