



## **CHAPTER 5**

# **COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

To the Lozi prayer for protection is a religious reality. Prayer portrays religious traditions of any given people. There are three ways of conducting studies on prayer, namely, textual analysis, studies of rituals and an examination of the contents of prayers (Zahavy 1980:45; Gill 1987:489). In this study both Lozi and biblical prayer texts have been explicated with the intention of analyzing elements of protection. Rituals have been referred to summarily with the view of underlining the cultic setting. However, at this juncture the question remains whether there are similarities between the psalms and Lozi prayers for protection to the extent that parallels can be drawn and utilized as points of departure for the promotion of dialogue?

In order to embark on a cross-cultural comparative study certain remarks must be made. Some scholars have clearly demonstrated that it is possible to shed light on ancient cultures based on observations from present cultures (Fabian 1988:215). For example, in his *Enslavement and the early Hebrew lineage* Steiner (1982:21-25) has demonstrated that by comparing cultures of tribal people, such as Africans, it is possible to elaborate and broaden an understanding of the Joseph account. Similarly, Schapera (1982:26-42) in *The sin of Cain* uses cultures other than Near Eastern to illuminate the reason for allowing Cain to wander and not receive the death penalty. In this study a similar but variant approach is employed to compare prayer traditions from the said groups.

Prayer for protection plays an important role in Lozi and Israelite experiences. Between Lozi petitioners and the psalmists eliciting the aid of the Deity during calamities is common. When danger is looming and prior to embarking on projects the ancient peoples sought for assistance, favour and protection from the Supreme Being. Lozi people conduct prayers at many occasions with the aid of intermediaries such as family heads, priests and witchdoctors. Important among intermediaries are ancestors. Most African societies have belief systems and life styles comparable to those in ancient Israel. What cannot be demonstrated with certainty is whether African societies went through the same process of development as Israel (Fabian 1988:216).

Just as there are similarities, differences also exist between African, particularly Lozi and ancient Israelite cultures. The objective of this investigation has been to analyze the concept of protection prayer in the two traditions. Through comparison this study interrogates a hypothesis of cultural closeness between Israelite and Lozi people. Prayer

performs an important role in both cultures. The meaning of a concept is determined by its similarity and difference with other concepts like or unlike it (Paden 1988:2). By comparing similar units from distinct backgrounds meaning is achieved (Neuman 1997:440-456). New understanding is then created for the religious rituals of the current culture.

## 5.2 Comparative analysis

At the outset it is important to note that African Traditional Religion includes distinctive features compared to the Old Testament (Zahan 2000:3). Nonetheless this matter of fact does not take away the necessity of a comparative approach. Some scholars are skeptical about such an undertaking. For example, Coggins (1990:84) argues that ancient cultures existed over long periods and were written about from particular and various editorial points of view. African cultures may not have developed amidst similar conditions and time periods as ancient Israel. Valid comparisons may therefore be corrupted if a segment of the cultural sum total is studied in relation to another segment in a different cultural setting. As a result it is suggested that the comparative method can only be valid if the subjects are genuinely similar.

In addition, social institutions and customs that are studied ought to be understood in context as part of the people's whole way of life (Beattie 1966:10). This principle is only applicable to a society where the way of life is known. Given the long history of ancient Israel and its varied experiences it could be difficult to find a people with similar historical-cultural accounts (Fabian 1988:215-239). Even where cultures are from the same period methodological weaknesses are indicated. These principles make comparisons untenable.

At any rate it is instructional to consider the fact that comparison is implicit when an investigator speaks of cultures other than his/her own. In such a case the scholar assimilates new cultures into categories familiar to his/her own background (Beattie 1966:48). Anthropological methods involving primitive cultures are rare in the Old Testament and biblical studies, the reason being that these cultures appear to be at variance. Although a cross-cultural comparative undertaking is massive it is not insurmountable (Keasing 1958:140,141). In the past comparative studies have been conducted with the view of promoting opposition to indigenous religions (Fabian 1988:218). However, current epistemological theories such as postcolonial theory that

underpin the study of the Bible in Africa lean toward appraising previously marginalized cultures.

The premise for using ancient Near Eastern cultures as a paradigm for studying the Old Testament and African is comparable to using the unknown to study the known. Israel and her contemporaneous cultures are inaccessible through participant observations; they are only available through artifacts and literary material (Lang 1982:3, 7). Yet scholars have provided explanations for biblical concepts based on anachronistic societies. If biblical studies can be used to elucidate African Traditional Religion the inverse could also be true. Herein lies the key to using African culture as an aspect of the comparative process.

The gravity of this comparative method is exacerbated by the variances of culture, historical gap, geographical distance, linguistic differences and dissimilar religious schema between Lozi and Israelite societies. Notwithstanding the forgoing limitations, in the main the victims' response of turning to the Deity in search of reprieve from marauding adversaries provides a common denominator that must be exploited in this endeavor.

Below is the analysis of data from both Israelite and Lozi prayers. This analysis involves the following broad categories: parties involved, elements and other aspects of prayer. In this way analogous concepts are examined simultaneously resulting in similarities and differences. Theories are evaluated against their cultural contexts in order to avoid superficial resemblances and conclusions.

## **5.3 Involved parties in prayer**

### **5.3.1 God(s)**

God offers protection in both Israelite and Lozi religious experiences. In the presence of danger suppliants turn to their Supreme Being for protection and deliverance. There are similarities as well as differences concerning the concept of the Deity.

The presence of many lesser gods and spirits in African Traditional Religion is problematic. It precipitates the question whether African Traditional Religion is a reflection of monotheism or polytheism? Many African scholars have emphasized the monotheistic schema but it is perhaps prudent to point out that there are divergent elements obtaining therein (Ray 1976:50). Belief in the Supreme Being is predominant in African societies (Maimela 1985:63). The ancient Near East was permeated by belief in the plurality of gods (Jacobsen 1976:11). After an encounter with a god people normally sought, placed allegiance and subsequently worshipped the deity. At any rate African Traditional Religion cannot be equated with the major monotheistic religions of the world (Judaism, Islam and Christianity) due to the prevalence of either lesser gods or ancestral cults. In numerous ways the African God is similar to the biblical God but not identical (Amanze 2001:276).

### **5.3.1.1 God in the Psalms**

Consistently the examined psalms have revealed the presence and action of Yahweh on behalf of the victim. The God of the psalmists is all-powerful (Pss 77:10, 14-19; 91:1), transcendent (Ps 91:1), all-knowing (Pss 64:5-7) and immanent (Pss 77:20; 91-14-20). Yahweh's characteristics are underscored by different epithets such as Most High, Almighty and the designation God (Pss 91:1-2). Besides divine epithets Yahweh is described metaphorically symbolizing the expected divine acts on behalf of the victim. These figurative terms are descriptive of Yahweh's protection attributes. For instance Yahweh is called "my rock" (Ps 28:1) and "my strong deliverer" (Ps 140:7). Yahweh acts and provides protection to the victim. God shields the victim's head in battle (Ps 140:7), secures justice for the poor and upholds the needy (Ps 140:12). God is their strength and a fortress of salvation (Ps 28:8). Yahweh is the psalmists' shelter, shadow, refuge, fortress and dwelling (Ps 91:2, 9). Furthermore, Yahweh destroys the wicked thereby securing safety for the victim (Pss 28:4-5; 64:7-8; 91:8; 140:8-11).

Divine epithets and metaphorical terms are employed based on the covenant relationship between him and his people, Israel. Yahweh is not distant from Israel and the individual. Hence the victim exploits this relationship and Yahweh's dependability when calamities strike. To this end the employment of the possessive in conjunction with the titles Almighty, Most High, God and Yahweh illustrate this relationship (Ps 91:1-2).

### **5.3.1.2 Nyambe: God in Lozi prayers**

*Nyambe* has names that portray his divine attributes. For example he is the creator of all (Jalla 1954:2; Mainga 1972:95). *Nyambe* is all-powerful. Before him there is none too powerful to withstand his command (Junod 1938:137-138; Muuka 1966:250). This Lozi Deity is a glorious king (Jalla 1954:3; Rooke 2006:2). When struck by fear of the rapids the suppliant refers to God as the one who inhabits the abyss (Coillard 1902:169,170). These qualities signify *Nyambe*'s awesomeness.

