CHAPTER 1

1  How she sits alone
the city once full of people.
She has become like a widow,
the greatest among the nations,
the princess among the provinces.
She is reduced to slavery.

2  She weeps bitterly in the night.
Her tears run down her cheeks.
There is none to comfort her
from all her lovers.
Her companions have all betrayed her;
they have become her enemies.

3  Judah is exiled in affliction
and by hard labor.
She sits among the nations
but she finds there no relief.
All her pursuers overtook her
in her dire straits.
4 The roads to Zion are mourning for want of festival pilgrims. All her gateways are deserted. Her priests are groaning. Her maidens are afflicted; she is embittered.

5 Her oppressors have become her master; Her enemies prosper. Since God has aggrieved her for the greatness of her sins. Her young children have left her as prisoners before the oppressor.

6 Gone from the daughter of Zion is all her splendor. Even her leaders have become like deer that find no pasture, that flee without strength before their pursuer.
7 Jerusalem remembers her days of misery and her roaming; all of the treasures that were hers in the days of old when her people fell into the hand of the enemy, and there was none to help her. The oppressor did gaze at her and laughed at her downfall.

8 Jerusalem has sinned very grievously. Therefore she has become an outcast. All who honored her now despise her, for they have seen her nakedness. And she herself sighs and turns away.

9 Her uncleanness clings to her skirts. She never thought this would be her end. She descended amazingly low. There is no one to comfort her. Behold, Adonai, my affliction, because the enemy is triumphant.
10 The oppressor has spread out his hand over everything that she treasured. For she saw the nations invade her holy place, whom You had forbidden to attend Your assembly.

11 All her people are sighing, searching for bread. They gave up their most precious things in exchange for food, to restore their life. See, Adonai, and behold, for I have become so despised.

12 May it not befall you, all you who pass by! Behold, and see if there be pain like my pain, which was meted out to me, with which Adonai has afflicted me on the day of His fierce anger.
13 From on high he sent a fire into my bones, which overpowered them. He spread a net for my feet; he hurled me backwards. He has left me deserted. All day long I endure sickness.

14 Weighing me down is the yoke of my transgressions. By His hand they were lashed, and thrust upon my neck; It saps my strength. The Lord has given me over into hands that I can’t withstand.

15 The Lord has trampled all the warriors that are in my midst. He has called against me an assembly to crush my young men. [As in a press], the Lord has trodden fair maiden, daughter of Judah.
For all of these things I am crying. My eyes—my eyes are flowing in tears, because so far from me is any comforter to restore my soul. My children are in despair because the enemy has proved too strong.

Zion stretches out her hands. There is no one to comfort her. God has commanded concerning Jacob that his enemies should surround him. Jerusalem has become a thing unclean among them.

Righteous is He, Adonai, for I rebelled against His word. Listen now, all you peoples, and behold my agony. My maidens and young men walked into captivity.
19 I called to my lovers:
they deceived me.
My priests and my elders,
breathed their last inside the city,
as they sought food for themselves
to restore their souls.

20 See, Adonai, my distress;
my innards are churning.
My heart has turned over within me,
because I rebelled so grievously.
Outside, the sword strikes down,
At home, it’s like death.

21 They have heard that I am sighing.
There is none to give comfort to me.
All of my enemies
heard of my plight and rejoiced,
for it was You who have done it.
Bring the day that you proclaimed—
let them become like me.
22 Let all their evil come before You, and You will treat them in the same way as [you have treated me] for all my transgressions. For great is my groaning, [final melody] and my heart is sickened.
CHAPTER 2

1  Alâs, Adonâi has darkened in his anger the daughter of Zlon. He has cast down from heaven to the earth the glory of Israel, and remembered not His footstool on the day of his anger.

2  The Lord has laid waste, showing no pity. All of the dwellings of Jacob He shattered in his displeasure. Fair Judah’s stronghold He has thrown to the ground. He profaned the kingdom and its leaders.

3  He cut down, in burning anger, all the dignity of Ísrael. He turned backward His right hand before the enemy. He burned through Jacob like a flaming fire, consuming on all sides.
4 He has bent his bow like an enemy; poised his right hand like a foe. [And he] slew all who delighted the eye. In the tent of the daughter of Zion He poured out, like fire, His great fury.

5 Adonai became like an enemy; He consumed Israel; consumed all her citadels; destroyed her fortresses. He increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation.

