YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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# **SEFER Tehillim**

**by Rav Elchanan Samet**

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Please pray for a refua sheleima for

Shimon Elimelech HaCohen ben Sima Rivka

Gilad Hillel ben Bracha Mirel

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**Lecture 60: Psalm 122 – "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Part III)**

(1) A Song of Ascents of David.

1 I was glad when they said to me:

We are going to the house of the Lord.

1. Our feet were standing

within your gates, O Jerusalem.

(3) Jerusalem that is built.

It is like a city that is united together.

2 (4) For the tribes went up there, the tribes of the Lord,

a statute in Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord.

(5) For there sat thrones for judgment,

the thrones of the house of David.

3 (6) Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

May they prosper who love you.

1. May peace be within your walls,

prosperity within your palaces.

4 (8) For my brothers' and companions' sakes

may I now say: Peace be within you.

(9) For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,

I will seek your good.

### V. THe meeting of the people and the city

In section III of our analysis, we explained the structure of our psalm. The psalm is divided, based on stylistic considerations, into four stanzas. We demonstrated there that stanza 1 is characterized by the linking connection between its three lines, whereas stanzas 2-4 are characterized by the striking doubling in the two lines of each stanza. The doubling in stanzas 2 and 4 create a parallelism between the two lines, whereas in stanza 3 the doubling is based on a repetition of two words in a fixed place in each line. We raised the question: Does the doubling that characterizes stanzas 2-4 serve to express a particular idea, and is there a common denominator shared by these stanzas?

As in section III, here too we shall begin our discussion with stanzas 2-4, and only afterwards shall we turn to stanza 1, which is different from them.

Let us examine **stanza 2**. Its two lines demonstrate parallelism, as was described in section III.[[1]](#footnote-1) Is this synonymous parallelism?[[2]](#footnote-2) The answer seems to be affirmative; in both lines, a description is given of something that is taking place "there" – in Jerusalem. The parallelism follows from the fact that the event described in each of the lines is presented in similar grammatical order and from similar linguistic phenomena in the two lines. Here is the formula upon which the two lines are built:

The word "*sham*" ("there") used in reference to Jerusalem / a past tense plural verb ("*alu"* ["went up"], "*yashvu*" ["sat"])/ a noun serving as the subject of the clause and appearing twice ("*shevatim*" – "*shivtei*" ["tribes"], "*kis'ot*" – "*kis'ot*" [throne]).

It is, however, difficult to describe this parallelism as synonymous. The subjects of the two lines, "the tribes of the Lord" and "the thrones of the house of David," are very different one from the other, and it is difficult to perceive the connection between them. Similarly, the parallel verbs are very different from each other (“went up” and “sat”), corresponding to the difference between the subjects. The verb "went up" denotes movement and dynamism, whereas the verb "sat" expresses motionlessness and being at rest. It may be argued that the parallelism between these two verbs is contrasting.

What underlies the differences between these two lines? It seems that the first line describes the **people** going up to Jerusalem, whereas the second line describes the **city** itself. The people going up "there" is comprised of people in motion; hence the dynamism characterizing the first line.[[3]](#footnote-3) The city, on the other hand, is a static element by its very nature; the "thrones" within it "sit" and wait for the people to appear before them for judgment.

The desire to create a contrast between the dynamic element and the static element explains the psalmist's seemingly surprising decision to describe the kings of the house of David by way of the noun "thrones." "Throne" is a metonym for "king."[[4]](#footnote-4) Why doesn't the psalmist simply say, "for there ruled the kings of the house of David"? The answer is that in order to sharpen the contrast between the dynamic element (the people) and the static element (the city), he chooses to describe the kingdom by way of an **object** that symbolizes it, and the verb connected to the kingdom by way of the static verb "sat."

What, then, is the second stanza's guiding idea in its entirety? This stanza wishes to describe **the encounter between the people and the city**, between the dynamic element and the static element. The stanza achieves this by way of two lines standing in partial contrasting parallelism to each other.

