YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***TEHILLIM* (SERIES II)**

**Rav Elchanan Samet**

**Shiur #13: Psalm 11 - “How Can You Say To My Soul, Flee Like A Bird…”**

**A Theological and Practical Polemic in the Book of Tehillim (continuation)**

### IV. Stanza IV: The beginning of the psalmist's Response – the principle of Providence

The Lord in His holy Temple,

The Lord whose throne is in heaven,

Whose eyes behold,

Whose eyelids try, the children of men:

Stanza IV is comprised of two synonymous parallelisms. The first one appears to be direct and complete, even though its two clauses are not identical from a grammatical perspective:

The Lord in His holy Temple,

The Lord whose throne is in heaven

 This synonymous parallelism teaches that "His holy Temple" is in heaven (Ibn Ezra, Radak, and other commentaries). God's "throne" is found in "His holy Temple" in heaven.

The second parallelism is also synonymous and direct, but its first clause is defective, and it is completed by the second clause:

Whose eyes behold[[1]](#footnote-1) [the children of men],

Whose eyelids[[2]](#footnote-2) try the children of men

Not only does the second clause complete the first, but it also explains it. God's seeing is not mere seeing; rather, it involves "trying" the people whom He sees. In other words, God's eyes examine people's actions.

The two parts of stanza IV appear to be contradictory.

The first parallelism describes God as transcendental, distanced and apart from our world He sits on His throne in His holy Temple **in heaven**, high up and far from the world of man. God's distance from the world seems to accord with the account of "those who say to the psalmist's soul" that human society is controlled by the wicked, without Divine intervention.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The second parallelism, in contrast, describes God as overseeing the children of men, taking an interest in them, and examining their various actions.

This contradiction between the two parts of stanza IV is reflected in the fact that the stanza opens with the name of "the Lord" and closes with the words "the children of men." What connects the two contradictory pairs of clauses, and what is the idea behind the stanza as a whole?

It appears that the primary objective of stanza IV is precisely to resolve this contradiction. The early commentators explain that "**even though** His throne is high in heaven, His eyes behold you on earth" (Rashi, and similarly the Radak and Meiri). But it seems that the two halves of stanza IV should be connected in a different way. **It is precisely because** God's throne is in heaven that He lowers His glance to the earth, and sees and examines all of the deeds of the children of men.[[4]](#footnote-4) In this way, the seemingly contradictory attributes of God can be reconciled – **His "greatness" and distance from the human world,** on the one hand, and **His meticulous monitoring and examination of people,** on the other.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Who is the speaker who sounds this argument in stanza IV? At the end of the previous section, we determined that the citation of the words of "those who say to the soul" of the psalmist ends in stanza III. If so, the argument presented in stanza IV is already that of the psalmist himself. Is it possible to prove this from what is stated in the stanza?

Across the entire length of verses that record the words of those speaking to the psalmist (stanzas I-III), God's name is not mentioned once. Not only is God's name missing from the words of these speakers, but their words do not even allude to His presence! This absence ends dramatically in the beginning of stanza IV. As in the introduction to the psalm, where God's name appears at the very beginning of the psalmist's words – "In the Lord I put my trust" – stanza IV similarly opens with the name of God, and this time God is the subject of the sentence: "The Lord in His holy Temple." God's name appears once again at the beginning of the second line of stanza IV: "The Lord, whose throne is in heaven." God's eyes and eyelids are the subjects of the next lines of stanza IV, even though His name is not mentioned in them.

There is no doubt, then, that stanza IV is not part of the words of "those who say to the psalmist's soul." Rather, it is connected to the words of the psalmist in the introduction to the psalm. In both places, God's name seems to be on the tip of the psalmist's tongue, and His presence in his consciousness is central.

It seems that both in the introduction to the psalm and in stanza IV the psalmist expresses his reservations about the words of "those who say to his soul." His reservation in the introduction to the psalm was already explained at the beginning of section II. The psalmist expresses his astonishment: Seeing that "in God I put my trust," "how can you say to my soul" words that contradict my trust in Him?