Lozi prayers indicate that *Nyambe* is not only transcendent and powerful but he is also a helpful source of strength, a compassionate provider and protector (Junod 1938:137-138; Coillard 1902:169-170; Holub 1976:320). Thus petitioners approach *Nyambe* fully confident of his ability to intervene. Although *Nyambe* is generally benevolent he causes calamities to befall his people especially for judicial purposes. Leprosy for example is called *mulilo wa Nyambe* (*Nyambe*'s fire)<sup>41</sup>

### 5.3.1.3 Similarities

Both Lozi and biblical prayer texts demonstrate ample evidence that *Nyambe* and Yahweh are approached directly during calamities and difficulties. Moreover, *Nyambe* like other African Deities has certain attributes resembling the God of the psalmists. This is attested to by the following acknowledged characteristics: omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, eternal, kind, merciful and good, transcendent and unique (Gehman 1989:189-190). Similarly *Nyambe*'s works could be likened to Yahweh in terms of creation.

The psalmists seek Yahweh's protection from their adversaries. Divine epithets and metaphorical terms are markers embedded in the texts, attesting to Yahweh's protective role. Similarly Lozi suppliants invoke *Nyambe* to intervene and provide protection from calamity and unforeseen danger.

God is immanent in the two traditions. Contrary to the belief that Africans believe in a remote and inactive Deity many societies recognize the Supreme Being's continued involvement in the maintenance and operation of the created world. Although there is an

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<sup>41</sup> The literal translation perhaps means god's curse or punishment as alternatively leprosy is referred to as a curse of the land.

apparent lack of visible shrines dedicated to the Supreme Being in Africa it is vital to point out that God is the underlying core of the religious system (Ray 1976:51; Gehman 1989:192; Uka 1991:44). *Nyambe's* power and involvement is amplified through praises. Exemplarily, *Nyambe* does not speak to anything. When he does the world comes to an end (Jalla 1954:81). The foregoing embodies a dialectic understanding of *Nyambe's* remoteness and aloofness on one hand and his approachability (yet exuding awesomeness) on the other hand. Similar reactions are borne by the Exodus texts where the Israelites feared to listen to Yahweh directly but rather listen through Moses (Ex 19).

God is the progenitor of human, animal and plant life. This premise is foundational in the relationship between God and man for he is not only creator but also sustainer. Based upon this relationship the victim approaches the Deity when facing difficulties in both Israelite and Lozi traditions.

#### 5.3.1.4 Differences

When comparing concepts from distant cultures it is imperative that their historical and cultural contexts should be considered. This is precisely because ideas and concepts derive meaning from their cultural frameworks. Although belief in God is universal *Nyambe* is distinguished from Yahweh, since Lozi creation mythology reveals that he has a consort, *Nasilele*. In certain myths it appears that *Nyambe* did not create but procreated animals and man through *Nasilele* (Betrand 1899:277). Lozi royal myths indicate that *Nyambe* had wives such as *Mwambwa*, her daughter *Mbuywamwambwa* the royal ancestress and other unnamed wives who bore other tribal groups (Jalla 1954:1-2).

*Nyambe* is all-powerful and all-knowing yet there are tensions in his characteristics as noticed from creation myths. When vexed by *Kamunu's* (man) evil ways *Nyambe* relied on counsel from diviners regarding a sanctuary removed from *Kamunu's* (man) reach. Additionally, when *Nyambe* left for heaven he sought the assistance of a spider (Mainga 1972:100).

There is a distinction in the manner by which Yahweh and *Nyambe* metes out judgment. It appears that *Nyambe* has an ambivalent character and is capable of directly causing destruction and blessing.

The African belief system is informed by a Supreme Being who exercises power to punish. Epidemics are associated with the judicial character of the Deity. Ba-ila<sup>42</sup> believe that sickness is an affliction from the tribal God, Leza (McVeigh 1974:113). Lozi people believe that leprosy is an affliction from *Nyambe*. This aspect does not entail vindictiveness but is rather a correction to an erring member of the community. It is also thought that God allows afflictions to overtake his people (Uka 1991:44). Unlike evil spirits God cares for His people.

In contradistinction the psalmists believe in a benevolent God (Ps 91:14-16). Israel's neighbours held to a pervasive belief in personal gods. These personal gods were ambivalent bringing both good luck and pain. Protection was acquired through incantations and magical means from their malevolent activities. The Old Testament makes allusions to Yahweh's association with destruction (Ex 12:12, 29; Dt 35:35; Hab 3:5-6). However, this feature may not be Yahweh's direct act. Exemplarily the identity of the destroyer in Exodus 12 is problematical. The executor of judgment cannot be both Yahweh and an angel (Goldin 1968:412-424). Later literature leans towards an angel (Fossum 1985:225-226). Ultimately, Yahweh also employs harsh realities of calamities to punish Israel.

### 5.3.2 Enemies and dangers

Danger is a key militating circumstance in prayers of protection. Whether danger was imminent or ongoing the natural response of the psalmists and Lozi petitioner is to elicit the Deity's protection. Unlike Lozi prayers the psalms present danger figuratively. It is broadly difficult to establish who the enemies in the psalms are. Numerous suggestions have been put forward. But caution must be exercised due to the plurivalence of metaphoric language.

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<sup>42</sup> The Ba-ila lived to the northeastern fringes of Barotseland. For animals, wives and slaves Lozi people frequently raided them.



### 5.3.2.1 Enemies of the individual

#### 5.3.2.1.1 Enemies of the psalmists

Psalm texts have yielded the following results in relation to the identity of the enemy. The enemy is referred to as the wicked, evil men, evil doers, and men of violence and wicked hands (Pss 28:3-4; 64:1-2; 91:8; 140:2, 3, 4).

These enemies sometimes masquerade as friends but their intentions are evil (Pss 28:3; 64:2). They slander and cause malicious harm to the victim (Ps 140:4). It is possible that in certain cases magic and witchcraft may have been involved. Methods of attack are metaphorically depicted through the use of hunting language such as “snares” and “nets” (Pss 91:3; 140:6); figurative beasts as in “sharpening tongues like serpents, venom and poison”; and war symbols illustrated by “words like swords” (Pss 28:3; 64:4; 140:2, 3, 4). Enemies are also depicted in dark terms which are reminiscent of evil spirits such as terror of night, pestilence and plague (Ps 91:5-6). Psalm 77:16-19 pictures an adversary who resembles historical mythical figures evocative of ancient Canaanite and Mesopotamian primordial episodes. Similarly allusions to mythical creatures appear in Psalm 91:13.

#### 5.3.2.1.2 Lozi enemies

Lozi petitions depict danger emanating from drought and crop failure (Junod 1938:137-138; Di Nola 1962:38), tribal enemies (Jalla 1954:9), war (Coillard 1902:212), mythic enemies (Coillard 1902:169-170) or tyranny and jealousy (Holub 1976:321-322).

The victim is threatened with death. For example as a result of jealousy a man is accused of treason and subjected to a poison ordeal. Yet another case demonstrates a mythical enemy at Matome rapids. For fear of death at the abyss one of Coillard’s paddlers calls on *Nyambe* for protection. In other prayers the suppliant is concerned about danger arising from future disasters such as crop failure and *Nyambe*’s wrath.

Although not directly mentioned in the studied prayers malignant spirits are greatly feared by Lozi people. These spirits are deceased victims of witchcraft and other malevolent spirits which are bent on revenge. Several evil spirits are found in Lozi beliefs. They may cause harm depending on their disposition. These spirits are unpredictable, dangerous. Evil spirits attack, molest, destroy and harm the living. Tragedies of illness, insanity or

epilepsy are caused by them. Unlike ancestors evil spirits are not held in affection (Gehman 1989:139).

### **5.3.2.1.3 Witchcraft**

Besides danger arising from direct enemy attacks witchcraft may also be involved as a secrete danger. Although the Old Testament and Psalms in particular are unclear and reticent to the subject, various texts allude to witchcraft, particularly with the aim to censure the practice (Aune 1986:216). Thus the Old Testament has failed to detail a craft prevalent in Palestine (Mendelsohn 1962:213). It appears that witchcraft and religion do not co-exist in the Old Testament. Where they occur in tandem one inevitably makes the other redundant (Middleton & Winter 1969:8). Magic and witchcraft were common in Mesopotamia. Magic was esteemed since people in Mesopotamia lived under threat from demons and human sorcery. On the other hand sorcery was eschewed due to its antisocial characteristics (Black & Green 1992:124,125).

