YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***TEHILLIM* (SERIES II)**

**Rav Elchanan Samet**

**Shiur #18: Psalm 13 -**

**"How long, O Lord… Look, and hear me…**

**I Will Sing to the Lord"**

**From Complaint to Supplication and From Prayer to Praise**

**)Continuation)**

1 To the chief musician, A psalm of David.

I 2 How long will You forget me, O Lord? Forever?

How long will You hide Your face from me?

3 How long shall I take counsel in my soul,

Having sorrow in my heart daily?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

II 4 Look, and hear me, O Lord my God:

Lighten my eyes,

Lest I sleep the sleep of death;

5 Lest my enemy say, I have prevailed against him;

And those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved.

III 6 But I have trusted in Your mercy;

My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.

I will sing to the Lord, Because He has dealt bountifully with me.

### IV. the parallelism between the supplication in stanza II and the complaint in Stanza I

 The structure of the psalmist's supplication in stanza II parallels the structure of his complain in stanza I. The supplication, like the complaint, is composed of three sections. The order of the sections of the supplication in stanza II matches the order of the complaint in stanza I. In the first section, the psalmist prays for the repair of God's relationship with him; in the second section, he asks that his wretched personal situation be changed; and in the third section he prays that victory should be denied from his enemies.

 The quantitative relationship between the three sections of the supplication is the opposite of the relationship between the same sections in the complaint. The requests that the petitioner presents become gradually longer – the first section is comprised of 4 words, and it takes up only one clause; the second section is 5 words, it is made up of two clauses, the second not paralleling, but rather complementing the first; the third section is comprised of 8 words, which constitute two clauses that stand in synonymous parallelism:

Lest say my enemy, I have prevailed against him;

And those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved.

 What is the meaning of this gradual lengthening? Why do the sections of the supplication – the order of which parallels the order of the sections of the complaint – gradually lengthen from section to section, while the sections in the complaint become gradually shorter?

 It would appear that the reason for the gradual shortening of the sections of the complaint, which we discussed earlier, is also the reason for the gradual lengthening of the sections of the supplication: The more that the supplication relates to the "outside world," the longer the petitioner's request, because the reality that he seeks to change is more complex. The hiding of God's eyes is the easiest to change; God needs only to "look" at the petitioner, and the hiding of His eyes will come to an end. Therefore, the psalmist's prayer relating to this issue is short. Changing the petitioner's mental state is already a mission that relates to the psalmist's physical and psychological state which he wishes to change – "lighten my eyes." But the most complicated change is thwarting the steps taken by the petitioner's enemies, preventing their victory and cancelling their joy when he falls. Therefore the supplication regarding that matter is the longest and most detailed of all.

Let us now compare the complaint in stanza I to the supplication in stanza II when they are standing side by side, and not as they were transcribed at the beginning of this study, one below the other. We will note in parentheses the number of words in each section:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Aspect of the trouble** | **The complaint** | **The supplication** | **The total number of words** |
| **God's relationship with the petitioner** | How long will You forget me, O Lord? Forever?How long will You hide Your face from me? (11) | Look, and hear me, O Lord my God: (4) | 15 |
| **The petitioner's****mental state** | How long shall I take counsel in my soul,Having sorrow in my heart daily? (8) | Lighten my eyes, Lest I sleep the sleep of death; (5) | 13 |
| **The realistic situation** | How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? (5) | Lest my enemy say, I have prevailed against him;And those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved. (8) | 13 |
| **The total number of words** | 24 | 17 |  |

 If we combine the section of the complaint with the parallel section of the supplication, it turns out that the whole of stanzas I-II is divided into three parts almost identical in length. This is because the length of the complaint and the length of the supplication balance each other out, owing to the gradual shortening in the complaint and the gradual lengthening in the supplication.

 At the same time, the entire complaint in stanza I is longer than the entire supplication in stanza II by seven words. The shortening of the supplication in relation to the complaint testifies, as stated in the introduction, to uplifting and progress in the petitioner's mental state, which finds expression in the conciseness and concentration of his words.

