YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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# **SEFER Tehillim**

**by Rav Elchanan Samet**

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**Lecture 57: Psalm 107 - "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is Good, for His lovingkindness is forever" (Part IV)**

### VIII. What is the Simple meaning of the psalm?

 We opened section II with the words of R. Yosef Ya'avetz that "the commentators were bewildered about the meaning of the psalm as a whole." In the continuation of that section, we presented the main reason to explain our psalm as a universal psalm and, in contrast, the reason to interpret it as a psalm dealing with the history of the people of Israel. At the end of that section, we followed in the footsteps of *Chazal* and the medieval commentators to see how they understood "the meaning of the psalm as a whole." This we did in sections III-VI. Now, we too are bewildered: what is the simple meaning of our psalm? Which camp of commentators is closest to the plain sense of the text?[[1]](#footnote-1)

 Were we to define the plain meaning of a psalm as the meaning that arises from the entirety of its words, verses, and structure, we would apparently join the camp of commentators that reads our psalm as a universal one. The factor that we mentioned in section II, that the term Israel is totally absent from our psalm and that there is also no other term alluding to the people of Israel and its history, is the decisive factor according to the definition of "plain meaning" brought above. The commentators who explained our psalm as discussing the people and history of Israel did so on the basis of things that they knew from **outside** the psalm, things for which they found associative support in the wording of the psalm.[[2]](#footnote-2) Were we, however, to show our psalm to someone who knows nothing outside of this psalm, he would certainly interpret it in the manner of Rashi, the Ibn Ezra, and the Radak – that is, as a universal psalm.

 The only problem is that the definition of the “plain sense of a psalm” is not so simple. Besides the words, the verses, and the structure, the context in which it is found also affects its meaning. A psalm in the book of *Tehillim* is found in many circles of contexts: it is juxtaposed to the psalms that immediately precede or follow it; it is sometimes found in a collection of psalms that can be distinguished on the basis of various markers; it is part of the book of *Tehillim*; and finally, it is a literary unit that is part of Scripture.

 The commentators who explained our psalm as dealing with the redemption of the people of Israel were undoubtedly influenced by the wider scriptural context: the ingathering of the redeemed of the Lord from lands situated at the four corners of the earth is surely the ingathering of the exiles of Israel at the time of their redemption, an ingathering that is described in many places in Scripture as a promise for the future.[[3]](#footnote-3)

 We will try below to examine the narrowest context in which our psalm is found – its juxtaposition to the two psalms that precede it – and the contribution of this context to our understanding of the psalm.

### IX. THe connection between psalms 105 and 106

 In the introduction to our study of psalms 111-112, we dealt with those isolated cases in the book of *Tehillim* where the juxtaposition of psalms does not stem from an editorial process that brought together independent psalms owing to linguistic or substantive similarities between them, but rather from a primal connection between the psalms: they were composed together and they demonstrate essential conceptual and stylistic continuity.

 One of the examples brought there (besides psalms 111-112, which are the focus of that study) is the pair of psalms 105-106, which precede our psalm. Both of these psalms, which are similar in length and both open with the words, "Give thanks to the Lord," survey Israel's historic past. Psalm 105 opens with the period of the patriarchs and closes with Israel's entry into the Land, whereas psalm 106 opens with the Exodus from Egypt and the parting of the Sea and ends with Israel's sins in the Land of Israel and the punishments that they received for them, and it also includes an allusion to the exile from the Land (vv. 46-47). There is a partial overlapping between the two psalms: the Exodus from Egypt and the wandering in the wilderness is described in both. This poses a certain challenge to the assumption that that there is a certain continuity between them.

 The truth is that the continuity between the two psalms is not on the historical plain, but primarily in the conceptual objective that they share. Psalm 105 describes God's kindness toward Israel and His loyalty to the covenant that He had made with their forefathers:

(8) He has remembered His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations;

(9) which He made with Avraham, and His oath to Yitzchak.

