YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***TEHILLIM* (SERIES II)**

**Rav Elchanan Samet**

**Shiur #10: Psalm 142 - "You Are My Refuge and My Portion**

**in the Land of the Living"**

**The Soul's Escape from the Prison of Loneliness**

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|  1. A Maskil of David; A prayer when he was in the cave. |
| I 2. With my voice I will cry to the Lord; |
|  With my voice I will entreat the Lord.  |
| II 3. I will pour out my complaint before Him; |
|  I will declare my trouble before Him. |
|  4. When my spirit faints within me, |
| III then You know my path. | IV 5 Look on my right hand, and behold,  |
|  In the way wherein I walk |  but there is no man who knows me: |
|  they have hidden a snare for me. |  I have nowhere to flee; |
|  |  No man cares for my soul. |
| V 6. I cry to You, O lord: |
|  I say, You are my refuge  |
|  and my portion in the land of the living. |
| VI 7. Attend to my cry; | VIII 8. Bring my soul out of prison, |
|  For I am brought very low: |  that I may give thanks to Your name; |
| VII 8. Deliver me from my persecutors; | IX 9. The righteous shall crown themselves in me; |
|  for they are stronger than I. |  10. For You shall deal bountifully with me. |

### I. Introduction: The role of the interpretation of a Psalm in the book of *Tehillim*

 Psalm 142 is a typical psalm of supplication, in which the psalmist petitions God to save him from his enemies, who are persecuting him.[[1]](#footnote-1) Psalms of supplication of this type are among the most common in the book of *Tehillim.* Modern commentators refer to all of these psalms as "individual psalms of supplication."[[2]](#footnote-2) With respect to its content, our psalm is similar to many psalms of its type.[[3]](#footnote-3) The similarity in content is also reflected in linguistic-stylistic similarity; phrases and verses appearing in our psalm are found verbatim or with minor changes in other psalms of supplication in the book of *Tehilim* (see below, note 5).

 Several modern commentators highlight the similarity between our psalm and other psalms of its type. Here, for example, is what Tz. P. Chajes says at the beginning of his commentary to our psalm:

[This is] **one of the usual poems** in our book, of someone in trouble, with nobody to help him… and he prays to God that He should save him. When he is rescued, the righteous will rejoice and their spirit will grow stronger… **Almost all of its phrases are found in other places,** as you will see in the commentary.[[4]](#footnote-4)

 Similarly, in the conclusion of his commentary on the psalm (in the *Da'at Mikra* series), Amos Chakham writes:

**The descriptions** of distress and persecution that are found in this psalm **are similar to those in many other psalms.**

In note 12 there, Chakham lists about twenty phrases in our psalm that are similar to expressions found in other psalms and in other books of the Bible.[[5]](#footnote-5)

When a commentator approaches the task of explaining a psalm in the book of *Tehillim*, he must determine the specific literary type to which it belongs, and he must also point out the substantive and stylistic similarities between the psalm and other psalms of its type. But the commentator must not stop there. Exclusive occupation with uncovering the similarities is liable to lead to the hasty judgment that the psalm is "one of the usual poems in our book, of someone in trouble," or that "almost all of its phrases are found in other places." This is likely to lead to the conclusion that the psalm has no unique statement and lacks originality.

In truth, the primary role of interpretation involves uncovering the unique aspects of the psalm, the one-time statement lying behind the common motif of the supplication of the psalmist who is being persecuted by his enemies and behind the phrases familiar to us from other places.

The composition, which makes use of existing and familiar foundations while arranging them in a new and special order, is what determines the quality of the tune and its uniqueness. Uncovering the structure of the psalm will, more than anything else, bring us closer to its specific subject and unique objective. The structure of the psalm is what distinguishes it from similar psalms, which it resembles with respect to its literary type and its contents and style, but does not merely repeat without adding something new.

As usual, our work uncovering the structure of the psalm starts with transcribing the psalm in the way that a poem is supposed to be transcribed – dividing it into short lines and stanzas.[[6]](#footnote-6) Our psalm is transcribed in such a manner at the beginning of this study. The psalm consists of five short stanzas of two lines each, and four longer stanzas, with three or even four lines.