Old Testament witchcraft citations include where Saul banned the practice (1 Sm 28:3), consulted the witch at Endor (1 Sm 28:8-19), Mannaseh practiced divination and witchcraft (2 Ki 21:6, 2 Chr 33:6) and the activities of Jezebel are mentioned (2 Ki 9:22). Equally legal texts forbid the practice (Lv 19:26, 31; 20:6). In the Psalms malicious people may have used the curse and evil eye resulting in calumnies overtaking their victims (Mowinckel 1962:3). However, it is not clear how this occurred. If the allusion is correct victims may have requested for Yahweh's intervention to neutralize spells and curses through blessing (Pss 107:19; 109:22-24, 28).

In many African societies witchcraft is considered as real (Idowu 1973:195; Mpolo 1990:38). Misfortunes, illness and death are commonly attributed to the activities of spirits and witchcraft. To be accused of witchcraft is to be dishonoured, to be branded as antisocial, as a murderer, or to be associated with the occult and ritual cannibalism (Musopole 1993:348).

Among Lozi people witches are notoriously known to operate nocturnally. As elsewhere in Africa witches travel in spirit with the assistance of familiars (Parrinder 1968:125). Witches are associated with cannibalism, which results in increased spiritual powers. The causes

of witchcraft are numerous but the major ones are: inheritance disputes, malice (Reynolds 1963:25, 48), petty feuds and revenge (Gluckman 1955:76).

The purpose for bewitching a victim is to bring destruction to their property such as crops and livestock or ultimately to cause death (Mbiti 1975:166; Mitchell 1977:66). The desired end is sought in many ways, for example, through manipulation of spirits and natural materials (Turner 1952:54). This may include the use of familiars (Melland 1923:214,215), projection and direct attack like poisoning (Reynolds 1963:42).<sup>43</sup> Witches also express the ability to employ the spoken word in their evil activities. Mpolo (1990:41-42) suggests that the effects of witchcraft are the result of the power of thought, fascination and suggestibility of the victim.

Suspicion of witchcraft is often targeted on clan and family members with whom a victim has quarreled. This is noticeable from the fact that it is difficult to find a witch outside the clan and family structure. Witchcraft also thrives on the principle of collective culpability. In this case the guilt of an individual is borne by society. The sufferings of someone are embodied in an external enemy, namely the witch. Hence members of the family are made scapegoats.

#### **5.3.2.1.4 Similarities**

There is a strong resemblance in so far as the appearance of individual enemies is concerned. In addition, the enemy's mode of operation in a few cases is similar. The exemplar employment of slander and malice as a possible result of jealousy is common in both Lozi prayers and the psalms. Such enemies are known to the victim. However, they twist facts or disguise their attacks. While in the psalms they pose as friends of the victim in Lozi prayer they turn the accused into a villain.

Another similarity is the use of myth to depict a foe. Even though psalm texts are not very clear on this phenomenon traces of mythical language have been observed in Psalm 77:14-20 and Psalm 91:13. Lozi traditions are quite vivid in their belief and use of myth. Belief in such a described adversary is exemplified by prayer for protection at Matome Rapids (Coillard 1902:321-322).

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<sup>43</sup> See excursus on witchcraft.

### 5.3.2.1.5 Differences

Conjectures have been made concerning witchcraft in Israel based on prohibitive texts and socio-cultural parallels with contemporary cultures. However its presence in the examined psalms is unproven. Similarly witchcraft is not mentioned directly in the examined Lozi prayers. Its absence from Lozi prayers may arise from the fact that different forms of protection are used against it. Witchcraft is one of the main reasons for the presence of evil and calamities to individuals among Lozi people. Ailments and calamities from suspected witchcraft are countered through the assistance of diviners and medicine men. In any case these intermediaries ultimately depend on power from the Supreme Being.

### 5.3.2.2 Enemies of the nation

#### 5.3.2.2.1 Communal enemies in the Psalms

Communal danger in the Psalms arises from natural phenomena like pestilence (Ps 91: 5, 6). Pestilence is one of the main causes of death on a wide scale in the Old Testament along with war and famine (Del Olmo Lete 1999:231). Occasionally pestilence is personified (Ps 91:5; Hos 13:14; Hab 3:5). Both in Mesopotamia and Canaan illnesses were sometimes represented as demons (Black & Green 1992:63; Del Olmo Lete 1999:232). Pestilence and destruction in Psalm 91 have an echo in Habakkuk 3 where pestilence can be paralleled with *Resheph*<sup>44</sup>. *Resheph* is also attested to in Ugaritic texts as a god of destruction. The picture in Habakkuk concerning *Resheph* and *Deber* marching at Yahweh's side resembles the Mesopotamian epic of Marduk accompanied by plague and pestilence. To the contrary Psalm 91 depicts Yahweh providing protection to the victim of pestilence and destruction.

Belief in destructive spirits was pervasive in ancient Near East. The exemplar myth of *Atrahasis*<sup>45</sup> demonstrates that Pashitu was created to keep the human population down (Riley 1999:236). These spirits were in most cases offspring of the great gods (Jacobsen

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<sup>44</sup> In Ugaritic ritual *Resheph* was an ambivalent deity and his cult was also found in Egypt. The Old Testament *Resheph* is a demonized version of an ancient Canaanite god now submitted to Yahweh (Xella 1999:701).

<sup>45</sup> Meier (1999:241) state, "When Enlil in council with the other gods in *Atrahasis*, wishes to thin the world's population with a plague, it is Namtar, the god of plague, who goes to work."

1976:13). Evil spirits caused afflictions at certain times like at night<sup>46</sup>, windstorm<sup>47</sup>, eclipse, midday<sup>48</sup> and childbirth<sup>49</sup> (Riley 1999:236). They inhabited deserts, lonely places and byways. These evil spirits took forms of animals and birds. Generally they have frightful features.

Earlier Old Testament texts indicate that both good and evil spirits are from Yahweh<sup>50</sup>. At certain occasions evil spirits are sent (1 Sm 16:23; 16:14; 15, 16; 18:10). They are responsible for judgment (Jdg 9:24, 56-57) and torment (1Sm 11:6; 16:16). The foregoing cases do not personalize the evil spirit from Yahweh. Hence this use may not refer to actual beings (McCarter 1999:318). On the other hand there are cases of personified spirits under the control of Yahweh (1 Ki 22:19-22). In Exodus 12:23 Yahweh sent the destroyer<sup>51</sup> to kill the Egyptian firstborn. The destroyer also appears in the Davidic episode (2 Sm 24:15-16).

The identity of the destroyer, particularly in Exodus, is problematic. Suggestions on the destroyer's identity are: a creature which is separate from Yahweh or one that is identical with him (Fossum 1985:225-226; Meier 1999:243). However Psalm 91 desists from identifying destructive forces with Yahweh. Instead Yahweh is the protector of the victim.

#### **5.3.2.2 Communal enemies among the Lozi**

In agricultural prayers allusions to fear of crop failure is pronounced. Bad harvest can easily result from poor rain conditions and other eventualities. For Lozi people to realize an abundant crop was imperative due to limited means of production and storage. In the event of crop failure communities are threatened by starvation. Therefore the powers of nature are revered.

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<sup>46</sup> Lilith a lascivious demon haunted men in dreams (Riley 1999:236).

<sup>47</sup> Pazuzu the Babylonian demon was known to bring disease through the wind (Riley 1999:236).

<sup>48</sup> Midday demon struck at the height of the sun (Riley 1999:236).

<sup>49</sup> Lamashtu threatened women during childbirth together with their babies (Riley 1999:236).

<sup>50</sup> See earlier allusions to a lying spirit from Yahweh (1 Ki 22:20-23), the spirit from Yahweh that oppressed Saul (1 Sm 16:14-16 23) and the Satan who was a member of the divine council (Job 1: 6-12; 2:1-7). On the other hand possible late accounts include Satan as a proper name (1 Chr 21:1) compare with the account in 2 Samuel 21:1.