 The reservation from the words of "those who say to the psalmist's soul" in stanza IV is expressed through the very intensive appearance of God in that stanza. The twofold emphatic mentions of God's name, and His presence in all four clauses of the stanza, following after God's absence from the words of "those who say," constitute a sort of protest on the part of the psalmist against the words of "those who say." In other words: In all of your talking to me, you never put God before your eyes; you never mentioned his name, nor did you ever consider His presence in the world. But surely He sits on His throne and looks down from heaven upon the children of men!

 This reservation from the words of "those who say," as expressed by the psalmist in stanza IV, requires expansion and explanation. How does the psalmist's position regarding God's providence over the world counter the practical advice given to him by "those who say," who seek his well-being and speak to him in a reasonable fashion?[[6]](#footnote-6)

The psalmist's argument will broaden in the coming stanzas, and then it will become clear how his theological position fully answers the words of "those who say to his soul."

### V. the development of stanzas V-VI-VII from stanza IV

 We have seen that in stanza IV the psalmist formulates the principle of providence, according to which God sits in heaven, while His eyes are examining the children of men to see whether they are righteous or wicked. This principle is the foundation of the next three stanzas that conclude our psalm, stanzas V-VI-VII. These stanzas apply this principle and offer a detailed description of God's attitude to the righteous and to the wicked.

 Let us present in visual form the course of stanzas V-VI-VII, which develop from stanza IV, while emphasizing the connections between the three stanzas themselves (underlined), and between them and stanza IV (in bold):

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| *Stanza IV* |
| The Lord in His holy Temple, |
| The Lord whose throne is in heaven, |
| Whose eyes **behold**, |
| Whose eyelids **try** **(*yivchanu*)** the children of men: |
| *Stanza V* |
| The Lord **chooses (*yivchan*)** the righteous;  | But the wicked and him who loves violence His soul hates. |
| *Stanza VII* | *Stanza VI* |
| For the Lord is righteous,  | Upon the wicked He shall rain coals, fire and brimstone,  |
| He loves righteousness;  | And a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup. |
| The upright shall **behold** His face. |  |

 **The transition from stanza IV to stanza V:** Stanza IV formulates the principle of providence, and stanza V clarifies the result of the act of providence: some people are found to be righteous, while others are found to be wicked. The righteous merit a positive attitude on the part of God toward them – "The Lord **chooses** (*yivchan*)the righteous." The word *yivchan* is connected to the clause that appears in stanza IV – "Whose eyelids **try** (*yivchanu*), the children of men," but here the word *yivchan* bears a different sense: "choose" (*yivchar*), the letters *nun* and *resh* interchanging.[[7]](#footnote-7) (In the exegetical appendix to this study, we will expand upon other possible interpretations of this word and justify our decision to understand it in this manner.) In contrast to the righteous man, the wicked man merits a negative attitude – God's hate for him: "But the wicked and he who loves violence His soul hates."

 **The transition from stanza V to stanzas VI-VII:** In stanza V, the psalmist describes God's theoretical attitude, that of His **"soul,"** to the righteous and the wicked. In stanzas VI-VII, he describes God's attitude to the righteous man and to the wicked man **in actual practice.** In this way he realizes the theory that was stated in stanza V. The detailed account is presented in chiastic order in relation to the order of the appearance of the righteous man and the wicked man in stanza V. The psalmist first describes God's attitude to the wicked (stanza VI), and then he describes His attitude to the righteous (stanza VII).

