

Mizmor 011

Chizuk for a Fugitive

Key Concepts

David composed Mizmor 011 of Tehillim during a bleak period when he was a fugitive, about to be driven out of Eretz Yisrael by King Shaul and his soldiers. David felt he was being unjustly excluded from the one place in the world where he could be nearest to Hashem, the Land where the *Shechinah* dwells. David was especially concerned by the crimes his pursuers had already committed, without being held accountable. But David soon realized that he was being tested and in this mizmor he accuses his enemies of treating him like a defenseless bird that has wandered from its nest. He then vigorously declares his absolute bitachon that Hashem would make matters right in the end.

Historical Background

THE PEOPLE OF ZIPH. David deeply resented the fact that in the course of fleeing King Shaul, he was being forced to leave Eretz Yisrael. At one point, while still in the territory of Yehudah, David's location was betrayed to Shaul by the people of Ziph (See Mizmor 054). When Shaul reached this location, he camped for the night. However, David sent out scouts and found that Shaul had left his garrison unguarded. Shaul himself was asleep in the center of the camp and David had the opportunity to kill him. However, he merely took Shaul's spear and water flask to prove that he had Shaul under his power.

David then crossed a ford and called out to his pursuers from a distant mountaintop. He accused them in the following words: "They have driven me away this day from attaching myself to Hashem's heritage, effectively saying, 'Go worship other gods!'" (I *Shmuel* 26:19). He then compared himself to a bird being hunted in the mountains, saying, "For the king of Yisrael has gone to seek out a single flea as one hunts the partridge in the mountains." (ibid. posuk 20).

Navigating Tehillim. David felt very hurt by the betrayal of the people of Ziph. However, he ultimately overcame his bitterness through a renewal of *bitachon*. This is described in Mizmor 054.

THE SLANDER OF DOEG. In the mizmor David also refers to the massacre of the Kohanim of the city of Nov by a cruel, but self-righteous individual named Doeg (I

Shmuel 22:9-19). That tragic event came about after David received help from the Kohen Gadol in Nov. By helping a fugitive from the king, the Kohen Gadol had acted innocently, not knowing that David was being hunted by the king. But that is not how it was reported to Shaul by Doeg. When Shaul got the misleading report from Doeg, he was so angered that he ordered all the Kohanim of the city of Nov killed. In the end it was Doeg himself who executed Shaul's harsh command since no one else was willing to do it.

Navigating Tehillim. David was to draw an important lesson from this experience about the harm done by those who commit the sin of slander as described in Mizmor 052.

Exploring the Mizmor

PART 1. THE CHALLENGE. David speaks directly to King Shaul and his supporters who were driving him out of Eretz Yisrael. He rebukes them for wasting their time by treating him like a wild bird of the mountains.

(א) לְמַנְצַח לְדָוִד בַּה' חָסִיתִי אֵיךְ תִּאמְרוּ לְנַפְשִׁי נוֹדֵי הַרְכָּם צְפוּרִי:

(1) *For the musician, by David. I have taken my refuge in Hashem. How dare you say to me, flee from your mountain like a bird?*

PART 2. A RHETORICAL QUESTION. David turns to those who are listening to this song and asks them if they can explain this cruel situation. An innocent man (David) has been made a fugitive and the innocent Kohanim of Nov, who are the foundations of the world, have been slaughtered by a cruel man (Doeg). Since Hashem is righteous (the ultimate *tzadik*), how is it that He tolerates such injustice?

(ב) כִּי הִנֵּה הַרְשָׁעִים יְדַרְכוּן קֶשֶׁת כּוֹנְנֵי חֶצֶם עַל יָתֵר לִירוֹת בְּמוֹ אֶפֶל לְיִשְׂרָאֵל לֵב:

(ג) כִּי הַשְּׂתוֹת יִהְרָסוּן צְדִיק מִה פָּעַל:

(2) *For behold, the wicked stretch the bow, ready their arrow on the bowstring to shoot in the dark at the upright of heart. (3) When the foundations of the world are destroyed, what has [Hashem] the tzadik done?*

PART 3. JUSTICE WILL PREVAIL. David replies to his rhetorical question. He declares that the wicked perpetrators will not escape justice. Hashem sees all and even the righteous man (the *tzadik*) is being tested in order that he may earn his ultimate reward. In the end it is the *tzadik* who will be welcomed by Hashem and will merit to see the Shechinah.