(10) And He confirmed the same to Yaakov for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant:

(11) Saying, To you I will give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance.

The psalm concludes with a renewed mention of the covenant and with a description of its realization when the Land was given to the patriarchs' descendants:

(42) For He remembered His holy promise to Avraham His servant.

(43) And He brought out His people with joy, and His chosen ones with gladness

(44) and gave them the lands of the nations; and they seized the labor of the peoples.

 The final verse in psalm 105 serves as an introduction to the topic of psalm 106: God gave His people the lands of the nations –

(45) that they might observe His statutes, and keep His laws.

Psalm 106 describes Israel's ingratitude, which began already at the time of the Exodus from Egypt and the wandering in the wilderness,[[4]](#footnote-4) but continued and even intensified when the people were settled in their land.

 The historical survey in this psalm, following the introduction in verses 1-5, opens in verse 6:

We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity.

Thus, the condition "that they might observe His statutes" was not fulfilled. This led to a series of punishments that were ineffective until God gave them into the hands of the nations, and in the end – as is alluded to in the psalm's introduction in verses 4-5 and in its conclusion in verse 47 – Israel was exiled from their land. This twofold allusion is inserted into the psalmist's prayers, the first of which he utters even before he begins his historical survey and the second after he finishes it. At the beginning of the psalm it says:

(4) Remember me, O Lord, when You favor Your people: include me in Your salvation;

(5) that I may see the good of Your chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation…

The people of Israel are in need of God's salvation, and the psalmist asks to be included in the salvation of his people. This allusion is made more explicit in the prayer that closes the psalm:

(47) Save us, O Lord our God, **and gather us from among the nations**, to give thanks to Your holy name, to triumph in Your praise.[[5]](#footnote-5)

 As an intermediate conclusion, we can say that each of these two psalms stands on its own, but it is clear that behind these two psalms stands a single plan, a single idea, that is expressed precisely in the contrast between the two psalms. In order to understand this, it is necessary to read the two psalms in consecutive manner.[[6]](#footnote-6)

### X. THe connection between psalm 107 and the two preceding psalms

 We shall now argue that psalm 107 is but the continuation of psalms 105-106; it serves as the third link in a trilogy that encompasses the history of the people of Israel from the choosing of Avraham until the future redemption of Israel.[[7]](#footnote-7)

 Let us examine the various connections between psalm 107 and the previous psalms.

* All three psalms open with the words, "Give thanks to the Lord," and the opening of psalm 106 is identical to that of our psalm: "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His lovingkindness is forever."[[8]](#footnote-8)
* The three psalms are similar in length.[[9]](#footnote-9)
* Anyone who examines these psalms together will sense that they were written in a similar style. They are marked by linguistic connections that express themselves in the repetition of particular words and in the repetition of characteristic linguistic combinations.[[10]](#footnote-10) A good part of the linguistic connections listed in note 10 stems from a substantive similarity between the parallel passages.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The most important connection between psalm 107 and the psalm that precedes it is the fact that the beginning of psalm 107 constitutes a direct continuation of the end of psalm 108. As we saw above, the historical time in which the author of psalm 106 is found, and from which he surveys the past history of his people, is the time of exile. This is expressed in the prayer that opens the psalm in verses 4-5 and in the concluding prayer in verse 47. Verse 46 alludes to the exile in the words, "And He caused them to be pitied by all their captors," and in verse 47 the psalmist petitions in the name of the nation in exile:

Save us, O Lord our God, **and gather us** from among the nations, **to give thanks** to Your holy name, to triumph in your praise.

He prays for the ingathering of the exiles of Israel from among the nations so that they may give thanks to the name of God. And this is immediately followed by the beginning of psalm 107, which describes how the two elements of this request on the part of the petitioner will be fulfilled in the future:

**Give thanks** to the Lord, for He is good, for His lovingkindness is forever.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say this, whom He has redeemed from the hand of distress.

