

Mizmor 041

In Praise of the Caregiver

Key Concepts

The mizmor is a *tefillah* in which David, who has been deathly ill, appeals to Hashem to heal him. David is especially concerned because his suffering has been aggravated by the people who came to visit him, ostensibly to comfort him. From their attitude it was evident to David that his visitors did not wish him well. On the contrary they really hated him and hoped to see him succumb to his illness.

The *tefillah* is structured as a song that is intended to be performed publicly. It is designed to teach the listeners the importance of loving care in the treatment of an invalid.

Navigating Tehillim. This mizmor calls to mind other mizmorim in which David prayed to be healed from illness. In Mizmor 006 he emphasized the harm caused by the ill-will of his enemies and yet he looked for the opportunity to forgive them. In Mizmor 038 he gives extra thought to how his own sins may have contributed to his illness. In the current mizmor David speaks of the important role the caregiver has in promoting recovery from illness.

Exploring the Mizmor

PART 1. THE CONSIDERATE CAREGIVER. David praises those who give understanding care to an invalid. The suffering individual will benefit from their sympathy and especially from their *tefillas*, if those *tefillas* are truly sincere.

(א) לְמַנְצֵחַ מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד: (ב) אֲשֶׁרִי מִשְׁכִּיל אֶל דָּל בְּיוֹם רָעָה יִמְלֹטָהּ ה': (ג) ה' יִשְׁמְרֶהוּ וַיַּחֲיֶהוּ וְאֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ וְאֵל תִּתְּנֶהוּ בְּנַפְשׁ אֵיבָיו: (ד) ה' יִסְעֲדֵנוּ עַל עֶרְשׂ דָּוִי כָּל מִשְׁכָּבוֹ הִפְכָתָ בְּחַלְיוֹ:

(1) For the musician, a mizmor by David. (2) Praises to the giver of understanding care to the invalid. On the day of evil, Hashem will save him. (3) [The caregiver should pray] that Hashem will protect [the patient] and give him life [so that] he will be [once more] happy in the land and not give him over to the wishes of his enemies. (4) Hashem will sustain [the invalid] on his bed of suffering, [but it is] you the caregiver [who] have

converted all his lying down in sickness [into kindness and comfort].

PART 2. PLEA TO BE HEALED. In the second part of the mizmor David turns to Hashem with his own *tefillah* for healing of body and soul. He expresses the bitterness he feels as a result of the hypocrisy of people who pretend to care for his well-being. He is waiting for the day when they will realize how wrong they have been in their attitude towards him.

(ה) אָנִי אֶמְרָתִי ה' חֲנִי רַפְּאָה נַפְשִׁי כִּי חָטָאתִי לָךְ: (ו) אוֹיְבֵי יֹאמְרוּ רַע לִי מִתִּי יָמוּת וְאָבֵד שְׁמוֹ: (ז) וְאִם בָּא לְרֵאוֹת שְׁוֹא יִדְבֵר לְבוֹ יִקְבֹּץ אָוֶן לוֹ יֵצֵא לְחוּץ יִדְבֵר: (ח) יַחַד עָלַי יִתְלַחֲשׂוּ כָּל שֹׁנְאֵי עָלַי יַחֲשְׁבוּ רָעָה לִּי: (ט) דְּבַר בְּלִיעַל יִצּוֹק בּוֹ וְאֶשֶׁר שָׁכַב לֹא יוֹסִיף לְקוֹם: (י) גַּם אִישׁ שְׁלוֹמִי אֶשֶׁר בְּטַחַתִּי בּוֹ אוֹכֵל לֶחֶמִי הִגְדִּיל עָלַי עָקֵב: (יא) וְאַתָּה ה' חֲנִי וְהִקִּימֵנִי וְאַשְׁלֵמָה לָּהֶם: (יב) בְּזֹאת יִדְעוּתִי כִּי חָפְצָתָּ בִּי כִּי לֹא יִרְיַע אֹיְבֵי עָלַי: (יג) וְאִנִּי בְּתַמִּי תִמְכַּתָּ בִּי וּתְצִיבֵנִי לְפָנֶיךָ לְעוֹלָם:

(5) I said, "Hashem, have pity on me! Heal my soul for I have sinned against You!" (6) My enemies speak evil about me, 'When will he die and his name perish?' (7) And if [one] comes [to visit] he speaks falsely. His heart is [secretly] storing up [suspicions]. [He keeps the thoughts of] iniquity to himself, [but] when he leaves, he speaks [of them to others.] (8) All my enemies whisper together against me. [While whispering] against me, they are thinking up misfortunes for me. (9) [They whisper] 'A serious crime is firmly attached to him. Now that he lies ill, he will not get up again.' (10) Even my close friend, whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has raised his heel against me. (11) But You, Hashem, have pity on me and restore me [to good health] and [so] I will repay them. (12) With this [recovery] I will know that You are pleased with me. For then my enemy will not rejoice triumphantly over me. (13) But as for me, because of my integrity You supported me . You stood me upright before You for eternal life.

PART 3. FINAL BLESSING. David concludes the song with a blessing, which also serves as the conclusion to the entire first *sefer* of Tehillim.

(יד) בְּרוּךְ ה' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִהָעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם אָמֵן וְאָמֵן:

(14) Blessed is Hashem, the G-d of Yisrael from [the beginning of] the World to the [Next] World, Amen and Amen.

Learning the Mizmor

PART 1. THE CONSIDERATE CAREGIVER.

(א) לְמַנְצַחַּ מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד:

This song has been prepared **for the musician** — לְמַנְצַחַּ, who will perform it. It is **a mizmor** composed **by David** — מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד.

(ב) אֲשֶׁרִי מִשְׁכִּיל אֶל דָּל

I sing **praises to the one who gives understanding care** to the **invalid** — אֲשֶׁרִי מִשְׁכִּיל אֶל דָּל.

בְּיוֹם רָעָה יִמְלֹטְהוּ ה':

On the day of evil — בְּיוֹם רָעָה when the patient's condition is critical, the caregiver should console the patient, telling him that **Hashem will surely save him** — יִמְלֹטְהוּ ה'.

(ג) ה' יִשְׁמְרֵהוּ וַיַּחֲיֵהוּ

וְאֵשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ

The caregiver should pray for the patient, asking that **Hashem protect him** from being overwhelmed by his illness — ה' יִשְׁמְרֵהוּ **and** that He **give him life** — וַיַּחֲיֵהוּ so that his recovery will be hastened. He should ask that Hashem restore the suffering person to good health so that **he will be** once more **happy in the land** — וְאֵשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ without any lingering aftereffects of his illness.

וְאַל תִּתְּנֵהוּ בְּנַפְשׁ אֹיְבָיו:

He should even appeal to Hashem to protect the invalid from those who hate him: **Don't give** this weak man **over to the wishes of his enemies** — וְאַל תִּתְּנֵהוּ בְּנַפְשׁ אֹיְבָיו, who would be only too happy to see him die.

(ד) ה' יִסְעָדֵנוּ עַל עַרְשׁ דָּוִי

Then surely **Hashem will sustain him on his bed of suffering** — ה' יִסְעָדֵנוּ עַל עַרְשׁ דָּוִי.

כָּל מִשְׁכָּבוֹ הִפְכֹת בְּחַלְוֵי:

But it is **you** the caregiver who **have converted all his lying down in sickness**

— כל משכבו הפכת בחליו — into an experience of kindness and comfort.

PART 2. PLEA TO BE HEALED.

(ה) אָנִי אֶמְרָתִי ה' חֲנִנִי

As for me — אָנִי, I have been sick but no one has come to comfort me. So I threw myself upon Hashem's mercy and **I said** — אֶמְרָתִי, **Hashem, have pity on me!** — ה' חֲנִנִי though I don't deserve it.

רְפָאָה נַפְשִׁי כִּי חָטָאתִי לָךְ:

Heal my soul for I have sinned against You! — רְפָאָה נַפְשִׁי כִּי חָטָאתִי לָךְ. I know that once my soul is healed, my body will be healed as well.

(ו) אוֹיְבֵי יֹאמְרוּ רַע לִי

Sadly, the pain that I am suffering is aggravated by those who come to visit me. They pretend to be my friends, but they are really **my enemies** — אוֹיְבֵי and they are happy to see me in trouble. Not only that, they **speak evil about me** — יֹאמְרוּ רַע לִי, the exact opposite of their assurances.