This explains something else as well. Why does the psalmist choose to emphasize specifically "the sitting for judgment" of the Davidic kings from among all the other functions of the monarchy? The answer to this question is that the judicial function of the kings is what serves as the meeting ground between them – who sit on the thrones for judgment – and the people who go up to be judged before them.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Let us move on to **stanza 3**: Will the distinction between the two lines of stanza 2 help us here as well? Indeed, it will. The fundamental difference between the first and second lines in this stanza is to whom the speaker's words are directed. In the first line, he addresses his fellow pilgrims entering the gates of Jerusalem along with him as they go up to the house of the Lord; in the second line, the call (his or theirs) is to the city of Jerusalem. The call to the pilgrims uses a dynamic verb, "*sha'alu*" ("pray"); the call to the city contains the static verb "*yehi*" ("may it be").

While it is true that the speaker turns to Jerusalem already in the second clause of the first line, the subject of what he says to it is "they who love you" – those pilgrims to whom his first words were directed.[[6]](#footnote-6) It turns out, then, that when the speaker speaks **about** Jerusalem, he directs his words towards his fellow pilgrims, and when he speaks **to** Jerusalem, the contents of his request relate to his fellows.

Not only does the second line of the stanza deal with the city, but it specifies two of its parts – its walls and its palaces. We have here the clearest expression of the city's static dimension (even more so than the "thrones" in the previous stanza).

It turns out, then, that the twofold verbal parallelism between the two lines of this stanza comes to illustrate the different context in which each of the repeating words is found:

Pray for the **peace** – directed at the pilgrims, dynamic verb

May **peace** be – directed at Jerusalem, static verb

**May they prosper** who love you – the root *shin-lamed-heh* (verb), relating to the pilgrims

**prosperity** within your palaces – the root *shin-lamed-heh* (noun), relating to the palaces of Jerusalem

Stanza 3, even more than stanza 2, expresses the meeting between the people and the city. In stanza 2, the lines parallel each other, but each line stands on its own. In stanza 3, on the other hand, there is continuity between the two verses (and therefore they are not parallel): the call to the people in the first line yields its fruit in the second line, with the people turning to Jerusalem.

The intimate meeting of the people and the city in stanza 3 finds expression not only in the verbal repetition, but also in the alliteration that connects the four clauses in the stanza: the letters *shin* and *lamed*, which characterize the name Jerusalem *(Yerushalayim*), repeat themselves together six times in the four clauses:

Pray (*sha'alu*)for the peace (*shelom*) of Jerusalem (*Yerushalayim*).

May they prosper (*yishlayu*) who love you.

May peace (*shalom*) be within your walls,

prosperity (*shalva*) within your palaces.

This stanza constitutes in its entirety an interpretation of the name of Jerusalem. The peace and prosperity of the city spread from the static city to the people who are engaged in a dynamic process of ascent to and meeting with the city.

**Stanza 4** is entirely a call of the speaker of the psalm to Jerusalem. Is it then possible to find in the lines of this stanza the distinction that we found in the previous stanzas? The distinction here is simple and prominent. In each of the lines, the speaker wishes good things for Jerusalem, and the parallelism is synonymous: "May I now say: Peace be within you" / "I will seek your good." But the objectives of these petitions are very different. In the first line: "For my brothers' and companions' sakes," i.e., the pilgrims with whom the speaker came to Jerusalem;[[7]](#footnote-7) in the second line, "For the sake of the house of the Lord our God," the house which is situated in the midst of Jerusalem and which constitutes the objective of their pilgrimage ("We are going to the house of the Lord").

Once again we find a meeting between the dynamic element – the people making pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and the static element – the house of the Lord. The good of Jerusalem, for which the speaker prays, flows abundantly both on the nation that visits the city and on the house of God concealed within it.

Let us now return to **stanza 1**, which differs in its nature from the stanzas that follow. Because of this difference, is it also different substantively? Does the distinction that we found in stanzas 2-4 between the people and the city, between the dynamic element and the static one, exist in stanza 1 as well?

It does not take very much effort to see that this stanza is also divided between these two elements. The opening line and the first half of the second line describe the pilgrims on their journey until they reach the city; the second half of the second line and the third line are devoted to the city and its appearance.

Stanza 1 also describes the meeting between the people and the city, but in this stanza this encounter is not an established fact as it is in the other stanzas; rather, the encounter **is created** in it. At the beginning of the stanza, the pilgrims are still in their own towns far from Jerusalem, and the movement toward Jerusalem is just beginning. But in the heart of the stanza, in its second line, we come to the initial and moving encounter between them:

Our feet were standing

within your gates, O Jerusalem.