And whom **He has gathered** from the lands….[[12]](#footnote-12)

God will, indeed, hear the psalmist's prayer; He will save His people and gather them from among the nations-enemies, and they will, indeed, say, "Give thanks to the Lord," just as the psalmist had promised in his prayer.

### XI. The History of the people of Israel from its Beginnings and until its redemption in three parts

 Let us now define the subject of each of the three psalms, and along with that examine both the uniqueness of each psalm and also the continuity between the three.

 **Psalm 105**: This psalm describes God's kindness toward Israel from the time that He chose Avraham and until He brought his descendants to the land regarding which He had made a covenant with the patriarchs. The subject of the psalm is the covenant that God had made about giving the Land and its fulfillment in a broad and complex historical process. God is the active party throughout the psalm, whereas the people of Israel are passive. But nonetheless, Israel also has a role over the course of the psalm, one that is formulated at the beginning (vv. 1-5): They are asked to give thanks to God and to make His deeds known among the peoples – those deeds about which the psalm later speaks. Israel is asked (v. 4): "**Remember** His wondrous works that He has done," for God "**remembered** His covenant forever… which He made with Avraham" (vv. 8-9); "for He **remembered** His holy word, and Avraham His servant" (v. 42). This psalm can, of course, stand on its own as a psalm offering a historical survey of the beginnings of the nation, a survey directed at the objective formulated in the opening verse, "Give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name…"

 **Psalm 106**: This psalm describes Israel's ingratitude. They did not remember the kindness that God had performed for them, and they repeatedly sinned against Him until they were punished by being handed over into the hands of their captors, and apparently by being exiled from their land. This psalm as well opens with the demand made of Israel, "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good…," and it sees Israel's failure to fulfill this demand and its forgetting the kindness of God as the source of all sins (v. 7): "Our fathers in Egypt did not reflect on **Your wondrous works, they did not remember** the multitude of Your deeds of lovingkindness," and thus they failed to comply with the demand at the beginning of psalm 105: "**Remember His wondrous works** that He has done." Later, the psalm hangs two of Israel's gravest sins in the wilderness on their forgetting God's acts of lovingkindness: those who lusted exceedingly in the wilderness "were quick to **forget** His deeds" (v. 13), and those who fashioned the golden calf "**forgot** God their savior, who had done great things in Egypt" (v. 21).[[13]](#footnote-13)

 This psalm can stand on its own as well. The psalm surveys a complete historical cycle, from the Exodus from Egypt to the exile of Israel from its land, and this survey blames the people of Israel and justifies the punishments meted out against them. It is clear, however, that the depth of Israel's ingratitude can only be understood after reading psalm 105.

 The motif of thanksgiving with which psalm 105 opens continues in psalm 106; the psalmist opens the psalm with the demand, "Give thanks to the Lord," a demand that was not fulfilled in the generations described later in the psalm, and he concludes the psalm with a petition for redemption, whose objective is thanksgiving: "Save us… and gather us from among the nations, **to give thanks to Your holy name**, to triumph in Your praise" (v. 47).[[14]](#footnote-14)

 **Psalm 107**: This prophetic psalm describes God's answer to the psalmist's prayer at the end of the psalm 106 and Israel's response to the demand repeated in the previous psalms to recognize God's acts of lovingkindness toward them and to offer thanks for them. Unlike the past, the redeemed of the Lord will in the future proclaim wholeheartedly, "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His lovingkindness is forever." This verse, with which psalm 107 opens, does not constitute a demand that the psalmist sets before the people of Israel, as was the case at the beginning of the two previous psalms. This time, the verse appearing at the beginning of the psalm is a citation from the words of the redeemed of the Lord, who will proclaim them when God redeems them from the hand of their enemies and gathers them to their land.