Our transcription of the psalm already alludes to the psalm's structure, as will be explained below, but in the meantime, let us just note that according to this transcription, the psalm is divided into four sections: 1. Stanzas I-II; 2. Stanzas III-IV; 3. Stanza V; 4. Stanzas VI-IX. This division of the psalm will be clarified step by step over the course of our discussion of its structure.

The words of our psalm are for the easiest part to understand and do not lead to any special exegetical difficulties.[[7]](#footnote-7) We will therefore proceed directly to a discussion of the structure of the psalm, and integrate any necessary exegetical comments into that discussion in the appropriate places.

### II. THe opening of the psalm (stanzas I-II): An invitation to pray to God

 Stanzas I-II are different from the rest of the psalm with respect to two stylistic phenomena.

 First, in these two stanzas, and only in them, the psalmist speaks **about** God in the third person. In all the other stanzas, without exception, the psalmist addresses God in the second person, and twice he even turns to Him with the word You (in stanzas III and V).

Second, in these two stanzas, there are four verbs, all of which express the psalmist's prayer in **future tense: "I will cry"; I will entreat"; "I will pour out my complaint"; "I will declare my trouble."** In the other stanzas in the psalm, the future-tense verbs disappear,[[8]](#footnote-8)and they are replaced by verbs in the past tense or in the imperative. Special mention should be made of stanza V, whose linguistic connection to stanza I is clear, but the difference between them in the tense of their verbs is equally clear:

With my voice **I will cry** to the Lord -

**I cry** to You O Lord, **I say**…

 Before we attempt to offer a reason for these two differences in stanzas I-II, let us explain them. The two clauses of stanza I stand in direct synonymous parallelism:

With my voice I will cry to the Lord;

With my voice I will entreat the Lord.

The repeated opening, "With my voice to the Lord," means: "I will cry to and entreat the Lord **with** my voice."[[9]](#footnote-9) In both clauses, the word *koli*, "my voice," is advanced to the beginning of the clause, for the purpose of emphasis: My cry and entreaty will not be silent or secret; rather, they will be sounded with my voice, which firmly expresses what is in my heart. This justifies the request appearing later in the psalm, in stanza VI: "**Attend** to my cry."[[10]](#footnote-10)

The first clause of stanza II – "I will pour out my complaint before Him" – stands in chiastic parallelism with the two clauses of stanza I, and at the same time it stands in chiastic parallelism with the clause that follows it in stanza II:

Stanza 1:

With my voice to the Lord I will cry/ entreat

Stanza II:

I will pour out before Him my complaint

My trouble before Him I will declare

The first chiastic parallelism, between the two clauses of stanza I and the beginning of stanza II, is meant to set stanza II apart from the previous stanza; the second chiastic parallelism between the two clauses of stanza II is meant to close the series of four synonymous statements in stanzas I-II.[[11]](#footnote-11)

If, indeed, the words, "I will declare My trouble before Him," serve as a conclusion of the preceding clauses, why, in our transcription of the psalm, did we join the beginning of verse 4 – "When my spirit faints within me" – to stanza II, contrary to the division of the verses?

The words, "When my spirit faints within me," do not connect well to the continuation of verse 4 (and it is possible that the copulative *vav* at the beginning of the next clause, "then [literally, and] You know my path," is meant to overcome this difficulty, though it is not clear how). The suggestions proposed by the commentators, who try to unify all the parts of verse 4 as it stands before us, appear forced.[[12]](#footnote-12)

 Thus writes Tz. P. Chajes in his commentary to verse 3, on the words, "I will pour out my complaint before Him":

See *Tehillim* 102:1: "A prayer of the afflicted, when he **faints,** and **pours out his complaint** before the Lord." This indicates that the idea of attaching the first part of verse 4 to here: "I will **pour out my complaint** before Him; I will declare my trouble before Him, when my spirit **faints (*be-hit'atef*)** within me," is correct – when my spirit faints (*yit'alef*)[[13]](#footnote-13) because of my great trouble, I will call out to You.

