YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***TEHILLIM* (SERIES II)**

**Rav Elchanan Samet**

**Shiur #22: Psalm 22 -**

**"My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me"**

**Complaint, Supplication, and Thanksgiving**

**Appendix: Psalm 22 and Purim**

According to the different rites practiced in our time, Psalm 22 is recited at two different points in the Purim service:

1. The Sephardim and the Oriental communities open the evening service on the night of Purim with this psalm.

2. The Sephardim and the Oriental communities, as well as the Ashkenazim who follow the rite of the Vilna Gaon, recite Psalm 22 as the "Psalm of the Day" for Purim at the end of the Purim morning service.

In this study, we will attempt to reveal the sources of these two customs and to understand the rationales underlying them – the connection between Purim and the content of the psalm, according to its plain sense or its midrashic sense.

### I. reciting Psalm 22 before the evening service on the night Of Purim

In his book, *Tefilla U-Minhagei Tefilla Eretz-Yisraelim Be-Tekufat Ha-Geniza*, Ezra Fleischer dedicates a long and detailed chapter to the ancient custom of the people of *Eretz Yisrael* to open the evening service of Shabbat and the Festivals with special psalms. These psalms marked, with a grand and festive flourish, the beginning of those days.[[1]](#footnote-1) Within a more or less fixed framework of psalms, the main psalm would change from festival to festival in accordance with its content.[[2]](#footnote-2) When this custom was fully developed, it was observed before the evening service of Shabbat, the Festivals, Chol Ha-Mo'ed, Rosh Chodesh, Chanuka, and Purim.

Fleischer follows the development of this ancient custom of *Eretz Yisrael* until several centuries ago in various *machzorim* that are no longer used in any active rites (see note 3). He concludes the chapter dealing with this custom as follows (p. 213):

The custom today to recite "*Mizmor Shir Le-Yom Ha-Shabbat*" and *"Hashem Malakh Ge'ut Lavesh*"before *Barkhu* on Friday night is but a remnant of the custom studied in this chapter… the very ancient practice in *Eretz* *Yisrael*, which has become completely forgotten from the heart.

In truth, however, the custom is observed even in our time, in a more modest manner than in the past and with changes, in the Sephardi communities. Before the evening service of Shabbat, the Sephardim are accustomed to recite the psalms of Shabbat (Psalms 92-93, as is the custom today in all Jewish communities); in addition, "before the evening service of a Festival, they are accustomed to recite a chapter of *Tehillim* that is special for the day, it being called 'the psalm of the Festival.'"[[3]](#footnote-3) They follow a similar practice before the evening service of Rosh Chodesh,[[4]](#footnote-4) TishaBe-Av,[[5]](#footnote-5) and Purim.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Comparison between the psalms recited today on each of these dates according to the Sephardic rite and those recited according to the early custom of *Eretz Yisrael* reveals only partial overlap.

What is the psalm that was recited according to the ancient custom in *Eretz Yisrael* prior to the evening service on Purim? Fleischer (p. 173) notes two Geniza fragments that document two different customs: One manuscript attests to the recitation of Psalm 7 ("*Shigayon* *Le-David*"),[[7]](#footnote-7) whereas a second manuscript testifies to the recitation of Psalm 22.

The Sephardi custom of reciting Psalm 22 before the evening service on the night of Purim is thus documented in one of the Geniza manuscripts that reflect the early custom of the inhabitants of *Eretz Yisrael*.

### 2. psalm 22 as the "daily psalm" of Purim

The *Tosafot* (*Megilla* 4a, s.v. *pesak*) record several laws regarding the prayers offered on Purim (unrelated to the Talmudic passage there). While describing the end of the morning service of Purim, the *Tosafot* write:

One says "*Tehilla Le-David*," "*U-Va Le-Tzion*," and one does not say "*La-Menatze'ach*" (Psalm 20)… and one says "*La-Menatze'ach al Ayelet Ha-Shachar*," because it mentions the downfall of the idol-worshippers. And similarly on the night of the fourteenth. And one says *Pitom Ha-Ketoret*, and the whole order, as on a weekday.