(ד) ה' בְּהִיכַל קִדְשׁוֹ ה' בְּשָׁמַיִם כִּסְאוֹ עֵינָיו יַחֲזוּ עַפְעָפְיוֹ יִבְחֲנוּ בְּנֵי אָדָם: (ה) ה' צַדִּיק יִבְחֶן וְרָשָׁע וְאֹהֵב חָמָס שְׂנֵאָה נִפְשׁוֹ: (ו) יִמְטֵר עַל רָשָׁעִים פְּחִים אֵשׁ וְגַפְרִית וְרוּחַ זֹלַעְפוֹת מִנֶּת כּוֹסִם: (ז) כִּי צַדִּיק ה' צְדָקוֹת אֲהַב יֵשֶׁר יַחֲזוּ פְּנִימוֹ:

(4) Hashem is in the abode of His holiness, Hashem's throne, is in Heaven, His eyes observe. His eyelids [are open to] scrutinize mankind. (5) He tests the tzadik but He despises the rasha (wicked perpetrator) and the lover of lawlessness. (6) He will rain down fiery coals upon the resha'im, fire and brimstone, a burning blast, their allotted portion. (7) For Hashem is the tzadik and He loves righteousness, for the upright to see His presence.

Learning the Mizmor

PART 1. THE CHALLENGE.

(א) לְמַנְצֵחַ לְדָוִד

For the musician who will perform it, this is a mizmor composed **by David**.

בְּה' חֲסִיתִי

I have taken my **refuge in Hashem** — **בְּה' חֲסִיתִי**. I may be on the run, but I have faith that He will let me return to His Land and again attach myself to His heritage. Although I am physically weak I am secure because Hashem's *kedushah* is my fortress.

אֵיךְ תֹּאמְרוּ לְנַפְשִׁי
נוֹדֵי הַרְקָם צְפוּר:

How dare you say to me — **אֵיךְ תֹּאמְרוּ לְנַפְשִׁי** that I should **flee from your mountain** — **נוֹדֵי הַרְקָם** **like a defenseless bird** — **צְפוּר**, which has wandered from its nest! Your "mountain" is *Eretz Yisrael*, a heritage that belongs to all Jews. How can you say that the place of the *Shechinah* is more fitting for you than it is for me?

PART 2. A RHETORICAL QUESTION.

(ב) כִּי הִנֵּה הַרְשָׁעִים
יִדְרְכוּן קֶשֶׁת

For, behold — **כִּי הִנֵּה**, **the wicked** — **הַרְשָׁעִים**, Doeg and others like him are

sowing animosity between me and Shaul. Their tongue is like a bow that shoots lies instead of arrows. First they **stretch the bow** — **יִדְרְכוּן קֶשֶׁת**, as they prepare their slanderous remarks.

כּוֹנְנוּ חֶצֶם עַל יֵתֶר
לִירוֹת בְּמוֹ אֶפֶל לְיִשְׂרָאֵל לֵב:

Then they **ready their arrow** of lies **on the bowstring** — **כּוֹנְנוּ חֶצֶם עַל יֵתֶר** to **shoot** from a concealed position **in the dark** — **לִירוֹת בְּמוֹ אֶפֶל** **at the upright of heart** — **לְיִשְׂרָאֵל לֵב**. They think no one knows of their perfidy but their secret has been revealed. I know what they have done against me and against the innocent Kohanim of Nov.

(ג) כִּי הַשְׁתּוֹת יִהְרָסוּן
צְדִיק מַה פֶּעַל:

But the question remains, "**When** the Kohanim of Hashem, who are **the foundations of the world are** being **destroyed** — **כִּי הַשְׁתּוֹת יִהְרָסוּן**, **what has Hashem**, Who is **the tzadik** of the world, **done** — **צְדִיק מַה פֶּעַל** to correct such a tragic situation? Is there no justice in the world?"

PART 3. JUSTICE WILL PREVAIL.

(ד) ה' בְּהִיכַל קִדְשׁוֹ ה' בְּשָׁמַיִם כְּסָאוֹ
עֵינָיו יַחְזוּ
עֲפַעְפִּיּוֹ יִבְחֲנוּ בְּנֵי אָדָם:

Even when it seems that **Hashem** has taken Himself far away from this material world and **is in** Heaven, **the** purely spiritual **abode of His holiness** — **ה' בְּהִיכַל** **קִדְשׁוֹ**, and even though **Hashem's throne**, the symbol of His kingdom, **is in Heaven** — **ה' בְּשָׁמַיִם כְּסָאוֹ** — **עֵינָיו יַחְזוּ** all events on earth. **It** is as if **His eyelids** are open in order to **scrutinize mankind** — **עֲפַעְפִּיּוֹ יִבְחֲנוּ בְּנֵי אָדָם**, to determine whether men are acting innocently or with deceit.

(ה) ה' צְדִיק יִבְחֶן

Although I had to flee from Shaul, that is not because of any sin on my part; it is all a test from Hashem. It is the way Hashem deals with mankind. **He tests the tzadik** — **ה' צְדִיק יִבְחֶן** by afflicting him with troubles in order to develop his virtues and reward him for them.