 The motif of thanksgiving in its new configuration in our psalm does not exhaust itself in the citation of the words of the redeemed at the beginning of the psalm. Not only will the nation as a whole thank God for the deliverance He brought the people, but also its individual members. The process of gathering all the individuals into their land will be accompanied by difficult afflictions and serious dangers. God will save them from these afflictions, and when they are saved, they too "will thank the Lord for His lovingkindness, and for His wondrous works to the children of man."

 In stanzas 5-6, the psalmist returns to the nation as a whole and to the process of its redemption and the return to its land. This people, who, owing to their sins (described at length in the previous psalm), God brought calamity upon along with their land, will once again settle in their land, in continuation of its ingathering from the four corners of the world. God will restore the land to its former state and it will yield fruit in generous manner. God will bless the people so that they greatly multiply, "and He has made their families like a flock."

 The context in which psalm 107 is found, as a continuation of the two previous psalms, teaches us not only that it relates to the people of Israel, but also that it is a prophetic psalm describing the future redemption of Israel. R. Yosef Nachmias's explanation is fully confirmed by the continuity between psalms 105-106 and psalm 107. It is clear that psalm 107 does not come to describe once again events in Israel's past, for the broad comprehensive survey in psalms 105-106 – one that accompanies Israel from the time of Avraham to their exile from their land on account of their sins - was dedicated to that purpose. Psalm 107 is dedicated to the **future** history of Israel, to their redemption and return to their land. Therefore, this psalm is not a "historical psalm," but rather a "prophetic psalm."

The question that was raised in note 7 has not yet been answered. Why did the redactors of the book of *Tehillim* erect a barrier between psalms 105-106 and psalm 107 by placing between them the demarcation between the fourth and fifth books of *Tehillim*?[[15]](#footnote-15)

It seems that the barrier that the redactors of the book of *Tehillim* erected between these psalms is intentional, and that it stems from their objective to create a fundamental distinction between psalms 105-106 and psalm 107. The background for this fundamental distinction is found in the review of the three psalms given above.

The basis for this distinction is, of course, the fact that psalms 105-106 are historical psalms relating to the past, whereas psalm 107 is a prophetic psalm describing the future, and the distinction between past and present is indeed significant. But this is not enough.

Regarding the primary subject common to all three themes – the obligation to thank God for all the acts of lovingkindness that He performs for His people – psalm 107 stands in opposition to the two previous psalms. In the future, when the time of redemption will arrive, the people of Israel will repair what they had perverted throughout their history, and they will thank God for the acts of lovingkindness that He performed for them. The contrast between psalm 107 and the two preceding psalms is expressed precisely in the opening common to all three psalms: The call, "Give thanks to the Lord," at the beginning of psalms 105-106 are the words of the psalmist to Israel, and it is a demand that was never realized. The failure to fulfill this demand lies at the root of all the evil performed by Israel and all the evil that befell them. In contrast, the call, "Give thanks to the Lord," at the beginning of psalm 107 is a citation of the words of the redeemed, and through it the original demand is realized.

Beginning a new book (the fifth and final book) with psalm 107 is meant to emphasize the great novelty that will transpire in the future of the people of Israel, when the time of redemption arrives. The redemption of Israel is indeed a continuation of its history, but when it arrives, the people will turn over a new leaf, because their actions will be the very opposite of those of their forefathers. In order to emphasize this "new leaf" in the history of Israel, the redactors of *Tehillim* chose to open the fifth and final book with psalm 107, thus realizing the metaphor of "turning over a new leaf" in its literal sense.[[16]](#footnote-16)

### XII. Two levels of meaning in Psalm 107

 In our review of the three psalms at the end of the previous section, we did not deal with the following question that relates to psalm 107: Can this psalm stand on its own, not as a continuation of the two previous psalms, as is the case with psalms 105 and 106?

 The answer to this question brings us back to the exegetical discussion that we conducted in the first part of our study of psalm 107. Psalm 107 can, indeed, stand on its own, but then its nature is entirely different than that described above. As an independent literary unit without any context, psalm 107 turns into a universal psalm coming to teach universal religious truth. Put differently, the explanation offered by Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Radak (in the wake of *Chazal*) is the most appropriate explanation if we isolate the psalm from its context.