 Based on *Tehillim* 102:1, where the verb "faint" comes together with the expression, "pour out a complaint,"[[14]](#footnote-14) this commentator suggests joining the clause "when my spirit faints within me" in verse 4, to the previous verse, in which it is stated: "I will pour out my complaint before Him."[[15]](#footnote-15)

In other verses as well, a person's "fainting" – distress – appears as a reason or as a description of a situation of turning to God in prayer:

*Tehillim* 61:3: From the end of the earth **I will cry to You, when** my heart **faints.**

*Yona* 2:8: **When** my soul **fainted** within me, I remembered the Lord; **and my prayer came in to You,** into your holy Temple.

It may thus be argued that the words in our psalm, "when my spirit faints within me," are also intended to teach when and why the psalmist will declare his trouble and pour out his complaint. Thus, these words serve as a sort of heading for stanzas I-II, but in order not to detract from the dramatic opening of stanza I, "With my voice I will cry to the Lord," this "heading" is pushed off to the end of stanzas I-II. The truth is that without these words, stanzas I-II fail to explain why the author of our psalm wishes to cry out to God specifically at this time.

Let us now return to the stylistic characteristic of stanzas I-II that we already mentioned: the future-tense verbs. Consider how Amos Chakham explains these verbs in his *Da'at Mikra* commentary:

With my voice I cry to the Lord – The future form, *ez'ak*, here describes an action performed at the time of the narration of the event: "I cry." Another interpretation: I have come to cry to the Lord, the future form being used to express an action that the speaker intends to perform immediately.

This commentator uses these two possibilities to explain also the verbs *etchanan* (I will entreat), *eshpokh* (I will pour out), and *agid* (I will declare) in the continuation of verses 2-3.

 The possibility of these two explanations stems from the flexibility in the use of tenses in Biblical poetry. A future-tense verb can be used to express an action performed in the present,[[16]](#footnote-16) and sometimes even an action performed in the past.[[17]](#footnote-17) But it is, of course, possible that a future-tense verb refers to an action that will be performed in the future (immediate or distant). Deciding between the various possibilities must be based in each particular place on the meaning and on the context.

 Can we decide in our case between the two proposed explanations? And does this determination have any importance?

 In our opinion, both of these questions can be answered in the affirmative, as will be explained below. The consistent use of the future tense in stanzas I-II, in contrast to the cessation of its use in the rest of the psalm, and in particular the linguistic relationship between stanza I and stanza V that was noted above, intimate that the use of the future tense at the beginning of the psalm is deliberate, and that the verbs should be understood in their plain sense, as expressing a plan for the future, albeit the immediate future. The relationship between stanzas I-II and the later stanzas can be understood now as the relationship between a declaration of what the psalmist is about to do and the implementation of that declaration in actual practice. This declaration is directed toward us, the readers of the psalm, or to the psalmist himself, as sort of a self-invitation to cry out to God: "With my voice **I will cry out** to the Lord" (stanza I) – the psalmist informs us, and he immediately implements his plan: "**I cry** to you, O Lord" (stanza V).[[18]](#footnote-18)

 The assumption that in stanzas I-II the psalmist informs us of his intention to cry out to God, and that only beginning in stanza III does he implement that plan, accords with the second stylistic characteristic that distinguishes stanzas I-II from the rest of the psalm: the psalmist's speaking of God in the third person. Since this is only a declaration of his intention to pray to God, the psalmist does not yet turn to God in the second person. This he will do when he begins to implement his plan – in stanza III. Indeed, his prayer in stanza III begins with direct address to God: "**You** know my path," and in this way the transition from declaration to implementation is emphasized.[[19]](#footnote-19)

 This discussion concerning the special nature of stanzas I-II and their role in the psalm is relevant for the clarification of the structure of the psalm as a whole. According to the exegetical determination that we have reached, stanzas I-II constitute an "introduction" to the psalm, a sort of preview, and thus the body of the psalm begins only in stanza III. The division of the psalm into its major parts thus begins only with this stanza.[[20]](#footnote-20)

 We must still clarify what need there is for this invitation, the psalmist's relatively long declaration regarding what he is about to do immediately afterwards.[[21]](#footnote-21) Why doesn't he begin the psalm with the very appeal to God in stanza III?