The *Tosafot* describe the prevailing custom in their time and place (13th century France). The place where our psalm was recited in the Purim liturgy indicates that our psalm served as the "daily psalm" of Purim.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Testimony to a similar custom in Spain in that same period is found in the *Sefer Ha-Manhig* of R. Avraham ben R. Natan Ha-Yarchi:[[9]](#footnote-9)

I saw a good custom in Toledo and its environs to recite after the prayer service psalms based on the content of the day… On Rosh Chodesh: "*Borkhi Nafshi et Hashem*" … And on Chanuka: "*Mizmor Shir Chanukat Ha-Bayit Le-David*" (Psalm 30)… And on Purim: "*Al Ayelet Ha-Shachar*," which speaks of Esther, as is stated in [chapter] *Megilla Nikret*: "Why is Esther likened to a hind?"[[10]](#footnote-10) And so it is reasonable to do, and so it is fitting in my eyes.

The words of the *Sefer Ha-Manhig* seem to underlie what R. Yaakov bar Asher writes in his *Tur* (*Orach Chayim* 133, *Hilkhot Nefilat Apayim*):

And in Spain it is customary practice to recite a psalm every day after the *Kaddish* (that follows the *Kedusha* of "*U-Va Le-Tzion*")… And on each appointed time there is a different psalm in accordance with the essence [of the day]… And on Purim they recite "*La-Menatze'ach al Ayelet Ha-Shachar*," and this is a good custom.

In that same generation (middle of the 14th century) and in that same country (Spain), R. David Abudraham writes in his *siddur*, in the section dealing with the liturgy of Purim:

[After the *Kedusha* of "*U-Va le-Tzion*" and the return of the Torah scroll to its place], one says the full *Kaddish*, and he recites "*La-Menatze'ach al Ayelet Ha-Shachar*" which speaks of Esther, as is stated in *Megilla* [the reference is to *Yoma* 29a[[11]](#footnote-11)): "Why is Esther likened to a hind? Because her womb is narrow like that of a hind, etc." And it also contains an allusion to the name of Haman…

Three of the four testimonies that we brought from the writings of the *Rishonim* to the recitation of our psalm as the "daily psalm" of Purim are associated with the custom in Spain, while one (the words of the Tosafot in tractate *Megilla*) originates in France. These "statistics" reflect the situation in our time. All of the Sefardim follow the practice described here,[[12]](#footnote-12) while only a minority among the Ashkenazim, those who follow the rite of the Vilna Gaon, recite this psalm on Purim.[[13]](#footnote-13)

### 3. reasons for reciting Psalm 22 on Purim

The Tosafotcited in the previous section, as well as the *Acharonim*, mention several reasons for the custom of reciting our psalm on Purim, as well as various connections between the content of the psalm and the content of the holiday:

**a. Downfall of the idol worshippers**

Tosafot (*Megilla* 4a, s.v. *pesak*) write: "Because it mentions the downfall of the idol worshippers."

Even if we understand that the "oxen," "dogs," and "the assembly of the wicked" who surround the petitioner in our psalm are non-Jews (a reasonable understanding), although our psalm indicates that God saved the petitioner from them ("and answer me from the horns of the wild oxen" [22]; "but when he cried to Him, He heard" [25]), nowhere does it say that God brought about their downfall.[[14]](#footnote-14)

We must explain, then, that Tosafotmean to say that the very rescue of the petitioner from his enemies is their downfall.[[15]](#footnote-15) This reason, however, is very general, and would have been equally appropriate for dozens of psalms in the book of *Tehillim*.

**b. Esther is likened to a hind of the morning**

Ravan Ha-Yarchi in his *Sefer Ha-Manhig* cites another reason for reciting our psalm on Purim: "As is stated in chapter *Megilla Nikret*: 'Why is Esther likened to a hind?'"

His words are taken from the *gemara* in *Yoma* 29a, which offers several explanations for the cryptic phrase appearing in the heading of our psalm, "*Ayelet Ha-Shachar*."[[16]](#footnote-16) One of the explanations for this phrase is that of R. Zera, which is followed by that of R. Asi:

Why is Esther likened to a hind? To tell you that just as a hind has a narrow womb and is desirable to her mate at all times as at the first time, so was Esther precious to King Achashverosh at all times as at the first time.

R. Asi said: Why is Esther compared to the dawn? To tell you that just as the dawn is the end of the whole night, so is the story of Esther the end of all the miracles.