 **Stanza VI** is linked to the end of stanza V ("But the **wicked** and he who loves violence His soul hates"), and it describes God's attitude to the wicked in actual practice, which follows from the hate that he feels for them: "Upon the **wicked** he shall rain" various different punishments from heaven: "coals (*pachim*), fire and brimstone, and a scorching (*zil'afot*) wind. (We will discuss the meaning of the words *pachim* and *zil'afot* in the exegetical appendix to this study.) This punishment meted out to the wicked is connected also to stanza IV, which states: "The Lord whose throne is in **heaven**." This throne is now understood as the seat of the Judge who punishes the wicked and sends down their punishment from heaven: **"He** **shall rain."**

**Stanza VII** spells out the details concerning what was stated at the beginning of stanza V ("The Lord chooses the **righteous**"),and it describes God's attitude toward the righteous: "He loves **righteousness**; the upright shall behold His face." (We will explain the meaning of this clause as well in the exegetical appendix to this study.) The term "righteous" appears in stanza VII also in connection with God: "For the Lord is **righteous."** Stanza VII is linked also to stanza IV through the word **"behold"** that appears in both (just as the beginning of stanza V is linked to stanza IV through the root *bet-chet-nun*).

As we have not adequately explained the literal meaning of stanzas V-VI-VII, we will dedicate an appendix at the end of this study to an exegetical discussion of the difficult words appearing in these stanzas.

It is already clear at this point that the psalmist's position on the recompense of the righteous and the wicked, which is expressed in stanzas V-VI-VII, constitutes his answer to the arguments of "those who say to his soul" brought in stanzas I-III. A detailed explanation of this answer will be presented in the coming sections, in the course of a discussion of the structure of the psalm as a whole.

### VI. The structure of the Psalm: Two halves with a central axis between them

 Let us now outline the structure of our psalm as a whole.

 The introductory declaration at the beginning of the psalm, "In the Lord I put my trust," serves, as we explained in section I, as an introduction to the entire psalm. The body of the psalm is built out of stanzas of varying length.

 The first three stanzas (I-III), which cite the words of "those who say," open with a vigorous statement of reservation on the part of the psalmist, to whom those words are addressed: "How can you say to my soul…."

 The last three stanzas (V-VII) record the psalmist's main arguments against "those who say."

 Stanza IV stands in the middle. While this stanza opens with the psalmist's words in response to "those who say," it does not spell out his arguments against them in explicit manner. In this stanza, the psalmist lays the theological foundation for his answer, which will develop from it in the continuation (stanzas V-VII), as we demonstrated in the previous section.

 It should, however, be noted that a reversal takes place in stanza IV itself. That which is stated at the beginning of stanza IV, "The Lord in His holy Temple, the Lord whose throne is in heaven," is certainly acceptable to "those who say to the psalmist's soul." They do not reject this argument, and while they do not mention God's name in their words, they are not oblivious of God; they recognize His existence in heaven. However, they maintain that it is precisely for this reason – because of God's distance from the earthly world and human society – that He does not intervene in the ugly human reality that they describe. That world is controlled by the wicked. It is perhaps for this reason that they make no mention of God's name.

 That which is stated at the end of stanza IV, "Whose eyes behold, whose eyelids try, the children of men," is the novel point of the stanza. Without negating the transcendental perception of "those who say," and precisely because of it, the psalmist argues that God lowers his eyes from heaven to earth to see people's actions and examine whether they are good or evil. The principle of providence stems from a combination of these two Divine attributes, which appear to be contradictory but in truth follow one from the other. With his formulation of stanza IV in its entirety, the psalmist lays the foundation for the continuation – the second half of the psalm.

It turns out, then, that stanza IV serves as the psalm's "central axis." It fills the typical role of a central axis in a Biblical literary unit as a transitional link that mediates between two halves. Moreover, in the transition from the first half of stanza IV to its second half, there is a conceptual reversal that concisely expresses the debate that is presented over the course of the entire psalm.

Our psalm is thus divided into four parts:

* An introduction: "In the Lord I put my trust"
* Stanzas I-II-III: The first half – the words of "those who say"
* Stanza IV: The central axis – the principle of providence
* Stanzas V-VII: The second half – the psalmist's response to "those who say"

### VII. The difference between the two halves

 The primary objective of our psalm is to stand the first half against the second half, and thus create a contrast between the words of "those who say" and the psalmist's reasoned objection to those words.[[8]](#footnote-8)

 The length of each of the two halves and their internal structures are similar. Each half has three stanzas; the first and third stanza of each half have the same numbers of words (six words in each stanza in the first half, and eight words in each stanza in the second half), with a longer middle stanza (fourteen words in the first half, and ten in the second). The total number of words is the same in the two halves – 26 words.