 In our opinion, the answer to this question is that the psalmist's distress described in our psalm is not localized. At the point in time in which the psalmist is standing, there is no particular event prompting him to turn to God with an urgent and desperate appeal that He should save him (as in the case of the appeal at the beginning of Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"). The psalmist's distress is an ongoing situation; he has long been overcome by a sense of emotional imprisonment and depleted strength. A person who finds himself in such a situation is liable to forget the power of prayer to God and the remedy that it can bring to his ongoing plight. But in the case of our psalmist, the desire has ripened to engage in prayer as a conscious process. Stanzas I-II come to inform us how the psalmist has come to this recognition that when his spirit faints within him, it would be good for him to direct the voice of his cry to God and declare his trouble before Him.

### III. THe first Half (Stanzas III-Iv): the implementation of the psalmist's declaration in the introduction: "I will declare My Trouble before Him."

 Stanzas III-IV constitute the first part of the body of the psalm following the introduction. In this part, the psalmist spells out the distress in which he finds himself, and he does this with a direct appeal to God. In this way, he implements what he announced in the introduction that he intended to do: "I will declare my trouble before Him."[[22]](#footnote-22) What, then, is his trouble?

Then You know my path.

In the way wherein[[23]](#footnote-23) I walk

they have hidden a snare for me.

 In this stanza (stanza III), the psalmist complains that in the way where he regularly walks,[[24]](#footnote-24) his enemies are trying to cause him to stumble, or to catch him, in the manner of hunters who lay a snare for an animal in the place where they know it moves about.

 The words "in the way wherein I walk" serve a double role. On the one hand, they serve as an expansion of the words "my path" in the previous line (that is to say: You know my path, i.e., the way wherein I walk); on the other hand, they are part of the body of the complaint in the next line: "In the way wherein I walk they have hidden a snare for me."

 What does the psalmist mean when he emphasizes: "**You** know my path"? It would seem that the psalmist wishes to bring God to testify about the psalmist himself, about something that only He can confirm. What is that?

 The Ibn Ezra cites the explanation proposed by R. Moshe (Gikitila):

R. Moshe says: "My path" – which was straight towards you.[[25]](#footnote-25)

If we accept this explanation, then the continuation that follows from it is: "In the way wherein I walk" – which is the straight path in the eyes of God – "they have hidden a snare for me" – to cause me to stumble and to veer from the path of God.

R. Moshe's explanation sets the psalmist's trouble into a moral-religious context. But this is not the only possible explanation (see note 25), and according to other explanations of the words "You know my path," we are dealing with an actual path in which the psalmist is walking and with the real damage that his enemies wish to cause him as he walks on this path.

It is difficult to "translate" the psalmist's complaint regarding his enemies' intentions to harm him into real terms, and we remain in doubt as to what the psalmist means. Are his enemies lying in a physical ambush in order to hurt him? Do they wish to kill him? Or perhaps "they have hidden a snare for me" is a metaphor for their attempt to cause him moral-religious harm?[[26]](#footnote-26) From the wording of the psalm, it is difficult to conclude what exactly is the psalmist's trouble. This vagueness seems to be deliberate, and it is typical of the descriptions of troubles in psalms of supplication in the book of *Tehillim.*[[27]](#footnote-27)

Stanza IV continues the previous stanza with a further description of the trouble, and in it the psalmist petitions God for the first time:

Look on my right hand, and behold,[[28]](#footnote-28)

but there is no man who helps me.

I have nowhere to flee;

No man cares for my soul.

The psalmist proceeds on his path all alone. His enemies lay a snare for him along the way, but there is nobody to help him and save him from them.[[29]](#footnote-29)

 Why does the psalmist mention only his right side: "Look on my right hand, and behold"? The Radak (and similarly the Meiri) answers: "He mentions the right hand, and not the left – this is an abridged form, as is common in the Bible, for from one we can understand the other." It seems that this self-evident completion should be made in the continuation of stanza IV:

Look on my right hand, and behold, but there is no man who helps me:

[Look on my left hand, and behold,] I have nowhere to flee; no man cares for my soul.