It is clear to these two *Amora’im* that the phrase "*Ayelet Ha-shachar*" in the heading to our psalm refers to Esther, each one offering a different connection between Esther and the phrase.

**c. An allusion to the name of Haman**

R. David Abudraham, after bringing the reason proposed in *Sefer Ha-Manhig*, adds another reason:

And it also has an allusion to the name of Haman, as it is stated (v. 21): "Deliver my life from the sword; my only one from the power of the dog" (***H****atzila* ***m****eicherev* ***n****afshi*, ***m****iyad* ***k****elev* ***y****echidati*). The initial letters: *Haman maki*.

**d. Esther said this psalm**

R. Akiva Eiger in his *Gilyon ha-Shas* (*Megilla* 4a) comments on the Tosafot cited in section 2 above, and refers us to two other Talmudic passages: "See below 15b and *Yoma* 29a. **And the matter requires further study."** These two references are to expositions in which the *gemara* expounds our psalm in connection to the book of Esther. When he says, "And the matter requires further study," he means to say that the reason proposed by the Tosafot – "Because it mentions the downfall of the idol worshippers" – is not the reason that arises from these two passages for the connection between the psalm and Purim.

This is what the *gemara* states in *Megilla* 15b:

"And she stood in the inner court of the king's house" (*Esther* 5:1). R. Levi said: When she reached the chamber of the idols, the *Shekhina* left her. She said: "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me." Do You perchance punish the inadvertent offense like the presumptuous one, or one done under compulsion like one done willingly [Rashi: Even though I go to him, it is under circumstances beyond my control]? Or is it because I called him "dog," as it is stated: "Deliver my life from the sword; my only one from the power of the dog." She straightaway retracted and called him a "lion," as it is stated: "Save me from the lion's mouth."

It is clear to the Talmudic expounder that the speaker in our psalm is Esther, and the situation described in it is her going to Achashverosh and putting her life in jeopardy. Indeed, Rashi (*Yoma* 39b, s.v. *lama nimshela Esther*) explains the background of the connection between Esther and the phrase "*ayelet ha-shachar*" as follows: "In tractate *Megilla* (15b), we said that Esther said this psalm…"

**e. "I cry in the daytime… and in the night season."**

Here is another exposition brought in tractate *Megilla* 4a, connecting our psalm to the book of *Esther*:

R. Yehoshua ben Levi further said: A person is obligated to read the *Megilla* in the evening and to repeat it in the day, as it is written: "O my God, I cry in the daytime, but You answer not; and in the night season, and I have no repose."

Rashi explains, based on this exposition, that the reading of the *Megilla* is "in commemoration of the miracle, for they would cry out in the days of their troubles by day and in the night." Therefore this verse of complaint and supplication serves as a support for the law of reading the *Megilla.*

**4. Psalm 22 in *Midrash Tehillim***

In the previous section, we noted three places in the Babylonian Talmud where various different *Amora’im*[[17]](#footnote-17) expound our psalm in connection with Esther and the events described in the book of *Esther*.

In contrast to the paucity of expositions in the Babylonian Talmud that expound our psalm in reference to Esther and the events related in the book of *Esther*, in *Midrash Tehillim* we find a surprisingly large number of expositions that connect our psalm to the book of *Esther.*

*Midrash Tehillim* to Psalm 22 is very long (18 pages in the Buber edition), and the largest part of it, if not the majority, expounds our psalm in connection to the events described in the book of *Esther.* Anyone reading *Midrash Tehillim* to our psalm would think that he is reading not *Midrash Tehillim*, but one of the *midrashim* on the book of *Esther*!Indeed, this *midrash* contains explanations and expositions of verses in the book of *Esther* that are not connected to our psalm.