וְרָשָׁע וְאַהֲבַחֵם
שְׂנֵאָה נִפְשׁוֹ:

But He despises — שְׂנֵאָה נִפְשׁוֹ **the rasha and the lover of lawlessness** — וְרָשָׁע וְאַהֲבַחֵם, who wants to benefit from what belongs to others. In contrast to the *tzadik*, when Hashem rebukes the *rasha*, it is not a test but a sign of His anger, which continues to build. The calamity will befall him when he least expects it.

(ו) יִמְטֵר עַל רְשָׁעִים פְּחִים
אֵשׁ וְגַפְרִית וְרוּחַ זֹלַעְפוֹת מִנֶּת כּוֹסָם:

Because Hashem despises the *resha'im*, He will let loose His wrath upon them like fire from the sky: **He will rain down fiery coals upon the resha'im** — יִמְטֵר עַל רְשָׁעִים פְּחִים. If more is called for, He will send **fire and brimstone** — אֵשׁ וְגַפְרִית, and that will be followed by **a burning blast** — וְרוּחַ זֹלַעְפוֹת to distribute the fire. That **is their allotted portion** — מִנֶּת כּוֹסָם, which they prepared for themselves through their lawless behavior.

(ז) כִּי צַדִּיק ה' צְדָקוֹת אָהֵב
יִשֶׁר יַחֲזוּ פְּנֵימוֹ:

Hashem's treatment of the *tzadik* cannot be compared to His treatment of the *rasha*. **For Hashem is Himself the Tzadik** — כִּי צַדִּיק ה' of the world and **He loves tzidkus** (righteousness) — צְדָקוֹת אָהֵב. He promotes *tzidkus* by testing the *tzadik* and thereby giving him the opportunity to do more *tzidkus*. And because Hashem is upright He continues to purify those who are **upright** until they merit **to see His presence** — יִשֶׁר יַחֲזוּ פְּנֵימוֹ.

Living the Mizmor

Listed below are some of the lessons that you can draw from this mizmor, as well as some of the thoughts you might have in mind when you say the words of the mizmor as a *tefillah*, expressing your devotion to Hashem.

Lessons for Life - Your Attitude.

[11:1] COURAGE. – בַּה' חֲסִיתִי אֵיךְ תֹּאמְרוּ לְנַפְשִׁי נוֹדֵי הַרְכָּם צְפוּר – "I have taken my refuge in Hashem. How dare you say to me, flee from your mountain like a bird?" If you trust in Hashem's protection, you can

confidently challenge anyone who seeks to weaken your relationship with Him.

[11:3] HASHEM IS RIGHTEOUS. – **כִּי הַשָּׁתוֹת יִהְרָסוּן צַדִּיק מֶה פָּעַל** – “*When the foundations of the world are destroyed, what has [Hashem] the tzadik done?*” Don’t let yourself be demoralized by tragedy. Hashem is righteous and always acts with righteousness, even though His purpose may not yet be clear to us. To be righteous means to do what is “right.”

Lessons for Life - Your Behavior.

[11:2] METHODOICAL PROCEDURES. – **כִּי הִנֵּה הַרְשָׁעִים יִדְרְכוּן קֶשֶׁת כּוֹנְנֵי חֶצֶם** – **עַל יִתָּר לִירוֹת בְּמוֹ אֶפֶל לִישָׂרֵי לֵב** – “*For behold, the wicked stretch the bow, ready their arrow on the bowstring to shoot in the dark at the upright of heart.*” Don’t get caught up in the mechanics of preparation while ignoring the ultimate result of your activities.

Tefillos for Life - Contemplation of Hashem.

[11:4] THE OMNISCIENT ONE. – **עֵינָיו יַחְזוּ עֲפַעְפֵּי יִבְחֲנוּ בְּנֵי אָדָם** – “*His eyes observe. His eyelids [are open to] scrutinize mankind.*” Hashem sees all, and there is no evil that escapes Him.

[11:5] THE TEST. – **ה' צַדִּיק יִבְחֶן** – “*Hashem tests the tzadik.*” The success of the wicked is an exercise in the *emunah* of the *tzadik*. Ultimately, the *tzadik* is strengthened by it.

[11:6] JUSTICE. – **יִמְטֵר עַל רְשָׁעִים פְּחִים** – “*He will rain down fiery coals upon the resha'im.*” Ultimately, the *resha'im* must pay for their crimes, unless they have repented.

[11:7] HEAVENLY REWARD. – **צְדָקוֹת אֱהָב יֵשֶׁר יַחְזוּ פְּנִימוֹ** – “*He loves righteousness, for the upright to see His presence.*” Because Hashem is righteous He continues to purify those who are upright until they merit to see His presence.

Sources

The primary sources used in the interpretation of the *pesukim* of this mizmor are listed below.

ה - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, מלבי"ם
ו - אבן עזרא, מלבי"ם
ז - אלשיך

א - רש"י, אבן עזרא, רד"ק
ב - רש"י, רד"ק, נר לרגלי
ג - רש"י, מלבי"ם
ד - רד"ק, מלבי"ם

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