We have found, then, the common denominator between all four stanzas in the psalm, and this is what determines the structure of each of the stanzas and the theme of the entire psalm - the meeting between the people and the city of Jerusalem. The theme of the psalm is neither the city of Jerusalem in itself, nor the pilgrims who visit it, but rather the encounter between them.

The name of God appears three times in the psalm, and one more time in abridged form, "*Y-ah.*" In the psalm's frame, that is, in its first and last line, we find the expression, "the house of the Lord" or "the house of the Lord our God." The house of God drives the entire "plot" of the psalm and serves as its starting point, but it is also the end of all the wishes and blessings – "For the sake of the house of the Lord our God…"

In the body of the psalm, the name of God appears twice, both times in the first line of stanza 2, which is dedicated to the people going up to Jerusalem. The tribes are called "the tribes of the Lord," and the purpose of their pilgrimage to Jerusalem is "to give thanks to the name of the Lord."

It turns out, then, that the name of God rests upon the two elements comprising the psalm – the static element, the house of God, and the dynamic element, the tribes of God, the tribes of Israel going up to Jerusalem.

Other psalms in the book of *Tehillim* deal with Jerusalem, the house of God, and pilgrimages. Psalms 42-43 and 84 describe the yearnings for the house of God, recall past pilgrimages, and express hope to merit pilgrimages in the future. Psalms 48 and 87 deal with the city of Jerusalem in itself, but do not mention the pilgrimages made to it.

Our psalm is unique in that it sings the praises of Jerusalem in relation to the experiences of the pilgrims when they encounter the city.

### VI. THe course of the psalm

What is left for us to do now is to describe the course of the psalm – the progress made from one stanza to the next in such a manner that creates continuity and development.

The role of **stanza 1**, as stated above, is to create the very encounter between the pilgrims and Jerusalem. In its first line, the opening line of the whole psalm, the pilgrims are still in their hometowns, far from Jerusalem. The physical distance is bridged by the joyous heart that yearns to go up to the house of God. Jerusalem is, indeed, far off, but it draws to it those who love it with magnetic force.

In order to illustrate this magnetic attraction, there is a jump between the first and second lines: The psalmist did not yet describe his actual going to Jerusalem, after hearing those who said to him, "We are going to the house of the Lord," and already, "Our feet were standing within your gates, O Jerusalem." Our psalm is indeed a psalm of pilgrims, but it is not the pilgrimage experience upon which it focuses. A description of the pilgrimage itself can be found in verses in psalms 42-43 and 84.[[8]](#footnote-8) Our psalm is dedicated to the experience of **the pilgrims' encounter with Jerusalem,** and therefore the psalmist hurries to describe this encounter already in the second line, "Our feet were standing within your gates" – intentionally skipping over an account of the journey itself.

The emotional force of the encounter expresses itself in the choice of grammatical persons in stanza 1. The pilgrims to Jerusalem speak of themselves in first person singular or plural, and they address Jerusalem in second person feminine – "within your gates, O Jerusalem." This addressing of Jerusalem in second person feminine continues until the end of the psalm (with the exception of stanza 2, the peculiarity of which will be discussed below). On the face of it, there is novelty here. The prophets of Israel oftentimes liken Zion and Jerusalem to a woman, and similarly they frequently address it in second person.[[9]](#footnote-9) Nevertheless, our psalm is different than those prophecies. In the words of the prophets, Zion and Jerusalem are names given to an abstract entity that embraces the people and the land, the kingdom, and perhaps also the city itself. Our psalm is unique in that the concrete city of Jerusalem, with its gates and buildings, its wall and its palaces, stands before the psalmist in all its materiality while he stands at its gates, and he addresses the real city as if it were a woman![[10]](#footnote-10) The poet Yitzchak Shelav wrote his poem "*Ke-Ish Ha-Medaber Be-Isha*" under the influence of our psalm and psalm 87:

Like a man who speaks of a woman, I shall speak of you,[[11]](#footnote-11) the city,

Things glorious,[[12]](#footnote-12) precious and soft.