Of course, we cannot bring in this framework all of the expositions in *Midrash Tehillim* that connect our psalm to the book of *Esther*, and therefore we will suffice with one or two for each third of the psalm.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Here is an exposition on the first two sections of the psalm, sections I-II:[[19]](#footnote-19)

"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me" – The first day [of the three days of fasting set by Esther] – "My God"; the second day – "my God"; the third day – "why have You forsaken me"…[[20]](#footnote-20)

"O my God, I cry in the daytime, but You answer not." She said to the Holy One, blessed is He: Is this what You did to our forefathers in Egypt? Is it not that when they cried, You heard [them], as it is stated: "And I heard their cries" (*Shemot* 3:7)? Pharaoh said (*Shemot* 1:22): "Every son that is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive." And Haman said (*Esther* 3:13): "Both young and old, little children and women, in one day." Pharaoh said… He who completed his work, they would do nothing to him, but Haman decreed: "To destroy, to kill, and to annihilate, all Jews." Those who were in Egypt, when they cried out, You immediately heard them, but we have fasted these three days, and prayed, and cried out, and called, but You have not answered us.[[21]](#footnote-21) If we have no good deeds, do for us for the sake of the sanctity of Your name – "But You are holy, O You that are enthroned upon the praises of Israel."

Here is an exposition on the second part of the psalm:[[22]](#footnote-22)

"Many bulls have compassed me" – These are the troops of Achashverosh.

"Strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round" – … R. Abba says: These are the sons of Haman, who are waiting for her to fall.

"They gape upon me with their mouths, like a ravening and a roaring lion" – Just as a lion sits over his prey and tears it, so to Achashverosh sits over me and tears me…

"For dogs have compassed me" – These are the sons of Haman.

"The assembly of the wicked have enclosed me" – These are the troops of Haman.

"They seize my hands and my feet like a lion" – R. Yehuda said: They cast a spell upon me, that my hand and feet would be repulsive to Achashverosh.

And elsewhere in the *midrash*:[[23]](#footnote-23)

When [Esther] said, "And so I will go to the king" (*Esther* 4:16), the residents of the palace began to say: Now he is angry with her, and he has sentenced her to death. And each and every one of them would say: I will take her clothing. And this one would say: I will take her ornaments. And this one would day: I will take her rings. And this one would say: I will take her royal blue cloaks, as it is stated: "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture" (v. 19). And when she saw this, she prayed and said: "But You, O Lord, be not far from me. O my strength, haste You to help me" (v. 20). And when David saw with the holy spirit the term with which she would cry out to the Holy One, blessed be He – *eyulati*, "my strength" – he arranged for her this psalm: "*La-Menatze'ach al Ayelet Ha-Shachar*."

Here is an exposition on the third part of the psalm:[[24]](#footnote-24)

"The meek shall eat and be satisfied" (v. 27) – This is Mordechai and Esther, who merited the table of kings. It is taught: Haman's money was divided into three parts. A third to Mordechai and Esther; a third to those toiling in Torah study; and a third toward the building of the Temple. And the three of them are mentioned in one verse: "They shall eat and be satisfied" – this is Mordechai and Esther; "Those who seek Him shall praise the Lord" – these are those who toil in Torah study; "May your heart forever revive" – this is the building of the Temple, as it is written: "And My eyes and My heart shall be there forever" (II *Divrei Ha-Yamim* 7:16).

As stated, we have brought here only a few of the many expositions, all of which read our psalm as having been said by Esther, in connection with events described in the book of Esther.

What then is the meaning of this phenomenon? Are these many expositions a **result**of the customary practice among the people living in *Eretz Yisrael* (as least in part) to designate our psalm for Purim? Or are these expositions the **reason** for the establishment of this practice? Perhaps both of these explanations are correct.

**5. The plain meaning of our psalm vs. its exposition as the psalm of Esther**

Over the course of our study, we have explained the psalm throughout as the prayer of an individual petitioner. The complaint in section I of the psalm, "Why have **You abandoned me,**"is the complaint of an individual; the trouble described in section 3, **"But I** am a worm, and no man," is the trouble of an individual; and even the contrasting background to the present situation of the petitioner, described in section IV, is the experience of an individual petitioner: "But You are He **that took me** out of the womb: **You did make me hope** when I was upon my mother's breasts…"

Similarly, in the second third, the third of the supplication, the individual petitioner describes his dangers, troubles, and his loneliness – **"Have compassed me… have beset me round…** They gape **upon me** with their mouths" – and he puts forward his plea for rescue – "**O my strength, to help me…** Deliver **my life** from the sword; **my only one** from the power of the dog" – all in the singular and corresponding to the experiences of an individual. This is particularly striking in section VII, which describe personal physical and psychological reactions.