6 He stripped His sukkah like it was a garden; He shattered His place of meeting. He made to be forgotten in Zion sabbath and festival. He spurned, in the rage of His anger, king and priest.
7 Adonai abhorred His altar; abandoned His sanctuary. He handed over to the enemy’s hand the walls of its citadels. A great noise they made in the house of God as on the day of a festival.

8 Adonai resolved to destroy the wall of Zion’s daughter. He stretched out a line. He did not draw back His hand— bringing mourning to rampart and wall, they crumble together.

9 Sunk into the earth are her gates. He has smashed her bars into pieces. Her king and leaders are in exile; there is no torah. [And their prophets]: they find no vision from Adonai.
10 They sit on the ground, silent, the elders of fair Zion.
They have sprinkled dust on their heads, and wrapped themselves in sackcloth.
The girls bowed their heads to the ground—the maidens of Jerusalem.

11 My eyes waste away with weeping, my inwards are burning,
poured out on the ground are my organs, at the ruin of my daughter people.
as children—mere infants—are fainting in the squares of the city.

12 To their mothers they kept asking:
“Where is the grain and wine?”
As they languish like the dying in the squares of the city.
as their souls ebb away in the bosoms of their mothers.
13 How to bear witness for you?
To what can I compare you,
O daughter of Jerusalem?
To what can I liken you,
that I may console you?
O maiden, daughter of Zion.
For great, like the sea, is your ruin.
Who can heal you?

14 Your prophets envisioned for you
delusion and folly.
They did not reveal your iniquities;
this might have restored your fortunes.
And what they offered to you
was visions of vanity and deception.

15 They clap their hands at you,
all who pass your way.
They hiss, and shake their heads
at the daughter of Jerusalem:
“Is this it? the city
that was called ‘perfect in beauty’,
‘the joy of the whole earth?’”
16 They open their mouths against you, all your enemies.
They whistle and grind their teeth.
They say, “We devoured her.”
Indeed this is the day that we have been waiting for.
We have arrived; we have seen it.

17 God has accomplished what He has purposed.
He fulfilled His decree, that he commanded from days of old.
He tore down, and did not pity.
He let an enemy rejoice over you.
He raised the pride of your foes.

18 Their heart cried out to the Lord.
Walls of the daughter of Zion let tears run down like a river.
Day and night, give yourself no respite.
Don’t let even your eyes find rest.
19 Arise! Cry out in the night
at the beginning of the watches.
Pour out your heart like water.
before the face of Adonai.
Lift up to Him your hands,
for the life of your young children
who swoon from hunger
at every street corner.

20 See, Adonai, and behold:
whom have you ever treated so?
Should the women eat their little ones,
the children they have nursed?
Should there be slain,
in God’s holy place, priest and prophet?

21 On the ground, in the streets
they lie, young and old.
My maidens and young men,
fell by the sword.
You slew them on the day of your anger.
You slaughtered them;
you showed no mercy.
22 [You invited]—as on a feast day—my neighbors from all around.
There were none, on the day of God’s wrath:
refugees or survivors.
Those that I nursed and brought up,
[final melody]
ymy enemy has wiped out.
CHAPTER 3 [special melody—see note below]

1-3 I am the man

who has seen affliction↗

by the rod of his anger.

Me—he has lead and driven↑

in darkness, not in light.

Surely on me He brings down His hand↘

the whole day long.

4-6 He wore away my flesh and skin↗,

and shattered my bones.

He has besieged me and surrounded me↑

with bitterness and woe.

He has made me dwell in darkness↘

like men long dead.

7-9 He has walled me in
till I can’t escape↗.

He has weighed me down with chains.

And when I cry and plead↑

He shuts out my prayer.

He has blocked my way with boulders↘.

He has twisted my path.
10-12 He is a lurking bear to me↗
a lion in hiding.
He has filled my path with thorns↑,
torn me in pieces, left me forlorn.
He has directed His bow↘
and made me the arrow’s mark.

13-15 He shot into my vitals↗
the arrows of His quiver.
I am a derision to my people↑,
they taunt me all day long.
He has filled me up with bitterness↘,
and made me drink wormwood.

16-18 He has broken my teeth with
gravel↗, and covered me with ashes.
He has bereft me of all peace↑;
I forgot what it is to prosper.
I said, “my strength has perished↘,
even my hope in God.”
19-21 Remember my afflictions and sorrow, the wormwood and the gall. My soul remembers clearly, and is now bowed down within me. Here’s what I’ll tell my heart, and so recover hope:

22-24 The kindness of the Lord has not ended, His mercies not exhausted. They are new every morning.