I shall utter words that are

Better than caresses and warmer than kisses.[[13]](#footnote-13)

In **stanza 2**, there is a stylistic "retreat" from the intimacy expressed in the previous stanza through the use of the first and second grammatical persons. In this stanza, both the pilgrims to Jerusalem – "the tribes of the Lord" – and the city itself (with the thrones of the house of David that are found in it) are referred to in third person:

For the tribes went up there…

For there sat thrones for judgment…

What is more, even the name of Jerusalem is replaced by the term "there" (*sham* – *shama*). What is the meaning of this change?

It seems that this can be understood as follows. When the psalmist stands at the gates of Jerusalem and when he sees the city spread out before him in all its beauty, words reflecting the deep impression it has upon him escape from his mouth: "Jerusalem that is built. It is like a city that is united together." However, as he stands in that very same place, the psalmist contemplates the fact that Jerusalem is not only the city that reveals itself before him in the here and now. In a moment of reflection, he considers the role of Jerusalem in the life of the people, not only at this particular time, but at all times. A more restrained style is appropriate for reflection of such sort, a style that lacks the previous excitement of the "man who speaks to a woman."[[14]](#footnote-14)

Jerusalem fills two main roles in the life of Israel. It constitutes a center for pilgrimage, based on the law that three times a year the tribes of Israel must go up to the place that God will choose. This is the "religious" role of the city, connected primarily to the house of God that is situated within it.

Jerusalem, however, has another role - it is a royal city, the seat of the kingdom of the house of David – the site of government and justice.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Just as stanzas 1-2 constitute a pair in that they reflect two aspects of Jerusalem in relation to those standing at its gates, the manifest Jerusalem (stanza 1) and the concealed Jerusalem (stanza 2), so too stanzas 3-4 constitute a pair.

Stanzas 3-4 share both the same content and the same style. From a substantive perspective, the two stanzas contain blessings and wishes for Jerusalem. From a stylistic perspective, they are connected by the word "peace," which appears twice in stanza 3 and a third time in stanza 4. So too in both stanzas, Jerusalem is addressed in the second person feminine (as in stanza 1).

What is the place of these stanzas in the narrative framework of our psalm which describes a pilgrimage to Jerusalem? It seems that stanzas 3-4 reflect a more advanced stage of the encounter with Jerusalem. In stanzas 1-2, the feet of the pilgrims stand at the gates of Jerusalem; in stanzas 3-4, there are allusions to the fact that they have already entered the city. This is a reasonable conclusion from the pilgrims' blessing to Jerusalem, "May peace be within your walls, prosperity within your palaces." The direction indicated in this blessing is from the outside inwards – from the walls encompassing the city to the palaces inside. In the last stanza, the allusion goes even further: mention of "the house of the Lord our God" suggests that the pilgrims have already reached the house of God, the goal of their journey in stanza 1. It is possible then that stanzas 3-4 reflect the pilgrims' entry into Jerusalem and their arrival at the Temple.[[16]](#footnote-16)

We have already offered a basic explanation of stanzas 3-4 in section IV. Let us add here the following: Our psalm opened in first person singular, "**I** was glad when they said to **me**," and immediately shifted into first person plural, "**We** are going," "**our** feet were standing." It might seem that at this stage, the individual will be swallowed up among the mass of pilgrims which he has joined and that his voice will not be heard again. But the truth is that this is not the case.

Already in stanza 3, the individual sounds his voice, only that is only by implication; it seems that it is he who calls to his fellow pilgrims, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem," and he who then turns to Jerusalem and petitions, "May they prosper who love you." In this way, the speaker serves as sort of a go-between between his fellow pilgrims and the city that is so dear to him; he asks them to pray for the city's peace, and he petitions the city that it reward them and bestow prosperity upon them. The role of the individual speaker in this stanza and the role of his fellow pilgrims is the very opposite of their roles in stanza 1. There, it is they who say to him, "We are going to the house of the Lord," and he gladly goes with them, whereas here he calls to them, "Pray…," and they join him and bless Jerusalem, "May peace be within your walls."