 If so, this stanza is built around defective parallelism. The words, "but there is no man who helps me," parallel the words, "no man cares for my soul," and this is how they should be understood, as explained by Amos Chakham:

There is no man who helps me – No one offers me help against my enemies. The word *makir* refers to someone who helps another person in his time of trouble. Similarly (*Ruth* 2:19): "Blessed be he who helped you [*makirekh*]."

Since "there is no man who helps me," who "cares for my soul" and wishes to save me from my enemies, "I have nowhere to flee." In other words, I have no possible way to flee from my persecutors.

Let us summarize the psalmist's "declaring his trouble," as it finds expression in his words in stanzas III-IV. We will start with what we cannot say: We cannot offer a concrete account of his trouble – who his enemies are; what the background of their persecution of the psalmist is; what they actually do in practice; what the "snare" is that they hide for him along his path.[[30]](#footnote-30) We are still unable to decide between a metaphorical interpretation of "my path," "this way wherein I walk," and "snare," and a concrete interpretation of these terms. Nevertheless, even without knowing any of these details, we can well sense the psalmist's **emotional** distress, and we can even describe it, thanks to the precise expression that he gives his emotional state in stanzas III-IV.[[31]](#footnote-31)

The person who is praying walks along his path, which God knows, while his enemies try to harm him in devious ways ("they have hidden a snare for me"). However, it is not the danger itself that they pose that stands at the heart of his distress, but rather the sense that he is alone in the world, and that nobody on his path, neither to the right nor to the left, wishes him well ("no man cares for my soul"), that nobody in the world is ready to help him against his enemies. For this reason, he comes close to despair: "I have nowhere to flee."

Were we asked to give a title to the emotional distress described in these stanzas, it would be: **"The desperate loneliness of the unjustly persecuted."**

Loneliness is a difficult and depressing human experience in every man's life. But the loneliness of one who is being persecuted by his enemies is difficult sevenfold. In addition to the real danger that he experiences in his struggle with his enemies, there is also the bitter realization that no one from the people around him shows him compassion, and he is left alone in a world that is indifferent and insensitive to the plight of the persecuted and the wickedness of his persecutors.