 Understanding the psalm as universal is not wrong or defective, but rather follows from the body of the psalm itself and the intention of its author! We already noted that neither the term "Israel" nor anything like it is mentioned in our psalm. And this is certainly puzzling: How can a prophetic psalm describing the redemption of Israel consistently refrain from mentioning the word "Israel" or any other term connected to the people or history of Israel?

 This brings us to the surprising conclusion that our psalm was written from the very outset with the intention that it be read on two different levels. As an independent psalm that is detached from its context, it was meant to serve as a universal didactic psalm, teaching about the obligation to thank God falling upon any person meriting God's rescue from danger. For this purpose, it was necessary to conceal the name "Israel" or any other explicit testimony connecting the psalm to the people or history of Israel.

 When reading the psalm in this manner, we find various allusions to its Israelite meaning, allusions that brought several early commentators to interpret it as an Israelite psalm. The truth, however, is that these allusions by themselves do not suffice to negate the universal interpretation of the psalm. These hints may stir the reader to examine the literary environment of the psalm and reveal the ramified connections between this psalm and the two previous psalms. A consecutive reading of psalms 105, 106, and 107 reveals a dramatically different understanding: it is not a universal psalm, but rather an Israelite psalm that deals with the future history of the people of Israel in contrast to its past history!

 Which of these two readings is "more correct?" There is no place whatsoever for this question: both are correct, and both were intended by the psalm's author, who gave the psalm two different levels of meaning. Each "type" of reading will reveal a different level of meaning: reading psalm 107 by itself will reveal one level, whereas reading it as the third link in a trilogy will reveal a new and different meaning.

 This two-leveled understanding of the psalm is only possible if a deep common denominator exists between the two meanings. Such a common denominator indeed exists: the obligation to offer thanks to God for His lovingkindness, which is the meta-motif of the three psalms, is a fundamental human obligation, as it finds expression in psalm 107 when considered on its own. The non-fulfillment of this obligation in Israel's past, in psalms 105-106, is not only a sin connected to the selection of Israel and to the Torah that had been given to them, but also a betrayal of a most elementary human duty (which exists even in interpersonal relations).

 On the other hand, Israel's redemption will be characterized by the fact that the entire nation and even its individual members will adopt the constant human obligation to contemplate the lovingkindness of God and offer thanks for it:

Whoever is wise must keep these things,

and let them contemplate the acts of the lovingkindness of the Lord. (v. 43)

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Over the course of this study, we often mentioned R. Yosef Ya'avetz and his criticism of the commentators that preceded him, and we even discussed his critiques, but we did not bring his own explanation of the psalm. In his commentary, R. Ya'avetz creates a synthesis of the two camps. He explains the beginning of the psalm (vv. 1-3) as "an expression of thanksgiving that we will offer to God, blessed be He, at the ingathering of the exiles." The continuation of the psalm, however, he explains in the footsteps of *Chazal*,that God "performs wonders **at all times, with all people**, in these four ways." What is the connection between these two issues? This connection comes to teach us "that one must trust in our Creator, blessed be He, that He will redeem us from our exile," because He who redeems all of mankind from their afflictions "will certainly gather in His nation and inheritance, the descendants of His chosen ones, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, at the end of days."