 The two halves represent two opposite perceptions, between which an argument is being conducted. The same issue is discussed in both halves, and it is the subject of this argument: the relationship between the righteous and the wicked. The two halves deal with this issue and even use similar words for this purpose.

 In stanza I in the first half, the words of "those who say" to their friend, "Flee like a bird to your mountain," is their advice to him that he should flee to a distant place because of the wicked. Stanza II describes **"the wicked"** who lay in wait for **"the upright in heart"** in order to kill them. In Stanza III, the psalmist describes society as one whose foundations are destroyed, and it is clear that it was the rule of the wicked that caused this. This stanza closes the first half with a rhetorical question: "What can **the righteous** do" by way of his presence in such a society?

 The second half of the psalm also deals with the relationship between the righteous and the wicked, and it uses the same terms. Stanza V describes God's attitude toward **"the righteous"** in contrast to His attitude toward **"the wicked** and he who loves violence." Stanza VI describes the punishments that God visits upon **"the wicked,"** and in stanza VII God shines His face upon one who conducts himself with **"righteousness"** and upon one who is **"upright."**

From this survey, there emerges a fundamental difference between the discussions conducted in each of the two halves concerning the righteous and the wicked. "Those who say" in the first half discuss the question from a practical-sociological perspective. They present facts: The wicked act against the upright in heart to cause them to perish from the world. In the continuation, they evaluate the state of a society in which the wicked have gained the upper hand – "the foundations are destroyed." And in the end they assert that the righteous have become impotent: "What can the righteous do?"

 The psalmist in the second half, in contrast, discusses the question of the righteous man and the wicked man exclusively from a religious perspective: What is God's attitude to the righteous and the wicked, and what are their respective fates? He does not bring manifest facts. He describes God's fundamental attitude toward the righteous and the wicked. God chooses the righteous and shines His face upon him, and He hates the wicked and one who loves violence. Even his words in stanza VI, "Upon the wicked He shall rain coals…,” do not describe present reality, but rather express his faith in what will happen in the future, when God will punish the wicked and bring about their destruction.

These different perspectives reflect the difference in perception between "those who say" and the psalmist.

"Those who say" in the first half view the society in which their friend the psalmist lives (and perhaps they as well) as an autonomous region outside the realm of God's actions. They are not wicked. Just the opposite is true: They sorrowfully describe the wicked people's overcoming the upright in heart, and the advice that they give their righteous colleague reflects their wishing him well (as was noted at the end of section III). They might believe that it is beneath God's dignity to deal with such trivial matters – the human struggles between the righteous and the wicked in human society. This perception leads them to a profound pessimism regarding society. The wicked act against the upright in heart, and there is no one to prevent them from doing so. Stanza III expresses despair regarding the chances for a successful struggle or repair of society: "For when the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

This despair-filled outlook leads to a practical conclusion, with which the words of "those who say" open in the first half. The righteous must leave their corrupt society and flee to the mountain, and therefore they advise their colleague: "Flee like a bird to your mountain."

The psalmist's social and religious perception is just the opposite. Society is not a lawless region beyond God's interest. On the contrary, God's examining eyes keep a constant watch over man's actions, and his behavior is judged by God from His high throne in heaven. Therefore, already now the righteous man can be sure that God loves him and that he hates the wicked. As for the future, when the time comes God will surely punish the wicked, and they will perish from the world.

This positive outlook also has a practical ramification, one that is the opposite of the previous one. The practical ramification stemming from it is what opens the second half and advances the words of "those who say." This result is the psalmist's forceful rejection from the very outset of the counsel given by "those who say": "How can you say to my soul…?" The psalmist refuses to accept their advice to flee from his place to the mountain; he chooses to remain in his place, despite the dangers and hardships connected to this decision.

