**From Culmination to Anticipation** – The Semantic Shift of the Root *klh* in Light of the Phrases *‘kaltah ‘ayin*’ and ‘*kaltah nefesh’*[[1]](#footnote-1)

The basic sense of the root *klh* is to conclude, to bring to completion, to finish.[[2]](#footnote-2) This is the sense found in most of its appearances, in its verbal form, in the Bible.[[3]](#footnote-3) This led to the Semitic form of this word - ‘*kalah*’ – meaning complete destruction.[[4]](#footnote-4) In Ugaritic, the parallel root *kly* has a related meaning, ‘comes to the end,’ or ‘causing the end,’ ‘to empty,’ ‘to consume.’[[5]](#footnote-5)

One of the subsenses of the root *klh* in Hebrew indicates expectation, hope, yearning,[[6]](#footnote-6) especially in the phrases *kaltah ‘ayin* and *kaltah nefesh.[[7]](#footnote-7)* However, what is the exact relationship between the two senses, if such a relationship exists? And how did the root shift from its original sense to its secondary sense?

In this paper we will describe the semantic shift of the verb *klh* through an examination of the two phrases *kaltah ‘ayin* and *kalyah nefesh*. We will expose the ancients’ perception of the eye’s anatomy, and will reopen the discussion about the meaning of the two phrases, which will shed light upon the holistic perception of body and soul in the Bible.

In the early 80s of the previous century, Meir Gruber carried out a study on nonverbal body gestures, and claimed that *kalu ‘einayim* means ‘the eyes are emptied,’ or ‘eyes whose tears have dried up.’[[8]](#footnote-8) As part of the discussion about the gesture of weeping, he defines the phrase as an idiom which describes continual weeping and the state of continual depression which follows, similar to the English phrase to ‘cry one’s eyes out.’ He noted the thirteen appearances of the phrase and translated each of the verses into English.

Gruber’s foundational work influenced the scholarship that followed, although there are still interpretations and translations which do not correctly understand the phrase. So, for example, we find a wide range of exegetes who understand the phrase *kalah ‘ayin* to mean an eye which was damaged in various ways – erosion, failure, and blindness.[[9]](#footnote-9) True, the literal sense of the phrase *kalah ‘ayin* is that the eye is ‘finished.’ Therefore, the logic in interpreting damaged eyes as blindness is clear.[[10]](#footnote-10) The sense of ‘eye’ in the phrase is metonymic for its central function – to see, and therefore it means that the ability to see was terminated. However, a deeper examination of the text shows that the phrase relates to a different one of the eye’s functions – its ability to tear, and not its ability to see. This accords with the ancients’ perception of the eye’s anatomy.

In this paper I wish to add another layer to Gruber’s study, to lay out a wider picture, and delve deeper into the semantic development of the phrase. I start with the ancients’ understanding of the eye’s anatomy, then survey the development of the combination formed by *klh* with the noun ‘eye,’ and end with an understanding of the source of the phrases which mean ‘anticipation,’ ‘hope.’

**The perception of the eye’s anatomy**

The appearances of ‘eye’ in the Bible show that the ancients understood the eye’s anatomy as a vessel which holds and contains the tears. In Jeremiah, the speaker asks – ‘Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears’ (Jer 8:23). His secret wish was to have his eyes fill with water, so he would have a continual source of water for his tears,[[11]](#footnote-11) and he could cry without stop day and night over the destruction of his people. But this fantastical metaphor of course cannot be realized; therefore, he opens his words with the expression *mi yiten*, Oh, that.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Perceiving the eye as the source of tears and a water reservoir is reflected in the many mentions of tears which flow from the eyes (Jer 9:17, 13:17, 14:17, 31:16; Ps 115:8; Lam 2:11), and in metaphors of the tears as water. For example, ‘Streams of tears flow from my eyes…My eyes will flow unceasingly’ (Lam 3:48-49);[[13]](#footnote-13) ‘Mine eyes run down with streams of water’ (Ps 119:136), and in the speaker in Lamentation’s command to the female imagery of Jerusalem, ‘You walls of Daughter Zion, let your tears flow like a river day and night; give yourself no relief, your eyes no rest’ (Lam 2:18). Alongside the command to act – to cry day and night – the speaker also tells the female imagery of Jerusalem what not to do, not to let her eye rest or to cool off her eye from tears (=to dry it out),[[14]](#footnote-14) and not to relieve the eye’s pupil.[[15]](#footnote-15)