In stanza 4, the individual returns and speaks his words by himself the entire length of the stanza: "For **my** brothers' and companions' sakes may **I** now say… **I** will seek your good." The reason for this is that the target of his words in this stanza, with which he addresses Jerusalem, is "for my brothers' and companions' sake" – his fellow pilgrims to Jerusalem. Since he wishes to bless them through Jerusalem, he must distinguish himself from them. Does the community of pilgrims then disappear in this last stanza? Not necessarily. The connection between the masses of pilgrims and the individual speaker is expressed here in the words, "For the sake of the house of the Lord **our** God."

Thus, it turns out that across the psalm we hear many different voices - the voice of the "I" and of the "we," the voice of "they" and of the plural "you" - and all these voices turn to the singular "you" – Jerusalem.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. We used this parallelism in section IV to establish that "the thrones of judgment" and "the thrones of the house of David" represent the very same thing, the monarchal rule of the house of David, the members of which also serve in a judicial capacity. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. "Synonymous parallelism" is parallelism in which the two clauses express similar content, as opposed to "contrasting parallelism." [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This dynamism finds expression not only in the verb "went up," but also in the last words in this line, which have no parallel in the second line – "to give thanks to the name of the Lord." Not only is the going up a dynamic act, but its goal of "giving thanks" is as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. a. Metonymy is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated in actuality or conceptually.

   b. "Sitting on a throne" (*Melakhim* I 1:13 and other verses there) is also a metonym for the act of ascending to the kingship.

   c. Calling rulers by the name of some object that symbolizes their rule is very common in all languages. "Pharaoh" in Egyptian means "great house;" the president of the United States is referred to as "the White House;" the pope is called "the Holy See." [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. a. This encounter is finely described in *Shmuel* II 15:2: "And when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment… of the tribes of Israel." Usually the judge is described as sitting in a fixed place, with those who need his judgment coming to him. See, for example, *Shoftim* 4:4-5.

   b. The parallelism between the two lines of stanza 2 adds meaning to the description of the pilgrimage of the tribes in the first line. They go up "there" – to Jerusalem - not only "to give thanks to the name of the Lord," but also to stand before the king for judgment regarding any quarrel that they might have with others. But this pilgrimage is a pilgrimage of individuals, and not associated specifically with the pilgrimage festivals. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See our explanation of this line in the previous section. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See note 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 42:4; 43:3-4; 84:6-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For example, *Yeshayahu* 49:14-26; 51:17 and on; 52:1-2; *Yechezkel* 16:1 and on; 22:1-1; all of 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In another psalm in the book of *Tehillim* in which the praises of Jerusalem are recounted, psalm 48, Jerusalem is addressed in the third person, and thus it lacks that feeling of intimacy of a personal relationship with Jerusalem as if it were a woman. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. As in our psalm, "*Adabra na shalom bakh*." [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. As in *Tehillim* 87:3, "*Nikhbadot medubar bakh*." [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. This poem was published in the press following the Six Day War, and then again in the pamphlet "*Me'at Min Ha-Or*" for *Parashat Bechukotai*, 5760. Unlike the Jerusalem in our psalm, Yitzchak Shelav's Jerusalem is a beloved, elderly woman, who had been visited with afflictions and the death of a child. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. As opposed to the vista of Jerusalem which reveals itself before the pilgrim approaching it, and therefore allows the psalmist to speak in second person, the tribes which go up to it on a regular basis and the thrones of David hidden away in its palaces are not revealed before him, and therefore he speaks of them in third person. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This distinction between the two roles of Jerusalem, its being "the temple of the King" and "the city of royalty," stands at the heart of R. Kook's essay, "*Chibat Yerushalayim*," in his "*Chazon Ha-Ge'ula*," pp. 35-41, especially pp. 37-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. It is also possible that they reflect the pilgrims' exit from the Temple and Jerusalem and their farewell blessings. Amos Chakham raises both possibilities in his commentary, and we cited his words at the beginning of section IV. He himself adopts the possibility that "the psalm reflects the language of pilgrims who have completed their visit to Jerusalem and are about to leave the city and return to their homes." This is also the way he explains stanzas 1-2. We, on the other hand, are more persuaded by the other possibility – that the psalm accompanies the pilgrims through all the stages of their pilgrimage until their arrival at the Temple. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)