To be continued next week.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. According to the rites of most Jewish communities, our psalm is not included in the liturgy. Only according to the Yemenite rite is it customary to recite it together with the previous psalm, Psalm 141, at the conclusion of the weekday afternoon service. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In the scholarly literature written in Hebrew, it is customary to refer to this type of psalm as a *kinat yachid*, the lament of an individual. In the appendix to our study of Psalm 6 (*Iyyunim Be-Mizmorei Tehilim*, pp. 36-37), we noted the mistake in this designation and how it came about, and we offered an alternative: *techinat yachid*, an indidual psalm of supplication. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For example, Psalms 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 13, 17, 22, 27, 28, 31, 35, and 41 – all these just in the first book of *Tehillim.* Additional psalms in the first book of *Tehillim* include the motif of the persecution of the enemies and of the distress in which the psalmist finds himself on account of those enemies, but not as the primary motif. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In the series *Torah*, *Nevi'im* *U-Ketuvim im Peirush Mada'i*, by Avraham Kahana, the volume on *Tehilim* (Zhitomir, 5663). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Those interested in these linguistic parallels can find them in Chajes' commentary on our psalm or in the list compiled by Amos Chakham. We will refer to these parallels only when needed for our purposes. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See the introductory study to this series of studies. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Because of the apparent "simplicity" of our psalm, the commentators offered little expansion in the commentaries that they wrote on it, and they instead expounded at length in their explanation of the psalm's heading, which leaves an especially dramatic impression: "A Maskil of David: A prayer when he was in the cave." The commentators discuss the cave to which this heading alludes. Perhaps the cave of Adulam, to which David fled at the beginning of the period of his flights from Shaul, and in which gathered David's brothers and his father's entire household and four hundred discontented men over whom David became a captain (I *Shemuel* 22:1-2). Or perhaps it is the cave of Ein Gedi, where David and his men hid from Shaul, who searched for David with the help of three thousand of his soldiers, and into which Shaul entered to relieve himself, and in which David cut off the corner of Shaul's robe (I *Shemuel* 24:1-4; this is the opinion of the traditional commentators). Neither possibility accords perfectly which the content of the psalm, and in order to make them accord, all sorts of forced explanations are necessary. Some commentators subordinated their explanation of the entire psalm to what is stated in its heading, this leading them to various kinds of difficulties. According to our approach in these studies, each psalm in the book of *Tehillim* must be explained on its own, independently of what is stated in its heading, and we will do this in the present study as well. The connection between the psalms and their headings in the book of *Tehillim* is a broad topic, which must be discussed in a general introduction to the book of *Tehillim*, and this is not the place for that. See our comments in Appendix I to study XXX in our book, and in the appendix to Psalm 100 in the present series. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Only in the last stanza – stanza IX – do we find two verbs in future sense – *yakhtiru* ("they shall crown themselves") and *tigmol* ("you shall deal bountifully") – as this stanza describes the future: When God will deal bountifully with the psalmist and deliver him from his trouble, then the righteous will respond to His deliverance. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Amos Chakham (note 2 in his commentary to the psalm) proposes two explanations of these two clauses: "The word *koli*, ‘my voice,’ is used in place of *bekoli*, ‘with my voice.’ Alternatively, the word *koli* is the direct object of the verb *ez'ak*, ‘I cry’ (and similarly, the direct object of the verb *etchanan*, ‘I entreat,’ in the parallel clause)… Similarly (*Tehillim* 3:5): ‘With my voice I call unto the Lord (*koli… ekra*).’" [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The psalmist makes a similar petitition in *Tehillim* 130:2: "Lord, **hear my voice:** let your ears **be attentive to the voice** of my supplication." See our comments regarding this verse in our study of Psalm 130, p. 450, which are appropriate with respect to our psalm as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Regarding chiasmus as a way to conclude a series of parallel clauses, see our book, p. 400, note 12. Even though the matter in our psalm is not similar to the examples there, what we wrote above appears to be correct. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The commentators have generally interpreted the words "then you know my path" as a parenthetical statement, explaining that the direct continuation of the words "when my spirit faints within me" is "in the way wherein I walk they have hidden a snare for me." Accordingly, the meaning of the verse is: When my spirit faints within me owing to my many troubles… in this way I walk, **bent over and afflicted,** as they have hidden a snare for me to trap me…"; as proposed by the *Metzudot*. For a different explanation, see Amos Chakham, *Da'at Mikra*. But all these explanations seem forced. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The verb *ataf* appears about ten times in the Bible in the sense of being weak and in distress. Therefore, this commentator replaces the word *hit'atef* with *hit'alef*. Several traditional commentators connect this word to *ataf* in its common sense in Rabbinic Hebrew – cover or be covered, a sense that is very rare in Biblical Hebrew. Modern commentators see these as two different and unconnected words. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The connection between *le-hit'atef* and *si'ach* in the sense of prayer is found also in *Tehillim* 77:4: "I meditate (*asicha*), and my spirit faints (*ve-tit'atef*)." [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Dividing a psalm into subdivisions (in our case, dividing it into stanzas) in such a way that one verse is divided between two different subdivisions of the psalm is not a rare situation. See our study of Psalm 100, section V, and additional examples of this phenomenon in note 25, there. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For example, *Tehillim* 22:3: "I cry (*ekra*) in the daytime, but you answer (*ta'aneh*) not"; *Tehillim* 28:1: "To You I cry (*ekra*), O Lord, my rock, be not silent to me." [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. For example, *Tehillim* 18:5-8 (all of the future-tense verbs that express a past action are marked in bold): "The bonds of death encircled me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid (***yeva'atuni*)**. The cords of She'ol compassed me about: the snares of death took me by surprise. In my distress I called **(*ekra*)**upon the Lord, and cried **(*ashave'a*)** to my God: He heard **(*yishma*)** my voice out of His Temple, and my cry came **(*tavo*)** before Him, into His ears. Thus the earth shook and trembled; and the foundations of the hills moved **(*yirgazu*)** and were shaken, becaue of His anger." [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. What we said about the flexibility in the use of tenses in Biblical poetry is, of course, true also with repect to past-tense verbs: "I cry (*za'akti*) to You… I say -… The past form *za'akti*, is used here to express a present action, like the word *ez'ak*, 'I cry' in verse 3" (Amos Chakham, *Da'at Mikra*). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The letter *vav* at the beginning of the address might stem from the need to connect the words appearing at the beginning of the verse, "When my spirit faints within me," to the address to God in the continuation, as we proposed above. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Regarding the fact that the introduction to the psalm is not part of the structure of the psalm or its division into two halves, see the introductory *shiur* to this series, section IV3. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Stanzas I-II are comprised of 17 words, whereas the two large sections in the continuation of the psalm (each of its two halves) are either 21 or 23 words. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. In accordance with the Biblical convention, the implementation of the plan spelled out at the beginning of the psalm, in stanzas I-II, is executed in chiastic order:

Stanza I – plan to sound a cry: "I will cry to the Lord with My voice.”

Stanza II – plan to declare the trouble: "I will declare my trouble before Him."

Stanzas III-IV – declaration of the trouble: "They have hidden a snare for me.

Stanzas V – the cry: "I cry to You O Lord." [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The word *zu* means "that." The word *zu* appears 14 times in the Bible. The word *zeh* bears a similar sense in 12 places in the Bible. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *Ahalekh*, "I walk" – "The future form, *ahalekh*, refers to an action that is performed regularly, ‘I walk’" (Amos Chakham, *Da'at Mikra*). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. So too Rabbeinu Yeshaya, and in similar fashion the Radak. But Rashi explained this differently: "'Then You know my path' – how many traps are found there." The Ibn Ezra also has an alternative explanation: "'Then You know my path' – the path **that I wanted** to follow." According to both of them, God's knowledge relates to different concealed matters, but they are not connected to the psalmist's moral-religious conduct during his lifetime. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Similarly, the prohibition, "You shall not put a stumbling block before the blind" (*Vayikra* 19:14) was understood by *Chazal* in a metaphoric manner, as a prohibition to cause another person to stumble into transgression. See our study of *Parashat Kedoshim*, 1st series. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See our study of Psalm 6, p. 27, and our study of Psalm 30, pp. 86-88. And see below, note 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The medieval commentators disagree about the meaning of the words: *habet… u-re'eh*. The Ibn Ezra writes: "R. Moshe said that these are imperatives;" and so too the Meiri: "In my opinion, imperatives." But the Ibn Ezra himself, as well as the Radak, explain that "both of them are infinitives, and not imperatives: When I look right or left, there is no man who knows me" (Radak). We have adopted the first understanding, because each of the stanzas beginning with stanza III includes an appeal to God, whereas according to the Ibn Ezra and the Radak, stanza IV lacks an appeal to God. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The idea that stanza IV continues the previous stanza regarding walking in the path is found already in the Meiri'scommentary, s.v. *avad manos mimeni* – "Because wherever one might have thought I might walk there, they lie in wait for me." [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Several commentators resolved this problem by way of the psalm's heading in verse 1: The enemies of the person offering this prayer – David – are Shaul and his men; the background for their persecution of David is described at length in the book of *Shemuel*, and the "snare" that they hid for David along his escape routes is the attempt to capture and kill him. This, however, does not accord with the account of the author's loneliness in stanza IV, as David was surrounded by an entire battalion of loyal followers. See our comments in note 7 regarding the relationship between the heading and the body of the psalm. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. This discord between the absence of any concrete account of the trouble and the expanded and detailed description of the psalmist's subjective emotional state in the wake of his trouble, is typical of many psalms of supplication in the book of *Tehillim*; see the references mentioned in note 27. This is in fact what allowed these psalms to enter the liturgy in later generations, for a concrete description of the trouble might create a barrier between the author of the psalm and the person using it in his prayers, because their respective plights are generally not the same. By contrast, a description of a mental state, combined with a clouding of the actual facts, has the power to evoke identification on the part of anyone found in a similar mental state. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)