*Raba emunatecha.*

“My portion is God”, says my soul, thus do I hope in Him.

25-27 God is good to the one who trusts, to every soul that seeks Him. It is good to wait in silence for salvation from Adonai. It is good that a man bear the yoke from his youth and on.
28-30  Let him sit alone in silence↗, because God lays it upon him, to put his lips to the dust↑: perhaps there still is hope. Let him offer his cheek to the smiter↓, and suffer all men’s taunts.

31-33  For the Lord will not cast us off↗ forever and ever. He wounds, but He shows compassion↑, abundant is His kindness. For He is loathe to cause pain or grief↓ to the sons of men.

34-36  To crush under His feet↗ all the prisoners of the earth, To deny a man his rights↑ before the face of the Most High, to deprive a man of justice↓, does not the Lord see it?
37-39  Who’s will can be fulfilled↗, if God did not ordain it?
From the mouth of the Most High↑
do not good and evil come?
Of what should a living man complain↘?
Only for his own sins!

40-42  Let us search and examine our ways↗, and return to Adonai.
Let us lift up our hearts and our hands↑
to God who is in the heavens.
We transgressed and we rebelled↘,
and You have not forgiven.

43-45  You wrapped Yourself in wrath
and pursued↗ us,
and slain us without pity.
You covered Yourself with a cloud↑
so prayer cannot pass through it.
You have made us filth and refuse↘
among the nations.
46-48 Our enemies have opened their mouths in chorus against us. Panic and pitfall befell us, ravages and ruin.
My eyes run with streams of water at my poor people’s ruin.

49-51 My eyes flow without ceasing, and find no relief. Until the Lord looks down and sees us from the heavens. My eyes are sore with sorrow for the maidens of my city.

52-54 They hunted me down like a bird, those who hate me for no reason. They dropped me to die in a dungeon, and threw stones down upon me. The waters flowed over my head and I said “I am cut off.”
I called on your name, Adonai, from the depths of the dungeon. You then heard me crying:
“Don’t close your ears to my pleading.” You drew near on the day that I called You, and said to me, “Do not fear!”

You have defended the cause of my soul; you have redeemed my life. Adonai, you see how I am wronged, O vindicate my right! You have seen all of their vengeance, all their designs toward me.
61-63 You have heard their reproach
Adonai↗, the schemes they plot against me.
The talk of the men who attack me↑; their muttering all day long.
Observe their sitting and rising↘;
I am their taunting song.

64-66 Pay them back, Adonai↗ according to their deeds.
Give them anguish of heart↑,
Your curse should be upon them!
Pursue them in wrath
and destroy them↘,
from under the heaven of God.
CHAPTER 4

1 Alas, the gold is dulled, debased, the finest gold.
Sacred gems are scattered upon every street corner.

2 The sons of Zion are precious, [worth their weight] in fine gold.
How they are treated as earthen jugs,
The work of the potter’s hand.

3 Even the jackals present the breast and give suck to their young ones.
But my poor people has become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness.

4 The tongue of the baby at the breast cleaves to his palate, for thirst.
The young children ask for bread.
Not one person spares a scrap for them.

5 Those who once ate all the best food now lie rotting on the street.
Those brought up in scarlet clothing huddle now on heaps of garbage.
6 All the crimes of my poor people have outdone the sins of Sodom, which was overturned in a moment, no time for a man to wring his hands.

7 Her elect ones were purer even than snow, and they were whiter still than milk. Ruddy like rubies was their complexion, Like the sapphire in their features.

8 Now their appearance is blacker than soot, They go unrecognized in the streets. Their skin has shriveled on their bones, it has become as dry as wood.

9 We’d rather be slain by the sword than to find death by starvation, For these pine away. They are stricken for lack of the fruits of the field.
10 With their own hands, the women of tender hearts have boiled their own children. This became their food in the wreckage of the daughter of my people.

11 The Lord has vented all His fury. He poured out His burning anger. And he has kindled a fire in Zion that has devoured its foundations.

12 The kings of the earth did not believe, nor did anyone in all the world, that a foe or an enemy could ever enter into the gates of Jerusalem.

13 From the sins of her prophets and the crimes of her priests, who had shed in her midst the blood of the righteous ones.
14 They rôamed like blind men through the streets, being defiled with blood so that no one there would dare to brush up against their clothing.