Similarly, in the third third it is an individual who is the speaker: "I will declare Your name **to my brethren."** But here a doubt arises. An individual who offers thanks to God for his rescue might do so in the midst of his relatives, friends, and acquaintances, but in our psalm we find general, collective phrases that are not typical of an individual's gratitude: the turn to "all the seed of Yaakov… all the seed of Israel" (verse 24); the address to "all the ends of the world… all the families of the nations"; and also the telling of the story to "their seed shall serve Him" and "to a people that shall be born" – that is, to the coming generations.

These expressions in the third third bring us to reexamine the two previous thirds. Do these also contain such phrases? In section II in the first third, the speaker seems to be the people of Israel! This is not simply due to the fact that the speaker in this section uses the plural, which is appropriate for the people of Israel (**"Our fathers** trusted in You…"), but because the entire content of this section attests to this. An individual who complains about God not answering his prayers (as in section I) would not cite as the antithetical background to his situation God's response to "our fathers," and the praise heaped upon Him when He saved them, to the point that He became "enthroned upon the praises of **Israel."**

Is it then possible that the entire psalm is the prayer not of an individual, but rather of "the people of Israel," who find themselves in critical danger and feel that God is not answering their prayers?

It is difficult to read our psalm as a communal psalm, because of sections IV, VI and VII, which describe the most personal experience of the petitioner. This would be difficult to attribute to the people of Israel as a whole, even as a metaphor.[[25]](#footnote-25)

The *midrashim* of *Chazal* (both in the Babylonian Talmud and in *Midrash Tehillim* and in other places) identify the extreme situation described in our psalm with a historical situation in the annals of the Jewish population that fits perfectly that which is described in our psalm – the events described in the book of *Esther*. Attention should, however, be paid to the fact that according to the various *midrashim*, the speaker in our psalm is not the people of Israel as a collective speaking in first person singular. Rather, the speaker is indeed an individual person – Esther bat Avichayil – but she speaks both in her own name and in the name of all of the people of Israel.

According to this midrashic approach, there is no difficulty with the fact that Esther, who acts as Israel's representative in an effort to save them from Haman's decree to destroy the people, speaks both in the singular and in the plural.

According to the *midrash*, Esther argues in the name of all of Israel: "She said to the Holy One, blessed is He: Is this what You did **to our forefathers** in Egypt?"[[26]](#footnote-26)

On the other hand, when the *midrash* comes to section IV, "But You are He that took me out of the womb; You did make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon You from the womb; You are my God from my mother's belly" – it explains it based on the personal biography of Esther, who was orphaned from her father and mother:[[27]](#footnote-27)

Esther said: After my mother conceived, my father died; after my mother gave birth, she died. And You did make me hope, and you gave me breasts to replace the breasts of my mother, as it is stated (*Esther* 2:7): "And he brought up Hadassa [for she had neither father nor mother]" – Mordechai's wife nursed Esther and Mordechai brought her up.

In this way, the *midrash* resolves the duality found in our psalm, in which, on the one hand, the individual of the speaker is evident, and from which, on the other hand, the voices of all of the people of Israel and of the historical events in their past echo.

In the end, we must remember that we are dealing here with *derash*, and *derash* can never substitute for the plain meaning of the text.

Translated by David Strauss

1. Fleischer describes this custom in the third chapter of his book, *Mizmorei Chag Ve-Shabbat Be-Tefilatam shel Benei Eretz Yisrael*, pp. 161-213. He notes that "the custom was apparently established in *Eretz* *Yisrael* in a very early period, and was practiced throughout the period of the Geniza," but eventually was forgotten (p. 161). See, however, our remarks above, that a similar practice is found in Sephardi communities. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It should be noted that in some early communities the recitation of these psalms was preceded by a blessing that included God's name and kingship, and also followed by such a blessing. See ibid., pp. 181-185. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Madrikh Le-Hilkhot Tefila*, at the end of *Siddur Koren*, Sephardi rite, edited by David Benayahu, law 396. There he explicitly connects this practice to the early practice in *Eretz* *Yisrael*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See ibid., law 374. It should be noted that the custom observed by Sephardim in our time to recite the pslam "*Borkhi Nafshi*" (Psalm 104) is not in keeping with the early practice in *Eretz* *Yisrael*, according to which the Rosh Chodesh Psalm was Psalm 98 – "*Mizmor Shiru La-Hashem Shir Chadash*." [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See ibid., law 861, that we recite Psalm 137, and this was the practice documented also in *Machzor Romania* (in addition to other psalms and verses; see Fleischer, p. 211, and notes 250-251). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See ibid., law 727. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In, note 75, Fleischer notes that two *siddurim* that were profoundly influenced by the ancient custom of *Eretz* *Yisrael*, *Machzor Romania* (Balkans) and *Machzor Aram Tzova* (Aleppo), also bring Psalm 7 as the psalm of Purim.