 The psalmist's uplifted state is felt already in stanza II, in his request, "Look, and hear me, O Lord my God." We sense that this is not only a prayer for the termination of God's hiding His eyes; with his very prayer and direct address with the possessive pronoun, "O Lord my God," the psalmist "melts" the freeze that had characterized his relationship with God, and bridges the detachment about which he had complained in stanza I.

 In similar fashion, when he prays, "Lighten my eyes," which means, "Strengthen me and cause me to rejoice," he already emerges with one foot from the difficult mental state which he described in his complaint: "Having sorrow in my heart daily."

 Even when he grounds his prayer on the concern lest he die and lest his enemies rejoice in his fall, from which it might appear that he wishes to intensify the danger that he is facing (in contrast to the short account of the trouble in the complaint in stanza I), he does so out of inner certainty that God will rescue him.

 What brought the psalmist to this change in his supplication? Is it the change for good in his mental state that came first and allowed him to offer this prayer, or perhaps it was the prayer itself that led to the change in his mental state? It is difficult to answer this question, and both possibilities may be true. But it seems that it was precisely after he had laid out his complaints at length and in detail in stanza I that the psalmist's heart opened to the prayer and hope of stanza II. This supplication is what will bring him to an additional ascent in stanza III.

### V. Stanza III – Praise

 Had our psalm been built only of stanzas II-III – that is to say, were it a psalm of supplication, which does not begin with a long and detailed complaint – the last verse in the psalm would not be surprising. The great majority of psalms of supplication in the book of *Tehillim* end on an optimistic note, with an expression of confidence that the prayer has been heard and that it will indeed lead to the petitioner's deliverance, and with his undertaking to thank God for his salvation.[[1]](#footnote-1)

 But how far and great is the distance between the beginning of the psalm with the complaint, "How long will You forget me, O Lord? Forever?" and the declaration at the end of the psalm, "But I have trusted in Your mercy…." How did the psalmist's feeling that God has forgotten him forever and that He hides His face from him change into a feeling of absolute trust in God's mercy?

And how do his words in stanza I: "How long… having **sorrow in my heart** daily," accord with his words at the end of the psalm: **"My heart shall rejoice** in Your salvation"?[[2]](#footnote-2) While it is true that the verse in stanza I describes his mental state in the present, whereas the verse in stanza III relates to the future, "When your salvation comes, then my heart shall rejoice," a person who is confident in God's mercy that will be bestowed upon him and who foresees the gladness of his heart when God's salvation will arrive is very far from the feelings of depression described in stanza I.

Finally, how does the bitter complaint addressed to God time after time, "How long, O Lord… how long… how long… how long," accord with the festive proclamation with which our psalm closes: "I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me"?

The extreme mental revolution described in our psalm takes place over the course of only three verses!

Later in this section, we will analyze stanza III of our psalm, and we will try to understand the relationship between it and the previous stanzas.

Stanza III as well is built on the threefold format that is characteristic of stanzas I-II, and of the psalm as a whole. This stanza is built of three clauses. The progress from clause to clause is on the axis of time. The first clause describes the state of the petitioner at the present time:

But I have trusted [= trust] in Your mercy.

 In the second stanza, the psalmist describes his future joy, when God's mercy will be realized, and He will deliver him from his troubles:

My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.

In the third stanza, the psalmist commits himself to a song of thanksgiving in response to his salvation, and it is a more advanced stage than the previous one:

I will sing to the Lord, because (*ki*) He has dealt bountifully with me.

The word *ki* can be understood as introducing a reason, "because, since," but it can also be understood as a description of the time, "when." The past tense of the verb *gamal* is the "future past." When he will sing to God in the future, God will already have dealt bountifully with him. *Gamal* does not mean "paid for," but rather "gave," "acted beneficially." This is also the meaning of the root *gimmel-mem-lamed* in Assyrian: "Left alive" (Tz. P. Chajes).