<sup>51</sup> Unlike the deities of the neighbouring people who decimated populations out of their uncontrollable lust for death and destruction the destroyer was sent for specific situations. Another difference is seen in the extent of destruction while the foreign deities did not discriminate between the innocent and the wicked the destroyer passed over those covered by blood. In this vein Namtar stopped the killing due to shame after his people's cultic attention (Meier 1999:242).

Another area of danger affecting communities comes from tribal enemies such as Andonyi (Jalla 1954:9) and war with oppressed people (Coillard 1902:212). War is a costly affair in terms of lost life. Thus, rituals and prayers were conducted to provide victory to warriors and defeat to their enemies.

#### **5.3.2.2.3 Similarities**

Foreign enemies appear both in the psalms and in Lozi texts. While in Lozi texts it is possible to identify specific enemies it is with no doubt a difficult task to identify them in psalm texts. Furthermore it is difficult to conclude with certainty that references to war are literal and not metaphorical. Nonetheless the psalmists experienced danger from foreign enemies who foment wars (Pss 77; 91:7-8; 140:7). In the same way founders of the Lozi state suffered attacks from Andonyi foreign adversaries and Illa-Tonga warriors during cattle raids (Coillard 1902:212).

#### **5.3.2.2.4 Differences**

There is no mention of danger related to poor agricultural produce in the selected psalms. The fact that Israel believed that increase was a blessing from Yahweh is mentioned elsewhere (Ps 126). Lozi agricultural prayers have a strong emphasis on requests for a good crop from *Nyambe* (Junod 1938:321-322; Jalla 1954:3; Rooke 2006:3).

Psalm 91 mentions the danger of pestilence and destruction, terror of the night and midday havoc. Pestilence and destruction resemble evil spirits which were responsible for both individual and communal havoc. While in some texts these powers are agents of God the victim in Psalm 91 seeks protection from Yahweh from pestilence and destruction. Following the analysis on Lozi prayers and religious experience it seems that calamities which affect the entire community or sections thereof are conceived as afflictions from either dead royals or *Nyambe*. The development of sects associated with belief in spirits is limited to individual troubles they are not endemic. Therefore there is an element of similarity between Habbakkuk 3, the entourage of Yahweh and the Lozi belief. But the theology of Psalm 91 differs from Lozi belief.

### **5.3.3 Petitioners**

The fact that the suppliant has a relationship with God is foundational to the prayers. This relationship, illustrated by the possessive determiner provides the victim with access to Yahweh (Pss 91:2, 140:6). Allusions to dwelling and sheltering under God's protection underline this relationship (Pss 91:1, 2, 9). Assurances of Yahweh's assistance also emphasize the relationship (Ps 91:14-16). The presence of an oracle in many of the laments assists to strengthen the victims' trust in the ability of Yahweh to protect and save.

Lozi petitioners are victims of forces beyond their control. They respond through prayer to the Deity and ancestors. It is apparent from Lozi prayers that victims' requests are premised by a vantage point of relationship with the God their creator. Moreover, *Nyambe's* greatness and ability to provide is exploited in these prayers.

Thus psalmists and Lozi suppliants rely on God for protection from their adversaries. Prayer is undergirded by an element of trust in the Supreme Being.

### **5.3.3.1 Motivation of petitions**

Psalmists motivate their petitions by appealing to Yahweh's loving kindness (Ps 77:9), acts in the past (Ps 77:10-20) and ability to protect. It follows that Yahweh is great and that only he could protect, rescue and perform mighty acts. Motivation is further hinged on the wickedness of the adversary, particularly with regard to their disregard of God. Enemies pride in their abilities and openly defy God (Ps 28:4-5; 64:5-10). Therefore the victim petitions Yahweh to destroy the wicked and defend his honour. Motivation is underpinned by an existing relationship between Yahweh and the victim. God is compassionate to the afflicted and just in recompensing the wicked.

Lozi petitioners motivate their requests by showering praises on the Deity and ancestors. Praise functions as a means to open channels of communication and perhaps to make God and ancestors predisposed to the victims' plight. Humility is coupled with praise. It is an attitude which demonstrates total dependence on the Supreme Being. Equally one's innocence is a resource for motivating *Nyambe* to act on his/her behalf.

Although petitioners similarly seek to motivate why the Deity should act on their behalf there appears to be a subtle attempt to manipulate either ancestors or the Supreme Being



among Lozi people. While such endeavours may be embedded in prayer the above function of praise and humility confirm the point. Moreover the use of libations, offerings and sacrifices to appease ancestors and *Nyambe* support this behaviour further.

### **5.3.4 Intermediaries**

From both traditions, two broad types of intermediaries are divergently involved in the process of eliciting protection through prayer. The two can be categorized as otherworldly agents and natural entities.

#### **5.3.4.1 Human intermediaries**

##### **5.3.4.1.1 Intermediaries in the Psalms**

A cultic priest may have officiated at certain rituals where the psalmists sought Yahweh's protection. Although not directly mentioned the presence of a priest is conjectured from the appearance of God's promise to the victim (Ps 91:14-16). Liturgical prayer at the temple is offered in the midst of the cult community. Hence it is likely that a cultic official uttered words of assurance. Such officials served the purpose of making available the "word" of Yahweh in the given circumstance, or to teach the law or to pronounce judgment (Von Rad 1975:245). For example, before war kings might have sought the will of God through a cultic official (1 Ki 20:13ff). After offering sacrifices the officiating priest pronounced the blessing, which was hoped to bring triumph.

Individuals were also given a word from the Lord by the priest (1 Sm 1). Hannah, for instance, was sent home with a generic blessing from Eli (Berlin 2004:227-232). Thus a priest was an intermediary who acted both on behalf of the victim and as a messenger of the Deity. The presence of an oracle in a psalm may be assumed even where it is not indicated but there is a shift in the victim's mood from lament to praise (Mowinkel 1962:59).

Another official is the prophet. During the period of classical prophecy human messengers were commissioned to proclaim the will of the Yahweh (Hag 1:13). The prophet was more than just a messenger for he was a mouthpiece of Yahweh (Mullen 1980:215).



#### 5.3.4.1.2 Lozi intermediaries

In Lozi religious experience there are officials who execute functions of intermediaries, namely, diviners, medicine men, and rain makers. When a problem arises a remedy may be obtained through the assistance of a diviner. Depending on the diviner's counsel further help is sought from either a medicine man or a rain maker. In certain cases where the cause of the difficulty is suspected to be from ancestral spirits such as restlessness in children and various ailments an elder performs rituals to appease and secure the ancestor's help. The alleged ancestor is requested to desist from malevolent activities and then welcomed to bring good fortune. During large scale disasters royal ancestors are approached by a royal grave custodian when requested by the reigning king on behalf of the community.

#### 5.3.4.1.3 Similarities

Mediatory similarities of priests in the two traditions can be adduced such as sacrificial functions, communicating the will of the Deity and the preservation and transmission of tradition. It is contended that the role of the priest in the Old Testament resembles his/her African counterpart (Amanze 2001:277). There is no specific priesthood except for the royal gravesite custodian in the Lozi religious tradition. Both ancestral and *Nyambe* worship are conducted primarily at family level. An elderly member of the family leads in worship. At clan level the village headman assumes the responsibilities to approach *Nyambe* on behalf of the community. The royal ancestral cult attends to calamities or danger suspected to result from an angry deceased king. A grave custodian acts on behalf of the community in instances of epidemic proportions at the local royal gravesite (Mainga 1972:96). Similarly national disasters are resolved at a selected royal gravesite. The responsible custodian is provided with a sacrificial animal by the ruling king.

#### 5.3.4.1.4 Differences

There is a major shift in the object of worship in Lozi royal ancestral cult. This is demonstrated in divergent foci where Lozi priests assist in the veneration of departed kings. In the biblical tradition priesthood is dedicated to Yahweh. Neither in *Nyambe* worship nor in ordinary ancestral cult is there any official priest.

The strong emphasis of Yahwism on Yahweh has precluded the role of a medicine man in the Old Testament. Equally the function of a rain maker is absent in the Psalms. There are suggestions to the role played by a prophet praying for rain during drought (1 Ki 18:41-45). However it is important to underline the absence of magical elements in the Old Testament faith which are common in rain making rites in Africa and Lozi people.