This understanding, which seems to take from each camp the exegetical advantage that it offers, is really more forced than either understanding of our psalm as a uniform psalm. First of all, the connection that Ya’avetz makes between the opening verses and the body of the psalm is exceedingly forced, and there is no hint to it in the words of Scripture. Second, according to him, the primary objective of the psalm is to strengthen Israel's trust in their ultimate redemption. But the psalm allots only three verses to this redemption, whereas it devotes forty verses to the indirect proof that is meant to reinforce this trust, verses that do not deal at all with the people of Israel! The quantitative ratio between the essential and that which is only secondary is not at all reasonable. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For example, the words "redeemed of the Lord" connect themselves in the consciousness of anyone familiar with the situation of the people of Israel to the redemption of the people of God. Linguistically, however, this need not be so: the term "*ge'ula*" in Scripture often relates to the redemption of an individual from his troubles or lowly condition. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For example, *Devarim* 30:3-4: "… And He will return and gather you from all the nations, among whom the Lord your God has scattered you. If your outcasts be at the utmost parts of heaven, from there will the Lord your God gather you…" [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Here lies the explanation of the partial historical overlap between the two psalms. The period of the Exodus from Egypt and the wandering in the wilderness in psalm 105 is the time when God showered His lovingkindness on His nation in the context of the fulfillment of His covenant with their forefathers; that very same period in psalm 106 expresses Israel's ingratitude and rebellion. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The allusion to exile and to God's relationship with His exiled people is found already in verses 44-46, before the psalmist's prayer:

(44) Nevertheless He regarded their affliction, when He heard their cry:

(45) and He remembered for them His covenant, and relented according to the abundance of His steadfast love.

(46) Moreover He caused them to be pitied by all their captors. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The shared plan of the two psalms is what led to the choice of the historical period discussed in each psalm, as well as the selection of the specific events described therein. Recognizing this plan helps resolve various difficulties that arise in the course of their study. For example, why isn't the parting of the Sea mentioned in psalm 105 as part of God's lovingkindness toward Israel at the time of the Exodus from Egypt? The question is answered in psalm 106: This event is chosen there to illustrate the beginning of Israel's ingratitude (v. 7): "And they rebelled against You at the Sea, at the Sea of Suf." [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Even before we try to substantiate this argument, it encounters an immediate difficulty. Psalm 106 closes the fourth book of *Tehillim*, and verse 48 in that psalm is a typical closing verse, the likes of which we find at the end of the first book (41:14), the second book (72:18-19), and the third book (89:53), whereas psalm 107 opens the fifth book of *Tehillim.* We will deal with this difficulty after we have clarified the relationship between psalms 105 and 106 to psalm 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Although in psalm 106, these words are preceded by the call, "*Halleluya,*" which also appears at the conclusion of psalm 105, but is entirely missing in psalm 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Psalm 105 has 45 verses; psalm 106 has 47 verses (excluding v. 48, which closes the fourth book of *Tehillim* and is not part of the body of the psalm); psalm 107 has 43 verses. This length is unusual in the book of *Tehillim.* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Psalm 107 |  | Psalms 105-106 |
| 2 | **He redeemed them from the hand** of distress | 106:10 | And **He redeemed them from the hand** of the enemy (this parallelism suggests that the word "*tzar*" in psalm 107 should be understood as "enemy," against the Ibn Ezra) |
| 3 | **And whom He has gathered from the lands** | 106:27106:47 | And to scatter them **in the lands****And gather us** from the nations |
| 4 | They lost themselves **in the wilderness**, their way **in the desert** | 106:14 | And they lusted exceedingly **in the wilderness**, and they tried God **in the desert** |
| 6 | Then they cried **in their distress**,**And He delivered them** from their troubles. | 106:44106:43 | But He saw **their distress**Many times **He delivered them** |
| 8 | **And for His wondrous works** to the children of man | 105:2 | Talk of all **His wondrous works** (and similarly 105:5; 106:7) |
| 10-11 | Those who sat in **darkness**… because **they had rebelled** | 105:28 | He sent **darkness** to make it dark, and they did not **rebel** against His word |
| 10 | **Bound in affliction and iron** | 105:18 | They **hurt** his leg with fetters, his neck was set in **iron** |
| 11 | Because **they had rebelled** against the words of God, **and denied the counsel** of the Most High | 106:7106:43 | **They rebelled** at the SeaBut **they rebelled in their counsel** |
| 13 | **And He saved them** from their troubles | 106:8 | **But He saved them** for the sake of His name(10) **And He delivered them** from the hand of him who hated them |
| 26 | They went down to **the depths** | 106:9 | And He led them through **the great waters**  |
| 33 | He turned rivers into **wilderness** |  | **as through the wilderness** |
| 35 | He turned… and **dry ground** into springs of **water** | 105:41 | He opened the rock and **water** poured out. It ran in the **dry places** like a river |
| 42 | The upright see this and **rejoice** | 105:3 | Let the heart of those who seek the Lord **rejoice** |

