

MEANING AT MIDNIGHT - LINDSEY TAYLOR-GUTHARTZ (LSTJS)

(Translation: R. Shlomo Riskin)

This is only recited on the first night

And it was at Midnight!

וּבְכוֹן וַיְהִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה

The many miracles

were performed by you at night;

At the beginning of watches

On this very night;

You made the righteous convert win

(When Abraham) divided his men at night;

And it was at midnight!

בַּלַּיְלָה.

הַלַּיְלָה.

לַיְלָה.

אֶז רֹב נִסִּים הַפְּלֹאֶת

בְּרֹאשׁ אֲשֶׁמוֹרֶת זֶה

גַּר צֶדֶק נִצַּחְתּוֹ כְּנַחֲלֶק לוֹ

וַיְהִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה:

You judged the king of Gerar (Abimelekh)

In a dream at night;

You made the Syrian (Laban) tremble

In the deep darkness of night;

And Israel struggled with an angel

And overcame him at night;

And it was at midnight!

הַלַּיְלָה.

לַיְלָה.

לַיְלָה.

דָּנַת מֶלֶךְ גֶּרָר בַּחֲלוֹם

הַפְּחַדְתָּ אַרְמִי בְּאֶמֶשׁ

וַיִּשֶׁר יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִלְאָךְ וַיִּנְכַּל לוֹ

וַיְהִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה:

The first-born of Pathros (Egypt)

You smote at midnight;

They could not find their strength

When they woke up at night;

The forces of the prince of Charosheth (Sisera)

Were swept away by the stars of night;

And it was at midnight!

הַלַּיְלָה.

בַּלַּיְלָה.

לַיְלָה.

זָרַע בְּכוֹרֵי פִתְרוֹס מִחֲצֵת בַּחֲצֵי

חֵילָם לֹא מָצְאוּ בְּקוֹמָם

טִיסַת נַגִּיד חְרוֹשֶׁת סִלִּית בְּכוֹכְבֵי

וַיְהִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה:

Without respect (Sennacherib) besieged Jerusalem

But You dried up his corpse at night;

Bal and its pedestal were thrown down

In the darkness of night;

To the beloved (Daniel)

You revealed mysteries in a vision at night;

And it was at midnight!

בַּלַּיְלָה.

לַיְלָה.

לַיְלָה.

יַעַץ מִחֶרֶף לְנוֹכַף אוֹוֵי הוֹבֶשֶׁת פְּגָרֵי

כָּרַע בַּל וּמָצְבוֹ בְּאִישׁוֹן

לְאִישׁ חֲמוּדוֹת נִגְלָה רֵז חֲזוֹת

וַיְהִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה:

He drank from the holy vessels

And so (Belshazzar) was killed at night;

(Daniel) was saved from the lion's den

And interpreted fearsome dreams of the night;

(Haman) of Agag nurtured hate

And wrote letters at night;

And it was at midnight!

בַּלַּיְלָה.

לַיְלָה.

בַּלַּיְלָה.

מִשְׁתַּכֵּר בְּכֵלֵי קֹדֶשׁ נִהְרַג בּוֹ

נוֹשֵׁעַ מִבוֹר אַרְיֹת פּוֹתֵר בְּעֵתוֹתַי

שְׁנֵאָה נֹטֵר אֲגָגִי וְכָתֵב סִפְרִים

וַיְהִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה:

You rose and beat Haman
By not letting the king sleep at night;
You crushed the wicked
To protect us from the forces at night;
He cried out like the watchman:
Morning is coming and also...the night;
And it was at midnight!

לַיְלָה.

עֹרְרָתְךָ נִצְחָדְךָ עָלָיו בְּנֹדָד שְׁנַת

מִלַּיְלָה.

פִּוְרָה תִּדְרֹךְ לְשׁוֹמֵר מָה

לַיְלָה.

צָרַח בְּשׁוֹמֵר וְשָׁח אֶתְּא בִקְר וְגַם

וַיְהִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה:

May the day soon come
That is neither day nor night;
So that all shall know
That day is Yours, and also the night,
Set up guards for Your city
For all the day and all the night;
That bright as day may shine
The darkness of night;
And it was at midnight!

לַיְלָה.

קָרַב יוֹם אֲשֶׁר הוּא לֹא יוֹם וְלֹא

הַלַּיְלָה.

רֵם הוֹדַע בִּי לָךְ הַיּוֹם אִף לָךְ

הַלַּיְלָה.

שׁוֹמְרִים הִפְקֹד לְעִירְךָ כָּל הַיּוֹם וְכָל

לַיְלָה.