Remote similarities have been adduced concerning the function of the priest. These similarities pertain to the aspect of an intermediary. However all Israelites had access to Yahweh through prayer apart from the assistance of a priest, unlike in the Lozi royal cult, where only the custodian is eligible. Medicine men and rain makers do not figure as intermediaries in the Psalms.

### **5.3.4.2 Spirit intermediaries**

#### **5.3.4.2.1 Angels in the Psalms**

The psalmists may have believed in the existence of benevolent spirits or angelic agents who participate in the protection and dispensing of God's favour (Ps 91:11). The Hebrew word for angel (*mal'ak*) is sometimes used to designate a human messenger in the Old Testament (1 Sm 11:4, 1 Ki 19:2). But the term is also used in reference to supernatural beings. Angels are mighty in strength; they perform God's bidding and are at his disposal (Mullen 1980:214, 215). Their activities include: revealing mysteries; they are sent on various missions and they participate in eschatological wars (Newson 1985:23-38, 77-78). Psalm 91:11 is a promise to the victim concerning the aid of angels during tragedy. Elsewhere, angels are guardians (Gn 3:24), symbolizing God's presence (1 Sm 4:4) and divine judgment (Ps 18:10). They are dispatched by God to protect individuals on life's journey (Gn 24:7, 40; Ex 14:19; Ps 91:11).

There is an appearance and concentrated activity of angelic beings in late Old Testament and post canonical periods (Conrad 1997:79; Meier 1999:47; Gerstenberger 2001:166). Post Old Testament literature portrays angels as protectors and executors of judgment. Angels take a frightful form and assume a hierarchical structure, which cannot be easily identified in the Old Testament (Meier 1999:50). Already in the Maccabean period the patron God was involved in protecting the temple by causing natural phenomena and through the work of angels (Van Henten 1999:51).

Belief in angels was common in the ancient Near East. Outside Israel they were considered to be gods. In Ugaritic texts they are identified as a lesser order of gods serving El's council. Their responsibilities include running errands, interceding and executing divine judgment (Ringgren 1995:1289). High Gods communicated with each other by means of messengers. Gods were neither all-knowing nor capable of moving to different locations (Meier 1999:46). The High Gods had the authority to dispatch lesser gods on errands. Generally messengers traveled alone except when their mission was related to danger (Meier 1989:119,124-128). At Ugarit divine messengers appear in pairs (Mullen 1980: 211). Equally biblical angels appear alone when delivering messages. Angels rarely appear in accompaniment.

### **5.3.4.2.2 Lozi intermediaries**

#### **5.3.4.2.2.1 Ancestral spirits**

There is a distinct absence of ancestral veneration in the Psalms and Old Testament. Neither is the practice of deifying kings found in Israel. At certain time kings were deified during their own lifetime in Mesopotamia (Black & Green 1992:62). Deified kings were identified as brothers or sons of the major gods. Consequently a cult was organized and rituals were performed to the deified kings in Mesopotamian temples.

Kings and heroes are an important feature of the tribal religion in many parts of Africa. At their death they become objects of veneration. Ordinary ancestral cults are minimal in societies where hero gods are central. Lozi people have both royal and ordinary ancestral cults. People who live in the environs of royal burial villages consult departed kings for protection and other requests. During large-scale catastrophes the reigning king approaches the ancestor king through the royal grave custodian on behalf of the kingdom. Ancestors play an important mediatorial function in African Traditional Religion (Shorter 1983:199).

During Iron Age I Israel's belief system may have included ancestor cults (Hackett 1998:208). Burial site excavations from this period indicate that food, drink, lamps, amulets and tools were placed with the deceased. This practice possibly signifies belief in the continued existence of the dead. Biblical texts, which censure the practice inadvertently, indicate the existence of ancestor cults (Dt 26:14; Ps 106:28; Jr 16:5-9). However, a parallel practice which exists among African and Lozi people in particular

cannot be substantiated in the Old Testament. Amanze (2001:276) exaggerates when he interprets the Old Testament address of Yahweh as God of the fathers as proof of the existence of an ancestral cult equivalent to the African religious experience. Correspondingly his argument regarding ancestral communication in Exodus 3:16 is untenable.

Living members of a traditional African society have a responsibility to their ancestors. Daily ancestors are venerated through acts of hospitality, like the offering of snuff, beer and food. Ancestors are also remembered periodically through rites at birth, marriage, sickness, death, planting time, hunting and fishing. At these occasions libations are poured out and offerings are made. Lozi people pray to ancestors for protection during labor, naming rites when the child is restless and when an adult is struck by an ancestor. Through offerings and invocations the responsible ancestor is appeased. Then healing and protection is secured. Unlike the Supreme Being it is common for victims to scold ancestors when they do not receive answers. This is a marked distinction between prayers to God and the ancestors.<sup>52</sup>

Although ancestors are recognized as part of the family occasionally they are vindictive particularly when they are ignored. Disasters such as drought or pestilence, sickness or death can be linked to ancestors. Ancestors can use crisis to punish the guilty. They are unpredictable and can be easily offended. Africans therefore continuously appease their ancestors in order to obtain favours as well as contain their anger (Taylor 1963:152; Parrinder 1968:59).

#### **5.3.4.2.2 Messengers in mythical history**

Lozi creation mythology provides glimpses at the belief system of the ancients. *Nyambe* had a counselor *Sasisho* and a messenger, *Kang'ombe* the lechwe (Jalla 1954:1, 2). *Nyambe* used these mythical creatures to transmit messages to *Kamunu* (man). Occasionally, other animals were directed to convey messages. When he was moved by the plight of man *Nyambe* sent a chameleon and hare to inform man that he would be immortal and mortal respectively. The chameleon left first but dawdled and was overtaken

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<sup>52</sup> A prayer to the ancestors with this feature goes as follows: "You are useless, you gods. You only give us trouble. For although we give you offerings you do not listen to us! You so-and-so are full of hatred. You do not enrich us" (Smith 1966:25).

by the agile hare. Legend has it that the arrival of the chameleon was not helpful, as man had already been sentenced to mortality by the hare's message. Yet, another messenger is death (Muuka 1966:250). Death is personalized as *Nyambe's* messenger who comes to remove man from earth.

#### 5.3.4.2.3 Similarities

Some African societies generally believe in lesser divinities (Mbiti 1975:66). It is apparent that this class of gods is lower in rank to the Supreme Being. This religious schema has echoes to the Ancient Near East. Belief in multiplicity of divinities prevailed in Mesopotamia, Ugarit and Egypt. However this class of gods is not well documented in Lozi religious experience.

The appearance of mythical animals in Lozi historical legends lends support to an order of messengers who function at the disposal of the Deity like in the Old Testament (Ps 91:13). *Sasisho* and *Kang'ombe* are messengers who perform the bidding of *Nyambe*. In terms of running errands there is a resemblance with the mention of biblical angels (Gn 24:7; Pss 34:8; 103:20). However in Lozi traditions these messengers are animals. And they do not appear anywhere as functionaries of protection.

#### 5.3.4.2.4 Differences

Among the Bantu of southern and central Africa ancestral spirits are more common than lesser divinities. In the same way Lozi traditions have little, if any idea of lesser divinities. Lozi people venerate royal ancestors as well as ordinary ancestors. This feature marks a distinction between Lozi and Israelite religions. If Hackett (1998:208) is correct about a cult of the dead then early Israelites may have engaged in a form of ancestor cult. Her argument that they may not have worshiped ancestors does not altar the similarities with African practices. It is known that Africans do not worship their ancestors, but rather

venerate them. At any rate even if early Israelites had an ancestor cult the advent of absolute monotheism from the time of the Babylonian exile enhanced a break from it.

Although ancestors act as intermediaries who may be implored to convey requests to *Nyambe*, it is not known whether they also run his errands. Unlike angels who are primarily at the bidding of Yahweh (even as an arm of Yahweh) Lozi ancestors are first and foremost members of the earthly family. Thus their involvement with *Nyambe* emanates from their closeness to him through death. They are primarily engaged in the affairs of their families with whom they perform various tasks. Nonetheless, they are intermediaries. They are called divinities<sup>53</sup>; they possess superior knowledge and are more powerful than humans.