The psalmist does not decide as he does in order to conduct a social struggle against the wicked people in his area – that is, not for social-ideological reasons. He might very well agree with the assessment of "those who say" that the social corruption, the "destruction of the foundations," cannot be repaired by the righteous in society: "What can the righteous do?" The psalmist's decision stems from his solid religious outlook that the world has not been handed over to the wicked, and that the righteous Judge will punish the wicked appropriately and protect the righteous and shine His face upon them.

This belief is already concisely expressed in the introductory words to the psalm: "In the Lord I put my trust." This consciousness of his trust in God, with which the psalmist chooses to live, is spelled out in detail across the entire length of the second half, but finds particular expression in the last words in the psalm: "The upright shall behold His face" (as they are explained at length in the exegetical appendix to our study). With these two expressions, emphasis is placed on the unique mutual relationship between God and those who fear Him. God shines His face on the upright man, while the upright man puts his trust in God.

Now let us point to several linguistic parallels between the two halves – parallels that illustrate the striking contrast between them.

Stanzas III and V, which surround stanza IV, the central axis of the psalm, stand in antithetical parallelism:

Stanza III For when the foundations are destroyed,

 What can the **righteous** do?

Stanza IV Central axis

Stanza V The Lord chooses the **righteous**;

But the wicked and he who loves violence His soul hates.

 The word "righteous" in connection with man appears only in these two stanzas (in stanza VII the word serves as an adjective describing God). Stanza V answers the rhetorical question left unanswered in stanza III: "What can the righteous do?" The actions of the righteous might not influence the wicked who destroy the foundations of society, and it is possible that the wicked will in fact gain the upper hand. On the religious level, however, the actions of the righteous man were not in vain. God chooses him, whereas the wicked and one who loves violence and destroys human society, "His soul hates."

In the psalm's shell, stanzas I-II and stanzas VI-VII stand in antithetical parallelism:

Stanza I: How can you say to my soul,

Flee like a bird to your mountain?

Stanza II: For, lo, **the wicked** bend the bow,

They make ready their arrow upon the string,

That they may shoot in darkness at **the upright in heart**.

Stanza VI: Upon **the wicked** He shall rain coals, fire and brimstone,

And a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.

Stanza VII: For the Lord is righteous,

He loves righteousness;

The **upright** shall behold His face.

 The linguistic common denominator between these two parts of the psalm is the use of the word "wicked," which appears in the plural only in these two places, as well as the word "upright" as a designation for the righteous, which also appears only in these two places.

 The contrast between stanza II and stanza VI is clear. Stanza II describes the wicked as overcoming the upright in heart, but in stanza VI God restores the moral order and punishes the wicked. Stanza I and stanza VII deal with the righteous, In stanza I the righteous man is called upon to flee from the wicked, whereas in stanza VII a description is given of God's shining His face on the upright. The Divine recompense for the righteous and for the wicked is measure for measure. The wicked wish to shoot their arrows at the upright in heart "in **darkness**," i.e., clandestinely, whereas the punishment of the wicked involves God's raining down His "arrows" upon them from heaven in the open – coals, **fire** and brimstone, and a scorching wind. The upright in heart serve as a target for the arrows of the wicked that are shot at them "in darkness," and they are called upon to flee and hide, but God, "the upright shall behold His face," openly and in the light of His countenance.

### VIII. The boundaries of the argument in our Psalm

 But isn't our psalmist rejecting wise and practical advice regarding the present, that which is being offered by "those who say to his soul," in the name of a religious belief that is not based on facts, and whose justification will only be revealed at some unknown time in the future? Aren't caution and concern about personal safety worthy considerations from a religious perspective?

In section IV, note 6, we cited a conversation between R. Yose ben Kisma and R. Chanina ben Teradyon (*Avoda Zara* 18a). "Those who say to the psalmist's soul" could have answered the psalmist in the very same way that R. Yose answered R. Chanina: "I am telling you the plain facts, and you say: Heaven will show mercy!"