1. I thank Prof. Ed Greenstein and Prof. Sammy Cheval for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. HALOT 476-477. This includes the subsenses: 1. To stop, to bring to and end; 2. TO finish, to complete; 3. To conceal; 4. To perish, to die; 5. To be permanent; 6. To fail; 7. To yearn, to pine. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For example, in relation to substances, such as water (Gen 21:15), flour (1Kgs 17:14), grass (Isa 15:6), or in relation to actions, such as speaking (Gen 17:22), blessing (Gen 27:30), eating (Gen 44:3), and more. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Such as: “neither did I make a full end of them (*kalah*) in the wilderness” (Ezek 20:17). See also Jer 5:10, 18; Ezek 11:13, 13:13; Nah 1:8; Deut 9:27, 11:16; Neh 9:31; 2Chr 12:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Fensham’s approach adds an additional sense, ‘is preserved.’ See footnote 25. Fensham, The Semantic Field of kly in Ugaritic, *JNSL* 7 (1979) 27-30 . G. del Olmo, Lete and J. Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, 3rd Edition. Translated by W. G. E. Watson, HdO 112 (Leiden: Brill, 2015). Also compare to the Accadian root *kalȗ*, akin to the Hebrew root *kl’*. For a discussion of the relationship between the roots *kālâ*-*kl’,kālā* -*klh*, see: F.J. Helfmeyer, ' כָּלָה *kālâ* ', *TDOT VI*I, 1995 Michigan, 157- 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Above, footnote 1 (HALOT, no. 7). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The singular phrase ‘*kalu hakelayot*’ (Job 19:27) is similarly understood. Helfmeier, *klh*, 163; E.L. Greenstein, *Job: A New Translation*, New Haven, 2019, 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. M.I. Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East*, Rome, 1980, 386-400. Quotes are from p. 390. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See, for example, Levine, Leviticus (JPS) 1989, 185: “*Mekhallot 'einayim* literally means ‘which exhaust the eyes’ so that the eyes can no longer see”; Klein, *1Samuel*, (WBC), 2008, 22; Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (NICOT), 2007, 164 - "wear out his eyes"; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, (AB), 1999, 697-698; ‘to be languishing’; G.H. Wilson, *Job*, NIBC, Peabody 2007; Hoffman, *Yermiya 1-25* [Hebrew] (*Miqra leYisrael*), 2001, 358: ‘Waiting without hope, as if the eyes are finished from futile hope’ Klein, *Eikhah* [Hebrew] (*Miqra leYisrael*), 244: ‘Our eyes have been weakened from yearning.’ HALOT 477: ‘to finish > to consume... to cause to fail (the eyes) Lv 26, 16; 1S 2, 33; Jb 31,16.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See for example the interpretation as opposed to the translation: ‘…daughter Jerusalem’s eyes no longer function because of her many tears,’ which Renkema translates as ‘blinded with tears.’ Renkema, *Lamentations*, 1998, 268-269. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Treating the eye as a source of tears is based on the pair (*m*)’*ayan* – (*ma*)*kor* [spring/eye; source], common in the Bible and Ugaritic literature. For example: ‘*veyevosh meqoro veyekherav maʿyano*’ [his spring will fail and his well dry up] (Hos 13:15), ‘*maʿyan nirpas umaqor mashekhat*’ [a muddied spring or a polluted well] (Prov 25:26), CTA 12 [75] II: 60-61. See Y. Avishur, *Stylistic Studies of Word-Pairs in Biblical and Ancient Semitic Literatures*, Neukirchen-Vluyn (AOAT 210) 1984, 385, 703.. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The request formula ‘*mi yiten*’ always appears as opposition to reality (Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1*, 537). Here it refers only to the metaphor of water – ‘my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears,’ and not to the rest of Jeremiah’s words as in Holliday’s approach, *Jeremiah 1*, 249. See Marili, *Guf, lashon, umigdar*, note 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The speaker in Lamentations 3:48-51 may be identified as a woman, if we accept the arguments put forth by E. Greenstein, “*Qol haʾishshah beʾekhah pereq gimmel*,” *Shennaton lekheqer hammiqraʾ vehammizrakh haqqadum* 24 (2016), 167-176. Identifying the speaker as a woman in 3:48 creates a fitting parallel between the words of the lamenting widow in 1:16, which use the water metaphor to describe tears, *'ʿeni ʿeni yoredah mayim'* [mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water] and the metaphoric language in v.48*, 'palge-mayim terad ʿeni'* [Mine eye runneth down with streams of water]. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Understandint the command is dependent upon an analysis of the type *fugat* (*pwg*), from the verb sense *lafug* and the noun *hafugah* (BDB, 806; Provan, *Lamentations*, 74; H.L.Bussman, *pwg*, *NIDOTTE* III, in: W.A. Van Gemeren (ed.), Grand Rapids, 1997, 584-585. E. Robertson, “The Apple of the Eye in the Masoretic Text,” *JTS* 38 (1937), 59, brings the sense of rest or cooling off. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The verb *tidom* (*dmm*) in the sense of rest, cessation, in Robertson, “The Apple of the Eye,” 59; BDB, 198-199; Provan, *Lamentations*, 76; Renkema, *Lamentations*, 313-314; B.A. Levine, 'Sound, Silence, and the Phenomenology of Mourning in Biblical Israel', *JANES* 22 (1993), 89–106. *Bat ‘Ayin*, the ‘apple of the eye,’ is an epithet for the pupil, some say a result of error. See footnote 15, below. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)