15 “Get away, [unclean one]!” were the cries of [people to them]. “Keep away! Do not touch us!” So they fled away and now wander. People said among the nations: “They may no longer sojourn here.”

16 The face of God has dispersed them. He will no more give them a glance. They respected the priests no longer, paid no attention to the prophets.

17 Our eyes are strained and failing, watching vainly for our deliverance. We were watching for a nation [Egypt] that was never there to save us.
18 Our enemies eyed our steps,
so we could not walk in our streets.
Our doom is near. Our days are over,
yea our end has come.

19 They were swifter—our pursuers—
than the eagles in the sky.
In the mountains, they did hunt us,
in the desert, laid in wait for us.

20 The breath of our nostrils,
God’s own anointed [King Josiah],
our king was captured in their traps,
of whom we had said,
“Under his shadow,
we will live among the nations.”

21 Rejoice and exult, daughter of Edom,
you that dwell in the land of Uz.
To you in turn the cup will pass.
It will make you drunk;
you will show your nakedness.
22 Your crime is atoned for, daughter of Zion.
He will no more send you into captivity.
But daughter of Edom, your guilt He will punish, your transgressions will be laid bare.
CHAPTER 5

1 Recall, Adonai, what has befallen us.
Behold and see our disgrace.

2 Our inheritance turned over to strangers,
and our houses unto aliens.

3 We have become like orphans.
There is no father.
And our mothers are as widows.

4 Our own water—
we pay money to drink it.
And our firewood we get for a price.

5 [To our very] necks, we are pursued.
We labor, but nothing is left to us.

6 To Egypt we stretched out a hand,
and to Assyria, just to get enough bread.

7 Our fathers have sinned, and are
no more. We have all suffered
for their iniquities.
8 Slave\’s ruled over us.
There is none to deliver us
from their hand.

9 At the risk of our lives,
we get our bread,
because of the sword of the wilderness.

10 Our skin is hot like a furnace.
because of the burning heat of famine.

11 The women in Zion were ravaged,
the maidens in the towns of Judah.

12 The leaders have been hanged
by their hands.
The faces of elders are not respected.

13 Young men carry a millstone. And
children stagger under loads of wood.

14 The elders are gone from the gate,
the young men from their music.
15 The joy in our hearts has vanished, our dancing has turned into mourning.

16 The crown has fallen from our heads. Woe to us, for we have sinned.

17 Because of this, our hearts are sickened. This is why our eyes grow dim.

18 For the mountain of Zion, which lies desolate, while the foxes prowl over it.

19 Yet You Adonai will sit forever upon Your throne, through all generations.

20 You cannot mean to forget us forever, and forsake us for all time?

21 Turn us back to Yourself God, and we shall return. Renew our days as of old.
22 [You can’t] have rejected us utterly. You have raged against us, it is enough.

21 Turn us back to Yourself, God, and we shall return.

[final melody] Renew our days as of old.
This English version of Lamentations has been prepared by drawing on the following translations:
The Stone Edition Tanach, JPS, H.L. Ginsberg, David Seidenberg, James Moffat, Jerusalem Bible, New King James Bible

The goal was to create an English reading that can be sung to the traditional tropes that are used for the Hebrew, but which follows the Hebrew with its tropes as closely as possible.
If one examines the authoritative translations, it becomes clear that there are many passages in the text of whose meaning the experts are unsure. In those situations I attempted to choose a reading which scans well with the melody, and which agrees with some (or at least one) of the authoritative renderings.

The trope melodies I used were taken from the book CHANTING THE HEBREW BIBLE by Joshua R. Jacobson. In order to adapt the trope symbols to a left-to-right language like English, I reversed the direction of the following trope symbols:

mercha tip’cha munach tevir kadma/pashta geresh gershayim
However, I left these the way they are:
telisha katana telisha gedola
I also indicate a mercha/tipcha pair or a kadma/geresh pair by “wrapping it around” the phrase which will have the combined melody, as in:
Renew our days She weeps bitterly

I also frequently indicate an entire English phrase to be chanted to a single trope melody, as in: [clings to her skirts]

Chapter 3 of Lamentations is sung by singing each set of three verses to three melodies, in turn. I grouped each set of three verses together, as in 1-3, 4-6, etc. The first two of the three melodies end their first half (the “half-cadence”) with a high note, and the third with a “falling tone”. I have marked the corresponding syllable with an arrow:

↗ for the high note or half-cadence of the first melody, ↑ for the high note of the second melody, and ↓ for the “falling tone” of the third melody.