This third clause, which closes the entire psalm, stands apart from everything that came before it. In the entire psalm up to this point, including the two clauses that precede it, the psalmist addressed God in second person. But in the conclusion of the psalm, he goes back to speaking about God in third person. He does not say: "I will sing to you, O Lord, because You have dealt bountifully with me," but rather: "I will sing **to the Lord,** because **He has dealt bountifully** with me." What is the reason for this?

This is what Aryeh Ludwig Strauss writes in his exemplary analysis of Psalm 23 on verse 4: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for **You** are with me," and on the rest of that psalm:[[3]](#footnote-3)

It is precisely in a time of testing, in the valley of the shadow of death, that God's closeness is felt… [Therefore, in this verse] the psalmist for the first time addresses God directly… In the coming stanzas, the address in second person continues to appear, but not in the striking fashion of "You," but rather in weaker forms: "Your staff… You anoint…", until in the last stanza we once again here God's explicit name **in the serenity of third person,** and the discussion is **about Him, and not to Him:** "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

 Similarly, in our psalm, by addressing God in second person from the very beginning of the psalm, the petitioner expresses his personal distress and his vigorous appeal for God's presence in his life. He therefore opens both stanza I and stanza II with a direct address to God in second person ("How long, O Lord… Look, and hear me, O Lord"), and this address at the beginning of each of these two stanzas, continues until the end of each stanza. In stanza III, in which the distress is replaced by trust, addressing God in second person is preserved, but God is not addressed directly with the Tetragrammaton, as in the previous stanzas, but with second person pronouns ("in Your mercy… in Your salvation"). In contrast, in the final line, which describes the petitioner's state after having passed through the process of salvation – "we once again hear God's explicit name in the serenity of third person, and the discussion is about Him, and not to Him," borrowing the words of Strauss.

Do the three clauses of stanza III correspond to the three aspects of the petitioner's distress, concerning which he expressed his complaint in stanza I and his supplication in stanza II?

Already at the beginning of this section, when we asked about the contrasts between stanza I and stanza III, we alluded to such a network of connections. It seems that each of the clauses in stanza II expresses **the opposite and the repair** of the petitioner's situation with respect to one of the three dimensions of his distress, but the order of stanza III is not the same order of these sections in stanzas I and II:

**The first clause** in stanza III – "But I have trusted in Your mercy" – deals with the "I," the petitioner. It describes the change for the better **in his mental state.** There is no longer "sorrow in his heart," and he is no longer bereft of counsel, as he was in the second section of his complaint, and he is no longer concerned "lest he sleep the sleep of death," as in the second section of his supplication, but rather he is filled with trust in God's mercy.

There is no doubt that the letter *vav* with which this clause opens is the oppositional *vav*. What was stated earlier against which this clause stands in opposition? It seems that the opposition in this clause does not relate to the clause that precedes it ("But I," as opposed to “my enemies"),[[4]](#footnote-4) but rather to the clause that precedes that clause, which also related to the psalmist's mental state: "Lighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death." The sentence thus means: "But I" will not die, in accordance with the possibility that I raised earlier, but rather I will live, for surely, "I have trusted in Your mercy."

**The second clause** in stanza III – "My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation" – describes the very opposite of **the concrete reality** in which the petitioner finds himself: God will deliver him from his trouble and save him from his enemy. This clause stands in opposition to the complaint: "And those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved." The Radak noted this opposition: "'My heart shall rejoice' – as opposed to 'And those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved,' and when You deliver me, my heart shall rejoice, and they will grieve."[[5]](#footnote-5) This contrast teaches that with the words, "Your salvation," the petitioner has in mind salvation from his enemies who are plotting to kill him. If so, it is not those who trouble him who will rejoice when he falls, but rather his own heart will rejoice when God saves him from their hands. This clause then repairs the third section of the petitioner's complaint and supplication.

**The third clause** in stanza III – "I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me" – constitutes a full repair of **the relationship between God and the psalmist.** The hiding of God's face about which the psalmist had complained in the first section of stanza I, and for whose cessation he had pleaded in the first section of stanza II, is indeed repaired with a mutual relationship of joy and good will between God and the psalmist. God deals bountifully with the petitioner, and the petitioner sings a song of thanksgiving to God. The common denominator in all three sections of the psalm that deal with the relationship between God and the psalmist is that in each of them the petitioner mentions the name of God (which is not mentioned again in any other section of the psalm).