תְּאִיר כְּאֹר יוֹם חֹשֶׁבֶת

וַיְהִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה:

Biblical references

1. Shemot 12: 29

In the middle of the night [*vayehi bachatzi halailah*] the Lord struck down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on the throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon and all the first-born of the cattle.

2. Shemot 11: 4

... Thus said the Lord: 'Toward midnight [*kachatzot halailah*] I will go forth among the Egyptians ...'.

3. Bereshit 14: 15

He deployed against them at night [*vayechalek aleihem lailah*], he and his servants, and defeated them; and he pursued them as far as Hovah, north of Damascus.

4. Bereshit 20: 3

But God came to Avimelekh in a dream by night [*bachalom halailah*] and said to him: 'You are to die because of the woman that you have taken, for she is a married woman.'

5. Bereshit 31: 29

I have it in my power to do you harm; but the God of your father said to me last night [*emesh*], 'Beware of attempting anything with Jacob, good or bad.'

6. Bereshit 31: 42

Had not the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, been with me, you would have sent me away empty-handed. But God took notice of my plight and the toil of my hands, and He gave me judgement last night [*amesh*].

7. Bereshit 32: 22-25

And so the gift went on ahead, while he remained in camp that night [*balailah-hahu*]. That same night [*balailah hu*] he arose, and ... crossed the ford of the Jabbok ... Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn.

8. Hoshea 12: 5

He strove with an angel and prevailed—the other had to weep and implore him. At Bethel [Jacob] would meet him, there to commune with him.

9. Shemot 14: 4

Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart and he will pursue them, that I may gain glory though Pharaoh and all his host ...

10. Shoftim 5: 20

The stars fought from heaven, from thir courses they fought against Sisera.

11. 2 Melakhim (Kings) 19: 4

Perhaps the Lord your God will take note of all the words of the Rav-shakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to blaspheme the living God, and will mete out judgement

12. Tehilim (Psalms) 132: 13

For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His seat.

13. 2 Melakhim (Kings) 19: 35

That night [*viyehi balailah hahu*] an angel of the Lord went out and struck down 185,000 in the Assyrian camp, and the following morning they were all dead corpses.

14. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 46: 1

Bel is bowed, Nevo is cowering, their images are a burden for beasts and cattle; the things you would carry [in procession] are now piled as a burden on tired beasts.

15. Daniel 2: 19

The mystery was revealed to Daniel in a night vision [*bechezva di-leilya*] ...

16. Daniel 5: 30

That very night [*beh beleilya*], Belshazzar, the Chaldean king, was killed.

17. Esther 6: 1

That night [*balailah hahu*], sleep deserted the king, and he ordered the book of records, the annals, to be brought; and it was read to the king.

18. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 63: 3

I trod out a vintage alone; of the peoples no man was with Me. I trod them down in My anger, trampled them in My rage; their life-blood bespattered My garments.

19. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 21: 11-12

The Dumah pronouncement: A call comes to me from Seir: 'Watchman, what of the night [*mah-milailah*]? Watchman, what of the night [*mah-mileil*]?' The watchman replied: 'Morning came, and so did night [*atah voker vegam-lailah*]. If you would inquire, inquire. Come back again.'

20. Zekhariah 14: 7

But there shall be one day—only the Lord knows when—of neither day nor night [*lo-yom velo-lailah*], and there shall be light at eventide.

21. Tehilim (Psalms) 74: 16

The day is Yours, the night also [*af-lekha lailah*]; it was you who set in place the orb of the sun.

22. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 62: 6-7

Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen, who shall never be silent all the day and all the night [*kol-hayom vekhol-halailah*]. O you, the Lord's remembrancers, take no rest, and give no rest to Him, until He establish Jerusalem and make her renowned on earth.

23. Tehilim (Psalms) 139: 12

Darkness will not be not dark for You; night will be as light as day [*velailah keyom ya'ir*]; darkness and light are the same.

Targum Yonatan

Four nights are written in a book of remembrance before the Master of the Universe: the first is the creation of the world; the second involves Abraham; the third is in Egypt, where their firstborn died and Israel's firstborn were protected; the fourth is for saving Israel from among the nations ... and all of them are called nights of watching—watching for God to save Israel ... and so too to redeem them from exile in all future generations.

Shemot Rabbah 18: 12

Why did He call it *leil shimurim* [a night of watching]? On this night great things were done for the righteous, just as had been done for Israel in Egypt; on it he saved Hezekiah, saved Hananiah and his friends, saved Daniel from the lions' den; and on it the messiah and Elijah will be revealed.