## 5.4 Elements of prayer

### 5.4.1 Address

The psalmists address God in prayer and praise (Pss 64:1; 77:1; 91:2), mentioning the personal name Yahweh (Pss 28:1; 91:2; 140:1), and the epithets Most High and Almighty (Ps 91:1). Thus psalmists pray directly to God trusting in his power to protect and save his people.

Lozi petitioners occasionally approach God, *Nyambe* directly (Di Nola 1962:38; Coillard 1902:169-170; Mainga 1972:95; Holub 1976:320). *Nyambe* is also called king, creator, and powerful one, source of help, strength and fertility in recognition of his attributes (Junod 1938:137-138; Jalla 1954:2; Rooke 2006:2). Although all the petitioners in the examined prayers address *Nyambe* it is not uncommon for ancestors to be the focus of prayer.

In both biblical psalms and Lozi prayers petitions and praises are directed to God. Yet, again Lozi people will most likely approach their ancestors and turn to *Nyambe* for certain calamities or dangers.

### 5.4.2 Petition

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<sup>53</sup> The Lozi term Balimu for ancestors comes from the same root as Mulimu God and Milimu Gods/divinities.

Whether it was in the midst of attack or under threat the psalmists respond by turning to Yahweh. They called upon Yahweh for divine protection and safety. The following petitions demonstrate this element: “to you I call” (Ps 28:1, “hear me” (Ps 64:1) and “rescue me” (Ps 140:1). Although Psalm 77:1 does not include an invocation in the present time it is given in past tense: “I cried”. Additionally petitions in the psalms depict urgency for Yahweh’s intervention. The following requests illustrate this matter: “hear my cry”, “I call” (Ps 28:2), “protect me” Ps 140:1), and “keep me” (Ps 140:4).

Lozi petitions are directed at soliciting *Nyambe*’s answer to bless, strengthen, bring rain, education and relent in wrath (Di Nola 1962:38; Junod 1938:137-138). Spontaneous prayer is occasionally formulated as a wish as illustrated by relatives of a victim of injustice (Holub 1976:320).

Both psalmists and Lozi people petition their Supreme Being in prayer. This indicates their reliance on the Deity and trust in his abilities. Unlike psalms which have long redaction history Lozi petitions are concise, extemporaneous and focused on concrete material help.

### 5.4.3 Lament / complaint

Due to the overwhelming nature of calamities and distress, victims cry out in lament. Sometimes complaints about Yahweh’s silence and hiddenness are strong. In Psalm 28 the suppliant complains about Yahweh’s silence and deafness. Yahweh’s failure to respond promptly causes insomnia and depression (Ps 77:4, 7-9). At its height the difficulty is almost unbearable. The victim’s experience resembles one going down to the pit (Ps 28:2). Psalmists also lament their adversaries’ malice and evil acts. Enemies sharpen their tongues, attack from ambush, set traps and do violence (Ps 64:3-4; 140:2-5). Prayer for protection is all encompassing with laments about enemy attacks, danger and in certain cases the absence of an answer from Yahweh.

Lozi prayers also reflect the element of lament. Laments are illustrated by graphic representations of impending grievous harm on the victim. At its worst enemy danger causes petitioners to be anxious about being lynched by their accusers (Holub 1976:320), being destroyed by a mythic adversary (Coillard 1902:169-170), and falling into the hand of *Nyambe*’s wrath (Junod 1938:137-138). When ancestors are the cause of hardships petitioners are strong on complaints to the extent of scolding their pursuant.



Lament is found in the Psalms and Lozi prayers. Petitioners respond by rehearsing the problem at hand. As a result of pressure from ongoing calamities victims' complain to the Supreme Being. Although the lament is missing in most of the Lozi prayers it is included in the prayer about injustice and the prayer for protection from the mythical creature in the rapids. Petitioners complain about the accusers' jealousy and the difficult situation at the rapids (Coillard 1902:169-170; Holub 1976:320). Where the lament is not in the text, it is alluded to in the literary context.

The freedom to scold ancestors found in African prayers cannot be accounted for in the Psalms and Old Testament. Suppliants in Israel were honest and expressive regarding their experiences.

#### **5.4.4 Apotropaic sayings**

Imprecatory words function as a means of securing protection. Curses are pronounced on the enemy with the hope that they have power to wreak havoc. Words have either malevolent or benevolent power once they are uttered. One of the oldest apotropaic prayers is the priestly blessing in Numbers 6:24-26. The psalmists' imprecations are made effective through Yahweh's power. God metes out the same evil on the wicked as they had intended for their victims (Pss 28:4, 5; 64:8; 140:8-11). Therefore, while the wicked are overthrown the righteous are preserved (Prinsloo 2003:408). At other occasions destruction is set off by the adversaries' iniquities (Weiser 1962:610).

Apart from negative words, positive words are also employed for apotropaic functions such as the formulaic "You will not fear" in Psalm 91:5 (Gerstenberger 2001:166; Prinsloo 2003:408). It appears that these utterances are more than mere encouragement. They may have functioned as blessings which endowed the victim with protection from the enemy and the ability to succeed. In later traditions of from Qumran Psalm 91:11 functioned as a prayer requesting for God's protection through angels from harmful evil spirits (Eshel 2003:71). At any rate blessings and curses which are imbedded in laments are removed from magic since petitioners turn the power to revenge to God through prayer (Westermann 1978:22).



Lozi people like many primal people in Africa and elsewhere, believe in the power of spoken words (Adamo 2004:28). Tambiah (1968:176, 178) argues that words are only effective in the ritual. Words spoken in the right place and at the right time have effect (Adamo 2004:27). This implies that prayers, songs, spells, addresses and blessings are employed and effectual when they are pronounced in the ritual. For example, Ndembu<sup>54</sup> *ihamba* (spirits) rites consist of hunters' cult songs which are sung to please *ihamba* followed by confessions, grievances and reverent prayers made by a medicine man or elder. The attempt to locate words to the deity in a ritual context appears to be necessitated by Tambiah's desire to distinguish between magic and religion. Hence the power of words is reduced to a psychological dimension. But Tambiah's Melanesian people sometimes pronounce words over fields with the aim of enhancing their crop. This act negates a psychological interpretation (Ray 1973:28-29).

Performative speech need not be assigned to the area of magic. Rather this kind of language can be understood intelligibly (Ray 1973:17, 22, 29). Exertive words derive their power from the sacred and corporate authority of the ritual context. The ritual context comprises divinities, ancestors and the community. Thus a priest is authoritative given his/her position in the cult. This aspect makes cultural authority the center for performative words. Yet there is a mystical element as illustrated by the respect given to certain people in the community, whose words are believed to be weighty such as beggars, the elderly and kings (McKenzie 1997:335-340).

Among Lozi people it appears that the power of spoken words traverses restriction to ritual, cultural authority and linguistic dynamics as suggested by Ray (1973:17-29). Lozi cursing words over the Illa and Tonga and on their march to the southern reaches of their territory to plunder were imbued with magical power<sup>55</sup>. With the assistance of a medicine man potent words can be pronounced for the sake of causing harm (Adamo 2004:27). It is realistic to suggest that in that context words were understood to be potent, able to cause destruction and to bring victory.

Lozi people do not restrict cursing words to the religious ritual. They are usually uttered to individuals. Disobedience, malice and danger may be a motivation for cursing words. Cursing words can be uttered with or without charms and still be effective (Adamo

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<sup>54</sup> Ndembu are found in the Northwestern fringes of Zambia. They are neighbours of Lozi people. Their area lies on the northern edges of the Lozi territory.

<sup>55</sup> See cursing prayer for details to both accounts.

2004:28). The curse may counter evil, hence it leads to protection or can be used maliciously (McKenzie 1997:337)<sup>56</sup>.

While imprecations are embedded in some psalm texts they appear as independent texts in Lozi traditions. The theological understanding of later Yawhism may have moved from a belief in the power of words apart from God's influence. Similarly Lozi people believe that all power rests with the Supreme Being. But the use of magic coupled with fear of certain individuals support the notion that words are powerful. In some cases these utterances derive their effect from the latent power of the speaker. Lozi imprecations are made antiphonally, whereas the psalmist does not use this liturgical device. Another profound difference is in the use of archaic language when uttering war curses and blessings among Lozi people. This phenomenon is shared by many tribal people (Tambiah 1968:180). There is a general agreement about the power of words and their protective role in both traditions.