The order of the components in stanza III, which is not the same as the order in stanzas I-II, was already explained as stemming from the progress of its clauses over the axis of time, from the present to the hoped for future. First the petitioner fills with an inner feeling of trust in God's salvation, "But I trusted"; this is followed by the salvation itself, "My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation"; and finally the petitioner's response to its arrival, "I will sing to the Lord." According to this chronological order, the first change is the inner change in the personal situation of the petitioner, from sorrow and fear of death to quiet trust in God's mercy. The next change is a change with respect to his enemies; he will be delivered from their hands. The full repair of the relationship between the petitioner and God, which finds expression in his song to God for having dealt bountifully with him, is the end, as well as the climax, of the process.

This order – in which the solution of the petitioner's situation is completed in almost the reverse order of the way his distress was presented in the previous stanzas, and in which the psalm's conclusion is the opposite of its beginning – is fitting also from a literary and a substantive perspective.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Now that we have seen the contrasting relationship between stanza III and the two previous stanzas, let us consider another fundamental difference between it and the previous stanzas. In stanzas I-II, God stands at the center of the actions (or lack of actions) described in them, whereas the petitioner is passive. Thus, in the complaint in stanza I – "How long will **You forget me,** O Lord… will **You hide…**." Even in the following sections, where the grammatical subject is the petitioner himself or his enemy, "How long shall I take counsel in my soul…"; "How long shall my enemy be exalted over me," the substantive subject is in fact God, as if the petitioner were saying: "How long **will You allow** this situation to continue, that I take counsel in my soul, and that my enemy is exalted over me?"

The same is true in stanza II. God is the subject of the actions: "Look, hear me," "Lighten my eyes," and thus He is responsible for what will happen to the petitioner if He fails to answer his prayer – "Lest I sleep the sleep of death, lest my enemy say…." The petitioner himself, as stated, remains in a passive position throughout these two stanzas (even when he serves as the grammatical subject of one clause or the other).

This undergoes a dramatic change in stanza III. The upheaval in the petitioner's situation in this stanza, even though it has not yet actually taken place, finds expression in the fact that he begins to play an active role. He becomes the subject of the three clauses constituting this stanza, and his various actions stand at the heart of the stanza, though in constant connection to God's actions in his regard.

This dramatic change expresses itself in the word that opens this stanza: "But I." Earlier we considered the question – "But I," in contrast to what? We answered that the contrast is to the clause in the petitioner's supplication, "Lest I sleep the sleep of death" – "But I" will surely live, because "I have trusted in Your mercy." Perhaps we can expand on this answer: Placing the "I" at the beginning of stanza III marks the change in the situation of the "I" from what it had been the entire length of the psalm until this point, as if saying: "But I" – am no longer passive, depressed and afraid, as I was in the previous stanzas; but rather, I am filled with trust in Your mercy. The strengthening of the "I" is not a sign of the psalmist's pride and arrogance, but rather it stems from a strengthening of his trust in God and His mercy for him.

In the second clause of stanza III, the subject is "my heart" (which is the same as "I"), and its action is "shall rejoice." Here too, the reason for his gladness is God's action in his regard – "Your salvation," which allows his heart to rejoice.

In the third clause, the "I" which serves as the subject and the action performed by it are represented by one word, “*ashira*,” "I will sing," and the entire action is "to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me."

We see, then, that stanza III stands out as the opposite of the two previous stanzas in the psalm in several respects: **Substantively –** as it is exceedingly positive and optimistic; **stylistically** – the expressions which contrast with earlier expressions in the psalm,[[7]](#footnote-7) and especially the mention of God's name in the third person in the conclusion of the stanza as a sign of calm; **in the reversal of the order of the discussion** in relation to the previous stanzas; in **the rising of the "I"** of the petitioner, from depressed passivity, to activity filled with joy and thanksgiving.