In order to sharpen our question, let us consider part of Psalm 55, which is related to our psalm in several ways.

4 Because of the voice of the enemy,

Because of the oppression of the wicked;

For they cast iniquity upon me,

And in wrath they persecute me.

5 My heart is sore pained within me;

And the terrors of death are fallen upon me,

6 Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me,

And horror has overwhelmed me.
7 And I said, O that I had wings like a dove!

For then I would fly away, and be at rest.

8 Lo, then I would wander far off

And remain in the wilderness. Sela.

9 I would hasten to find a refuge for myself

And from the windy storm and the tempest.

10 Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues:

For I have seen violence and strife in the city.

11 Day and night they go about it upon its walls:

Mischief also and trouble are in the midst of it.

12 Wickedness is in the midst of it;

Oppression and fraud depart not from her streets.

This psalm also describes a city in which the wicked are in control of society and threaten the righteous: "For I have seen violence and strife in the city… Mischief also and trouble are in the midst of it… Oppression and fraud depart not from her streets" (verses 10-12). Using the concise wording of our psalm, we can define this as: "For when the foundations are destroyed."

And what is the psalmist's wish in Psalm 55?

7 And I said, O that I had wings like a dove!

For then I would fly away, and be at rest.

8 Lo, then I would wander far off

And remain in the wilderness. Sela.

 This is precisely the advice that "those who say to the psalmist's soul" offer him in our psalm: "Flee like a bird to your mountain"! Why, then, does the psalmist in our psalm reject this counsel so vigorously – "How can you say to my soul…” – while the psalmist in Psalm 55 yearns on his own to do something similar – to fly away from his corruption-filled city to the wilderness, and find refuge there from the wickedness of his neighbors?

 The difference between the two psalms lies in the degree of danger in which each of the speakers finds himself. In Psalm 55, the description of the danger threatening the psalmist's life comes from the mouth of the psalmist himself, and according to him the wicked are endangering his personal existence in a real way to the point that he finds himself in true existential dread: "Because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked; for they cast iniquity **upon me**… My heart is sore pained within me; and the terrors of death are fallen **upon me**. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me." The fear of death brings him to pray to God that He should save him from the hands of his enemies (verses 1-3; 17-18), and also to express the wish (which is theoretical, as he has no way to fulfill it) that he escape from his enemies to the wilderness, and there find refuge "from the windy storm and the tempest."

In our psalm, on the other hand, the psalmist himself does not describe any imminent danger; rather, it is "those who say to his soul" who describe the social situation to him. The wicked "make ready their arrow upon the string, so that they may shoot in darkness at the upright in heart." It would appear that there is no specific acute danger. Rather, counsel is given here stemming from the despair of "those who say to the psalmist's soul" from repairing the corrupted society, as is evident from their words in stanza III.[[9]](#footnote-9)

This difference between the psalms with respect to the degree of danger facing the psalmist impacts upon the question of whether the psalmist wishes to flee from his place or to stay there. From the psalmist's rejection of the words of "those who say," it may be inferred that he himself does not share their despair, nor does he feel serious fear or danger. He puts his trust in God, and believes that there is no need for him to leave his city. However, he does not deny the facts described by "those who say" – that the wicked have the upper hand and that they wish to harm the upright in heart. But according to him, this is not sufficient reason to despair and run away from the battle. He is filled with the faith that this situation is temporary and that in the end the wicked will be punished, whereas the righteous man who puts his trust in God will emerge unharmed.

Thus, the argument in our psalm is a religious-social disagreement, and it does not stem from a situation of mortal danger. The words of the psalmist should not be construed as a rejection of sound practical advice based on an erroneous religious consideration. On the contrary, the psalmist's solid religious outlook grants him clear vision of the real situation. He does not quickly despair of the possibility of reforming society, and therefore he also does not hastily flee from his place to the mountain, thus surrendering to the wicked and their rule over society. He will moderately and cautiously remain where he is, put his trust in God, and hope for the day when Divine justice will restore the moral order:

37:9: For evildoers shall be cut off:

But those who wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth.