   Similarly, tractate *Soferim* (chapter 18) establishes Psalm 7 as the psalm of Purim, but according to *Soferim*, it is recited on the day of Purim, and not before the evening service on the night of Purim. *Soferim* does not attest to a practice of reciting psalms before the evening service. See Fleischer, p. 188 and 199-202. It would appear that Psalm 7 was chosen as the psalm of Purim because of what is stated therein (verses 16-17): "He has made a pit, and has dug it out, and has fallen into the ditch which he made." [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. What is the earliest source for this practice of reciting alternative psalms as the "daily psalm" on Festivals and other special days? The source appears to be tractate *Soferim*. The author of this work, who apparently lived in *Eretz Yisrael* during the Geonic period (circa the eighth century) was also familiar with the Babylonian customs, and sometimes tried to combine the different practices in the two countries.

   According to the Babylonian custom, a different psalm is recited each day of the week at the end of the morning service, in commemoration of the Levitical singing in the Temple, as is spelled out in *Tamid* 7:4. The people of *Eretz Yisrael* were not familiar with this practice. In contrast, they were accustomed to open the evening service on Festivals and other special days with a special psalm, in accordance with the essence of each day. The people of Babylonia were not familiar with this practice.

   The author of tractate *Soferim* (chapters 18-19) tried to combine these two customs, and he assigned them a common place – in *Pesukei De-Zimra*. This did not fully succeed: The Babylonian custom of reciting a fixed "daily psalm" continued at the end of the morning service. But over time, the alternative psalms for the festivals were appended to the end of the morning service as "the daily psalm."

   Thus, it turned out that the Sephardi custom on Purim is to recite Psalm 22 twice: In accordance with the early practice in *Eretz Yisrael*, before the evening service on the night of Purim, and in accordance with the custom that developed based on tractate *Soferim*, as the "daily psalm" as the end of the mornng service of Purim. (It should be noted that in tractate *Soferim*, the psalm for Purim is Psalm 7.)

   This is all based on Ezra Fleischer's analysis of the words of tractate *Soferim*, pp. 161-164 and 199-202. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Yitzchak Refael (ed.), *Dinei Tefilla* (Jerusalem, 5738), pp. 107-108. Ravan Ha-Yarchi (1155-1215) was born in Provence, but he served as a *dayan* in Toledo, Spain, and there he wrote his *Sefer Ha-Manhig* at the beginning of the 13th century. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The *gemara*'s exposition that connects the heading of our psalm, "*La-Menatze'ach al Ayelet Ha-Shachar*," to Esther, who was called Ayelet, does not appear in tractate *Megilla*, but rather in tractate *Yoma* 29a. It would appear that the author cited from memory, and that he thought that this *gemara* is found in tractate *Megila* based on its content. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The mistake concerning the source of the talmudic statement was repeated here about a hundred and forty years after the appearance of *Sefer Ha-Manhig*. See previous note. It seems that R. David Abudraham used *Sefer Ha-Manhig* (as did the author of the *Tur* a short time before). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The later Sephardic halakhic authorities disagree about whether the special psalm for the various holidays (or Rosh Chodesh) is recited in place of the "daily psalm" for the days of the week (the position of R. Yosef Chazan in his book, *Chikrei Lev*) or whether it is recited in addition to the "daily psalm" (the position of R. Chayim Benveniste in his book, *Shayarei Kenesset Ha-Gedola*). There is also a difference in practice between the various communities. See *Madrich Le-Hilkhot Tefila*, in *Siddur Koren*, law 381. It should be noted that the words of the *Rishonim* brought above seem to support the *Chikrei Lev*. See also the next note. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. At the beginning of *Siddur Ha-Gra*, ed. R. N.H. Halevi (New York, 5714), in *Tefillat Shacharit*, there is a table of psalms which are to be recited on different occasions according to the Vilna Gaon. At the bottom it says that "we do not recite two psalms on one day," and it lists the rules of priority. He fundamentally accepts the view of the *Chikrei Lev*; see previous note. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. A marginal note in the *gemara* remarks about these words of *Tosafot*: "In that psalm (22) we do not find the downfall of any nation. But in *Eliyahu Rabba* 693, no. 9, it says: "And in Tosafot, *Megilla* 4, they write to say 'A poem, a psalm of Asaf' (Psalm 83), because it speaks of the downfall of Amalek." This must have been his reading of the Tosafot*.*