### VI. COnclusion

 We have not yet answered the questions that we raised at the beginning of the previous section regarding the radical upheaval in the petitioner's consciousness from the bitter complaint that he expressed in stanza I to the trust and joy that he expresses in stanza III. There is no hint in the psalm that some external event took place in the reality in which the psalmist was living, which could have caused such a significant change in him. How, then, are we to understand an upheaval of this sort?

 The change in question was not really a sudden change, but rather a gradual change. This change began already in the transition from the complaint to the supplication, as we noted at the end of section IV of this study. In the closing sentence of that section, we said that it was only after the psalmist laid out his complaints at length that his heart opened to a supplication that contains hope, as is hinted in stanza II. Now we can add that after having offered an emotional prayer, a prayer that contained the buds of hope for the future, only then did the psalmist recognize that his prayer was heard and that God was no longer hiding His face from him. Just the opposite: His mercy for him is certain, and His salvation shall surely come! In this way, the inner process that our psalmist underwent has been completed. The third stanza of the psalm, which is the shortest but most elevated stanza in the psalm, concisely expresses this mature religious awareness, and it concludes with the cry of joy: "I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me."

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. We discussed one of many examples of this phenomenon in our study of Psalm 142, a psalm of supplication which ends in verse 8 with: "Bring my soul out of prison, that I may give thanks to Your name: the righteous shall crown themselves in me; for You shall deal bountifully with me." See our remarks in that study at the end of section V and at the beginning of section VI, and in notes 10-11 there, which are relevant to our psalm as well. A slightly different example was discussed in our study of Psalm VI, in section V of that study (pp. 34-36), and note 22 there. The notes in these two places include references to additional psalms. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The contrast between these two verses is reflected in the play on words: "sorrow in my heart" (***yagon*** *be-levavi*) – "my heart shall rejoice” (***yagel*** *levavi*). In the words *yagon* and *yagel*, there is an interchange of two phonetically close consonants, *nun* and *lamed*, which often interchange in Scripture. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. "*Al Shelosha Mizmorei Tehillim*," in *Be-Darkhei Ha-Sifrut*" (Jerusalem, 5736), pp. 69-70. We slightly altered the citation to make it more easily understandable to the reader. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The commentators struggled to explain it in contrast to the previous verse: "Lest my enemy say, I have prevailed agaisnt him; and those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved." But their arguments are forced.

Tz. P. Chajes explains: "The enemies (mentioned in the previous verse) will laugh at me and at my trust, but I will hold fast in my righteousness." This contrast is not really found in the psalm: The enemies do indeed expect his fall, but they do not laugh at his trust in God, and he did not trust in God's salvation until this very verse; on the contrary, he was filled with the fear, 'Lest my enemy say, I have prevailed against him.'"

Amos Chakham explains: "But as for me (this does not apply to my enemy). 'In your mercy' – in your protection and Your promise to defend those who fear You and who direct their prayers to You." The contrast to the previous verse is not clear according to his explanation. He seems to mean as follows: My enemies will not rejoice at my downfall, for I believe that I will be saved from them when You defend me. But according to this, the contrast is not between "my enemy" and "myself," but between "downfall" and "rescue."

The Radak explains that the contrast is not to that which was stated explicitly in the previous verse, but to what is implied by it: "But I – they [the enemies] think that I have no Savior, 'but I have trusted in Your mercy' – that You will save me." [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This contrast allows us to propose that the words "But I" contrast with the words "my enemy" in the previous verse as follows: But I – since I have trusted in Your mercy, and I am certain that You will deliver me, **my heart shall rejoice** in Your salvation, and **my enemy will not rejoice** when I fall. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. It should also be noted that in this way, the psalm opens with the name of God (with an address to Him): "How long, O Lord," and also closes with the name of God (with a statement about Him): "I will sing to the Lord." [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. "But I" – in contrast to things that were stated earlier in the psalm (depending on the explanation); "my heart shall rejoice" – in contrast to "sorrow in my heart" in stanza I, and in contrast to "those who trouble me shall rejoice" in stanza II. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)