#### **5.4.5 Thanksgiving**

The realization of protection through prayer is confirmed through thanksgiving and anticipated thanksgiving. Thereby a petitioner acknowledges salvation from God. In such instances the catastrophe may have passed or was showing signs of relenting. Given the certainty of answered prayer the psalmists burst forth in thanksgiving (Pss 28:6-9, 64:11; 77:10-20; 140:12, 13).

Thanksgiving is expressed by confidence arising from the declaration of God's promise to intervene in debilitating situations. God's word is the basis of such spontaneous outbursts. Other circumstances warrant this response, for example, after recalling the past acts of Yahweh (Ps 77:10-12).

Thanksgiving is missing from the examined Lozi prayers. However, this fact does not imply a lack of certainty on the suppliants' part. For the petitioner is fully, confident of the ability of the Deity to protect and intervene. It is not possible to deduce that thanksgiving does not appear in any Lozi prayers. Prayer and praise are constantly on the lips of the

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<sup>56</sup> Cursing words are recited many times targeting witches who are enemies with the result that they get lost and fail to find their way (Adamo 2004:9). It is also believed that for the words to be effective they must be uttered at a specific time, place and given times.

African and Lozi faithful believer. Accordingly, although thanksgiving may not have been offered in the selected prayers, it was raised to *Nyambe* at a particular juncture most likely spontaneously with the answer.

#### 5.4.6 Praise

The psalmists evoke divine epithets to praise God. God is called Most High and Almighty (Ps 91:1-2). Through metaphorical representation Yahweh is praised as rock, strength, fortress of salvation and shield (Ps 28:1, 6-8). Further Yahweh is praised for his past deeds, such as his creation and victory over Israel's enemies (Ps 77:14-20).

Lozi petitioners praise *Nyambe* by citing his attributes. *Nyambe* is creator and possessor of all power (Di Nola 1962:38). Cognizant of lurking snakes, beasts and natural hazards the suppliant acknowledges *Nyambe* as supreme over all. Lozi mythology articulates *Nyambe* the creator of every living thing (Mainga 1972:38). At the appearing of the sun *Nyambe* is praised as king over creation (Jalla 1954:3; Rooke 2006:2). *Nyambe* is the great king, incomparable, compassionate, provider, teacher with whom everything is possible (Junod 1938:137-138). Like an African tribal leader *Nyambe* is inundated with praise interspaced by ejaculations of petitions.

In both the psalms and the Lozi prayers, victims praise the Deity for the acts in the past. Praises are fore grounded in creation, previous demonstrations of power and salvation. Resulting from such praise is a confidence in the ability of the Supreme Being to perform and answer prayer at present and in future. There is an appearance of a salient belief or desire to manipulate the Deity in Lozi prayers. If a parallel is drawn from the acts of a subject before a chief, then the foregoing is plausible. A subject may not appear before a chief without tokens and due homage, which includes crawling and clapping.

### 5.5 Other aspects

#### 5.5.1 Charms

It is likely that the use of phylacteries as well as tassels is a development from apotropaic functions of words in the Old Testament. Amulets were worn for protective purposes in Egypt. One such charm contains an image of a god stepping on the head of a lion (Weiser

1962:612). During the neo-Assyrian and neo-Babylonian time period Mesopotamians erected monumental statues. Reliefs were placed in palaces and temples in order to gain protection from evil spirits. These were images of magically protective figurines; smaller ones were buried in the building foundations (Black & Green 1992:63).

Amulets might have been used for protective functions in the Old Testament (Wiseman 1980:46; Gaster 1987:245). Jacob's ornaments buried at Shechem may have been amulets (Gn 35:41). Similarly the crescents that Gideon took off the camels' necks (Jdg 8:21) resemble those worn by men (Jdg 8:26) and women (Is 3:18) as decorative amulets (Yamauchi 1983:196). In later Jewish periods amulets were used against evil eye, evil spirits, imprisonment and sword. Amulets served the purpose of intelligence to instruct people in the Torah. They also functioned against diseases and loss of property (Yamauchi 1983:197). Parchments containing scriptures which were worn on hands and foreheads may have been for protection from danger (Ellison 1980:1228). Similarly mezuzahs have apotropaic use (Davies 1979:637; Harrison 1979:119). Through prayer the psalmists on the other hand placed their faith not in a charm but in Yahweh (Ps 91).

On the other hand Lozi people use charms to expel the work of an enemy. The victim consults a medicine man who proceeds to prepare an applicable charm against a particular enemy and danger. Charms are believed to protect people from witchcraft, snakebite, and dangerous animals, against misfortunes and lightning. In order to secure protection from their enemies, Lozi people carry amulets. They plant medicine in the spoor of dangerous animals and throw medicine on the water before fording a river with animals to ensure protection from crocodiles (Betrand 1899:277). Such medicine is empowered magically through the repetition of certain words (Gehman 1989:71).

Unlike the Old Testament, in Africa good magic is publicly practiced without fear. It is widely employed for both protection as well as manipulation of weather conditions such as rain and influencing the future. Protection for individuals and property is achieved through the use of charms, amulets, herbs, seeds, powder, skins, feathers, tattoos, and chanting magical formulas (Gehman 1989:69).

### **5.5.2 Sacrifices, offerings and libations**

Old Testament Levitical sacrifices consist of domestic animals and birds. These animals are either bulls or sheep (Lv 1:2; 5:7, 11). Fowls include pigeons and turtle doves. Israelites offered from their harvest products composed of barley and wheat (Lv 23:10-14). Israelite libations generally are cereal offerings. They are accompanied with a generous amount of wine poured on the flour. In ancient Near East libations were poured to gods and the dead. Mesopotamian libations to the dead were funneled through a clay tube stuck into the ground. Babylonian rituals are accompanied by libations of water, and sometimes beer and wine. Other elements are milk, honey, oil and cream (Black & Green 1992:117). Levitical sacrifices and libations on the other hand are presented to God. Old Testament view of God precludes worshipping the dead and other gods (Engelhard 1979:122).

Correspondingly Lozi people pour libations to God and ancestors. Libations are poured out at royal burial sites and at set places for ordinary ancestors. Types of libations comprise water, milk and honey (Arnot 1889:71; Coillard 1902:217-224; Mbiti 1975:59). The Lozi believe that appeasing ancestors elicits their assistance during periods of danger. Offerings and sacrifices are constituted of domestic animals, seeds, cloth, honey and foodstuff. Seeds are offered to *Nyambe* at the start of the agricultural season. It is difficult to determine whether other elaborate sacrifices are presented to God. Lozi royal cult sacrifices are domestic animals, mainly cattle. Ordinary ancestors are generally offered foodstuff, snuff, and libations.

There are similarities in sacrificial material. Both Lozi and Levitical systems use domestic animals. Similarly the use of wine in biblical traditions resembles alcoholic libations among Lozi people.

Unlike the Israelite sacrificial system Lozi sacrifices and offerings are devoid of bird offerings. Another area of dissimilarity concerns harvest products. Lozi people do not have elaborate harvest thanksgiving offerings from their crops. Instead, Lozi people offer foodstuffs to their ancestors. According to Arnot (1889:71) Lozi people may have performed human sacrifices in certain cases. This practice is prohibited in the Israelite sacrificial system.

Fundamentally there is a marked distinction between Lozi religious experience and Israel's religion based on ancestral veneration. This aspect of Lozi religion has to a large extent

overshadowed *Nyambe* worship. For example in *Nyambe* worship evidence points to the use of water and seeds and other libations. Animal sacrifices only appear in Lozi royal cult.

### 5.5.3 Metaphor and myth

There are allusions to mythical elements with regard to the psalmists' adversaries (Pss 77:14-20; 91:13). The psalmists may have borrowed these representations from their neighbours. Exemplarily Psalm 77 reflects the primordial battle between order and chaos in contemporaneous cultures (Pitard 1998:69-70; Stolz 1999:708). Similarly there are legendary representations in Psalm 91:13 regarding the serpent also rendered dragon by the LXX. This is a reflection of shared belief in dragons common in the ancient Near East. For example, Mesopotamian art indicates dragon like creatures which are either malevolent or beneficent (Black & Green 1992:71).