10: For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be:

And you shall look well at his place, but he will not be there.

11: But the meek shall inherit the earth;

And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. *Yechezu*, a poetic term in place of *yir'u*. This word appears a second time in our psalm at the end: "The upright shall behold (*yechezu*) His face." The use of the root *chet-zayin-heh* in place of the root *resh-alef-heh* is typical of Biblical poetry, except in the case of prophetic visions, in which the root *chet-zayin-heh* is widespread in the Bible in all of its literary genres. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Einayim/afapayim* are a common pair in the Bible. Of the ten instances of the word *afapayim* in the Bible, in six of them the word comes together with or parallel to *einayim*. Although *afapayim* apparently refers to a part of the eye, when the words come together (as a construct or as parallels), they refer to the same thing (hendiadys). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In *Midrash Tehillim* on our psalm, *Chazal* expound the phrase, "What can the righteous do," at the end of stanza III, as referring to God, "the Righteous One of the world" (see the end of our psalm: "For the Lord is righteous"). This exposition accords with the spirit of the words of "those who say," that God does not intervene in His world, which is controlled by the wicked. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. These two opposite attributes of God (on the one hand, distant from the world, while on the other hand, involved in what is happening there), is discussed also in other places in the book of *Tehillim*. For example, in Psalm 33:13-15, it is stated:

The Lord looks down from heaven; He beholds all the sons of men.

From the place of His habitation He looks upon all the inhabitants of the earth;

He who fashions their hearts alike; who considers all their deeds.

The Radak refers to what is stated in Psalm 138:6: "Though the Lord be high, yet He takes note of the lowly; but the haughty He knows from afar." In this verse, the opposition between the two attributes of God is expressed in each of the clauses in the verse, whereas in our psalm each of the opposite attributes is described in a separate pair of clauses. The reason for this separation in our psalm will become clear in section VI. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In Psalm 113:5-6, we encountered a similar but different contrast between God's attributes: "Who is like the Lord our God, **who is enthroned on high, and yet looks far down to behold** the things that are in heaven, and on the earth… He raises up the **poor** out of the dust… He makes **the barren woman to keep house."** In our study of that psalm (sections II, III, and VII), we showed that the opposition between the two attributes of God is between **His power** and **His gentleness,** which is reflected in His kindness to the wretched in human society. But in our psalm, it is not God's compassion that stands at the opposite pole across from God's greatness and distance, but rather His attribute of justice, which also expresses God's involvement in His world and His closeness to man. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. We are alluding here to the words of R. Yose ben Kisma to R. Chanina ben Teradyon (*Avoda Zara* 18a): "Brother Chanina, do you no know that it is Heaven that has ordained this [Roman] nation to reign? For though she laid waste His House, burnt His Temple, slew His pious ones, and caused His best ones to perish, still she is firmly established! Yet, I have heard about you that you sit and occupy yourself with the Torah, publicly gather assemblies, and keep a scroll [of the Law] in your bosom! He replied: Heaven will show mercy. He said to him: **I am telling you plain facts, and you say, Heaven will show mercy!"** [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The opposite interchange is found in the verse: "Behold, I have refined you, but not into silver; I have **tried you** (*bechartikha* = *bekhantikha*) in the furnace of affliction" (*Yeshayahu* 48:10). See at length in the appendix. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. In order that the reader of the psalm should know from the outset that he will be encountering a conflict between a rejected position and the position of the psalmist himself, the psalmist sets before the body of the psalm an introduction in which he declares, "In the Lord I put my trust," and before his citation of the words of "those who say," he sets his vigorous objection: "How can you say to my soul…." [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The moderate description of the danger mentioned by "those who say" was noted at the end of section II (we said there that the counsel that they offer does not reflect an immediate threat), and at the beginning of section III, where we argued that the danger that they describe is not one of imminent calamity, but rather a constant and hidden potential danger, stemming from social corruption. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)