    Indeed, Psalm 83 is very fitting for Purim for other reasons as well, but we do not find any evidence for such a custom anywhere else in the writings of the *Rishonim.* [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. A description of the downfall of the enemies of Israel is found in Psalm 7, which, as we saw, was recited according to certain ancient rites on Purim. Verses 16-17 read: "He has made a pit, and has dug it out, and has fallen into the ditch which he made. **His mischief shall** **return upon his own head,** and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own plate." This description aptly describes Haman's downfall, about which it is stated in the book of *Esther* (9:25): **"That his wicked scheme,** which he had devised agaisnt the Jews, **should return upon his own head."** Indeed, in *Midrash Tehillim* (ed. Buber, p. 35), this verse in Psalm 7 is expounded in reference to Haman: "'That his wicked scheme should return upon his own head' – this is Haman, for everything that he devised against Mordechai was returned upon his own head." [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The commentators who try to offer the plain meaning of the text have proposed widely-differing explanations of the phrase "*Ayelet Ha-Shachar*": The name of a musical instrument (Rashi, Ibn Ezra); dawn (*alot ha-shachar*) (Ibn Ezra); a designation of the people of Israel (Rashi, Radak); and others. The truth is that we have no means to determine the meaning of this phrase, just as we do not have the means to understand the meaning of words in many of the headings to the psalms of *Sefer Tehillim.* [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. It should be noted that R. Asi (*Yoma* 29a), R. Levi (*Megilla* 15b), and R. Yehoshua ben Levi (*Megilla* 4a) are all *Amora’im* of the first generation who lived in *Eretz Yisrael*. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The greatest number of expositions about Esther in *Midrash Tehillim* revolve around the heading of our psalm, the words "*Ayelet Ha-Shachar*." In this framework, we will not bring any of these expositions. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Buber edition, pp. 183-184. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Compare with R. Levi's exposition of the verse in *Megilla* 15b, cited at the end of the previous section, sub-section d. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. It is clear that this exposition also explains verses 5-6 in our psalm: **"Our fathers** trusted in You… **They cried** to You, and were delivered" – "Is this what You did to **our forefathers** in Egypt? Is it not that when they cried, You heard [them]," even though these verses are not mentioned here explicitly. The *midrash* reads section II as support for the complaint in section I, while identifying "our fathers" with those who were in Egypt. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Buber ed., pp. 193-194. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid., p. 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid., p. 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. a. Some of the medieval commentators, although they did not always spell out the considerations as presented above, proposed several identifications of the speaker in the psalm (and thus they identify the situation described in the psalm). Their words give rise to the two possibilities that we have been discussing. For example, the Radak says: "Some explain it as referring to David while he was running away from Shaul. And what is correct is that *'Ayelet Ha-Shachar*' refers to the people of Israel who are in this exile, and the end of the psalm proves this… They call out from their exile: 'My God, my God, why have You forsaken me' – in the singular in reference to all of the people of Israel, who are like one man in exile."

    Although the Radak also mentions the *midrash* of *Chazal* – "And they said that it refers to Esther and to the people of Israel who were in exile at that time" – he prefers, in keeping with his general approach, to explain that the psalm was said not about a particular situation in the past, but rather about "Israel who are in **this** exile." We have already in the past explained the reason for this inclination.

    b. The possibility of explaining the psalm as the psalm of an individual, as we have done throughout this study, and reconciling the places that pose a difficulty to this, is preferable to the reverse possibility, both from an exegetical perspective and because of the general impression that we get from the psalm as a whole. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See the *midrash* in its entirety in the previous section. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *Midrash Tehillim* (ed. Buber), pp. 192-193. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)