Although there are underlying similarities between Ugaritic and Mesopotamian mythological history and depictions of fear stricken waters in Psalm 77, caution must be applied when cross-cultural information is used for hermeneutical purposes (Pitard 1998:73). The Exodus 15:1-18 Song of the Sea is ostensibly related to Israel's passage from Egypt across the Reed Sea. It is a depiction of Yahweh's triumph over the Egyptian enemy. Thus Yahweh has demonstrated his power over nature, the sea and other powers of death (Hackett 1998:212).

Metaphorical language is used extensively in the Psalms. For this reason hunting images, war symbols and animal figures describe aspects of the adversary. In certain cases the human enemy who attacks maliciously, deceitfully and through war is described metaphorically. Likewise evil spirits may be envisaged through imagery in view of the victim's cultural milieu. In ancient Mesopotamia evil spirits are mentioned by their names in magical incantations. Evil spirits are agents and executors of the purposes of the gods (Black & Green 1992:63). They manifest as weather spirits and caused diseases even though not all diseases were associated with them.

Lozi petitioners allude to mythical creatures that cause danger. The fear of the rapids by Coillard's party was based on their belief in the existence of fearful mythological creatures in the abyss (Coillard 1902:169-170). Lozi people's belief system is permeated by the existence of places which are inhabited by divinities and the existence of apparitions which



possess semi human forms namely, *Mwendanjangula*<sup>57</sup>. There are also magical creatures like mystic snakes (*Lilombamema*), tortoises (*Nkalankala*) and many other witchcraft related objects. Lozi people also believe in transformations<sup>58</sup>.

The use of metaphor and myth is common in both traditions. However the occurrence of mythic language in Israelite traditions is veiled and appears to be to be either a recollection of ancient legends or an incidence of borrowed traditions. The Lozi belief system on the other hand is permeated by mythic representations. The pronouncement of myth among Lozi people may be alluded to their strong relation with magic and witchcraft practices. The censuring of witchcraft in Israel and the promotion of monotheism may have led to a break with the prevalence of magic and in turn a regression of mythical beliefs.

#### 5.5.4 Expression of confidence

Psalms placed their confidence in Yahweh during periods of danger. Prayer is underpinned by trust in God's ability to answer. Perpetually the psalmists explicate their trust metaphorically. For example war terminology such as the shield conveys an assurance of protection (Pss 28:7; 91:4). Yahweh is figuratively represented as a shield from the enemies. By requesting Yahweh to act as a shield the imagery conveys a motif of confidence that God will protect the endangered (Keel 1978:222-224). At war a shield protects a warrior against missiles coming from all directions.

Lozi people place their confidence in *Nyambe* through prayer. From given examples it is apparent that the victim's motivation to seek God is hinged on an expectation to receive a positive answer. Although *Nyambe* appears to be remote he is implored with confidence since the victim believes that the Deity participates in human affairs.

While assistance may be sought from ancestors and not necessarily from the Supreme Being the request is posed with the understanding that ancestors convey requests to *Nyambe* (Muuka 1966:xx). Another difference lies in the outworking of the answer. Lozi people, like many African societies, actively participate in securing favourable responses.

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<sup>57</sup> These creatures which are part man and part clay or reeds are said to inhabit the dense forests when met a fight ensues death follows should the victim lose and secrets of prosperity or medicine are disclosed if the victim triumphs.

<sup>58</sup> This is a belief that certain people are able to transform themselves into animals either in life for destructive purposes or at death.

They solicit the aid of a medicine man by acquiring charms and medicine. These remedies are believed to derive their efficacy from the gods.

### **5.5.5 Expression of humility**

Humility characterizes the psalmists' prayers to God. This characteristic is noticeable in the psalmists' dependence upon God. God fights on their behalf and rescues the victim from the adversaries. Sentiments about being lowly, although embedded in Israel's theology, are concentrated in texts which address sin. This quality must be considered in relation to confidence in God's grace and loving-kindness. The psalmists are bold and free to express their fears and doubts. In Psalm 77:4-9 the victim charges Yahweh who has failed to act in defense of his people.

Lozi petitioners like their counterparts in many African societies offer their requests in humility. The deity is acknowledged as greater, powerful and wholly other, while the suppliant is a lowly creature comparable with a worm or an ant (Di Nola 1962:38; Coillard 1902:169-170; Mbiti 1975:16-21).

Like the psalmists Lozi victims pray to an almighty God. They are humble in prayer. Psalmists do not necessarily condescend themselves except in texts that dwell on sin and repentance. At any rate the fact that African and Lozi victims employ a language of humility does not imply that they are not bold in their prayers to God. In certain African prayers the petitioner accuses God of being the cause of the problem.

### **5.5.6 Gestures**

Old Testament petitioners employed prayer gestures during prayers. Lifting hands to God while praying may have been commonly practiced in the ancient Near East (Pss 28:2; 77:2). It signified a posture of receiving, urgency, candor and persistence (Keel 1978:319; Hossfeld & Zenger 2005:275). Petitioners in ancient Near East stretched their hands before a sovereign or God as a symbol of aversion or veneration (Keel 1978:313). Babylonians threw kisses to their deities as an offering of their life. Assyrians may have stretched hands for apotropaic reasons. Egyptians stretched hands for exorcism and protection. Other gestures are bowing, kneeling and prostrating.



When approaching *Nyambe* an elder usually rises early in the morning. He then sweeps a designated spot, erects an altar from sticks and prepares a heap of white river sand. The suppliant proceeds to bow, kneel, stretch arms and clap while uttering the requests (Jalla 1954:3-5; Mainga 1972:96). Similarly, prayers to ancestors are offered at an altar or elected place at the homestead. An elder kneels and faces the west. The rest of the group faces the east. Prayers to ancestors requesting that they withhold their wrath and to remove evil may include spitting water to the ground in the western direction. This gesture is symbolic to casting evil into the direction of the setting sun where evil goes. In addition good is invoked from the east where the sun rises.

Psalmists and Lozi people engage in lifting hands as gestures when they are praying. Stretching hands signifies surrendering to the superior and expecting to receive. This gesture accompanies prayers for protection when the victim urgently seeks respite. Relief is realized through the assistance of God. Equally postures like bowing, kneeling and prostrating are accounted for in both religious systems.

#### **5.5.7 Places and times of prayer**

Psalms are inter alia a product of the temple worship system. Even where psalms originated at an earlier date and were transmitted orally they were fixed in the postexilic period. Therefore they are a feature of the temple cultic system. It is however unnecessary to attach different psalms to centralized single annual festivals such as Mowinkel's (1962:219) New Year festival, Weiser's (1962:35) covenant festival and Kraus's (1988:88) enthronement festival. The tendency to approach psalm setting from one single festival is elusive (Craigie 1983:48; Tate 1990:25). Based on the suggested cultic, historical and literary settings the selected prayers may have risen at different times motivated by the need for protection from danger. These prayers were offered to Yahweh at the temple. Moreover, they were used during celebrations and festivals in later periods. But their original setting, even though difficult to determine, could have been influenced by imminent danger as documented in the discussion.

Among Lozi people prayers to *Nyambe* and ordinary ancestors are often offered at the homestead. When village people participate prayers may be conducted at the village square by the headman. In the royal ancestral cult prayers are offered at a royal burial site by a grave custodian. More importantly, African people pray anywhere since God is

constantly on their minds (Turner 1952:49; Zahan 2000:16). Usually prayers are directed to *Nyambe* and ancestors in the morning. Yet again prayers can be offered at any time. Prayer is constantly on their lips (Mainga 1972:95, 99; Mbiti 1975:2).

Prayers for protection by the psalmists and Lozi petitioners were necessitated by prevailing situations of danger. Therefore, the frequency and time of prayer is an outflow of the request at hand.

In Israel, a place of worship is distinguished by the presence of a centralized system. The Lozi religious system is not centralized. Even in the royal cult where national cohesion is experienced, royal burial sites are multiple. There are designated places for both *Nyambe* and ancestral worship at family and village level. Nevertheless, each family unit or village determines such space.