 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For example, there is a similarity between "the redeemed of the Lord whom He has redeemed from the hand of distress" and Israel, who were "redeemed from the hand of the enemy" – from Egypt; those who lost themselves "in the wilderness, their way in the desert" are "hungry and thirsty," and the children of Israel "lusted exceedingly in the wilderness" for meat and "tried God in the desert" because of the lack of water; stanza 2 in our psalm, "bound in affliction and iron," is similar to the imprisonment of Yosef "in fetters and iron," and the liberation of Yosef from Egypt is similar to the liberation of the prisoners in stanza 2. The same is true about most of the parallels appearing in the previous note. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Even though Israel's exile is not explicitly mentioned in psalm 106, but merely implied by the petitioner's prayer, the decree of exile is indeed mentioned. Following the sin of the spies, God swore "to cast out their seed among **the nations** and to scatter them in **the lands**" (v. 27). After this decree was realized (something that is not explicitly stated in psalm 106), the psalmist prays, "and gather us from among **the nations**." This prayer is heard, and in psalm 107 we read about those "He has gathered from **the lands**." [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The motif of remembering in psalm 105 is mutual: Israel is asked "to remember," for God "remembers" the covenant that He had made with their ancestors. The motif of remembering in psalm 106 is built on the contrast between Israel and God: They "did not remember" and they "were quick to forget;" whereas God, even though He punished them for their sins, continues to remember His covenant with them, as in the previous psalm: "And He remembered for them His covenant, and He relented according to the abundance of His loving-kindnesses. And He caused them to be pitied by all their captors" (vv. 45-46). Also, at the beginning of the psalm, the psalmist prays to God: "Remember me, O Lord, when You favor Your people. Include me in Your salvation." [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. a. Petitioning for deliverance in order to make it possible to give thanks to God for that salvation is common in the psalms of thanksgiving in the book of *Tehillim*. See, for example, *Tehillim* 30:10-13.

b. In the future thanksgiving to which the psalmist obligates himself, the demand made at the beginning of psalm 105 will finally be fulfilled, as we see from a comparison of the two passages:

105:1 – **Give thanks** to the Lord, call upon **His name**…

**Glory in His holy name**…

106:47 – **To give thanks to Your holy name**

To triumph **in Your praise.** [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This question does not negate our understanding of these three psalms, for it draws its validity from an analysis of the style and contents of the three psalms themselves. It does, however, raise a different difficulty. Did the redactors of the book of *Tehillim* fail to see the striking connection between the three psalms, and how did they understand psalm 107? It goes without saying that the importance of such an ancient interpretation is greater than any other interpretation, and therefore we must address this question. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Prof. Nachum M. Sarna, in his introduction to the book of *Tehillim* (*Olam Ha-Tanakh*, *Tehillim* I, pp. 8-9) noted that the conclusion of each of the first three books in *Tehillim* mark the end of an independent collection of psalms, which, together with the other collections of psalms, constitute the book of *Tehilim* found in our hands. Indeed, there are clear differences between these three books.

According to Sarna, however, the division between the fourth and fifth books is different. These two books share features that set them apart from the first three books, and he notes several of these features. Therefore, the division between them does not stem from a distinction between different collections, but from something else. According to Sarna, this division is "artificial," whereas we understand that this division has a specific purpose and that this purpose stems precisely from the recognition of the plan that underlies the trilogy of psalms 105-106-107. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)