מָתִי יָמוּת וְאָבֵד שְׁמוֹ:

In effect, they are saying, "**When will he die and his name perish?**" — מָתִי יָמוּת וְאָבֵד שְׁמוֹ. They hope my sickness will get worse and that I will soon die because of it. Not only that, they want my ideals and the memory of what I have stood for to perish with me.

(ז) וְאִם בָּא לְרֵאוֹת

שְׂוֵא יִדְבֵר

And if — וְאִם one of my false friends **comes to visit** — בָּא, it is only to see — לְרֵאוֹת how bad off I am. He pretends to be distressed by my condition, but his pretense is obviously hypocritical and **he speaks falsely** — שְׂוֵא יִדְבֵר. Even if he goes through the motions of praying for my recovery, it is a false prayer, for he doesn't mean it.

לְבוֹ יִקְבֹּץ אֵין לוֹ

יֵצֵא לְחוּץ יִדְבֵר:

But I can tell that while he is with me **his heart is** secretly **storing up** suspicions

— **לבו יקבץ**. He thinks that because of my sins I myself am to blame for my illness. However, he keeps these thoughts of **iniquity to himself** — **און לו** for he would not speak of them in my presence. Yet **when he leaves, he speaks** of them — **יצא לחוץ ידבר** to my other false friends.

(ח) יחד עלי יתלחשו כל שנאי

In fact, **all my enemies** — **כל שנאי** **whisper together against me** — **יחד עלי** **יתלחשו**. When they are out of earshot they tell each other that my condition is hopeless and I am not likely to survive.

עלי יחשבו רעה לי:

Even while whispering **against me** — **עלי**, **they are** actually involved in **thinking up** — **יחשבו** new accusations and new **misfortunes for me** — **רעה לי** that they hope will bring me down.

(ט) דבר בליעל יצוק בו

ואשר שכב לא יוסיף לקום:

They whisper to each other: "**A serious crime** — **דבר בליעל** **is firmly attached to him** — **יצוק בו** and he will have to suffer for his sin. **Now that he lies ill** — **לא יוסיף לקום**, **he will not get up again** — **ואשר שכב**!"

(י) גם איש שלומי אשר בטחתי בו

אוכל לחמי הגדיל עלי עקב:

Not only those who I knew hated me, but **even** the person who I thought was **my close friend** — **גם איש שלומי**, **whom I trusted** — **אשר בטחתי בו**, the one **who** sat at my table **and ate my bread** — **אוכל לחמי**, has betrayed me. Now that I am no longer able to be of value to him, he has become self-important and has **raised** his **heel against me** — **הגדיל עלי עקב** to trample me.

(יא) ואתה ה' חנני והקימני

ואשלמה להם:

They are saying I will not get up again. **But You, Hashem** — **ואתה ה'**, I ask that You **have pity on me and restore me** — **חנני והקימני** to good health. They have spoken ill of me, **but I will repay them** — **ואשלמה להם** by showing them that they misjudged me.

(יב) בְּזֹאת יִדְעֵתִי כִּי חִפְצָתָּ בִּי

With this — בְּזֹאת recovery I will have all the vengeance I need, for if my foe cannot triumph over me **I will know — יִדְעֵתִי** that **You are pleased with me — כִּי חִפְצָתָּ בִּי**, and my enemy will realize it as well.

כִּי לֹא יִרְיַע אִיבִי עָלַי:

For then my enemy will not be allowed to **rejoice triumphantly over me — כִּי לֹא יִרְיַע אִיבִי עָלַי**.

(יג) וְאַנִּי בְּתַמִּי תִמְכַּתָּ בִּי

וְתִצִּיבֵנִי לְפָנֶיךָ לְעוֹלָם:

But as for me — וְאַנִּי, surely it was **because** You saw **my essential integrity — בְּתַמִּי** that **You supported me — תִּמְכַּתָּ בִּי** and healed me when I fell ill. You have seen that in contrast to my deceitful enemies I have been truthful with all men. Accordingly, **You stood me upright before You — וְתִצִּיבֵנִי לְפָנֶיךָ** for **eternal life — לְעוֹלָם**.

PART 3. FINAL BLESSING.

(יד) בָּרוּךְ ה' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

מִהָעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם אָמֵן וְאָמֵן:

Blessed is Hashem — בָּרוּךְ ה', the **G-d of Yisrael — אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל**, Who has enabled me to complete this first *sefer* of Tehillim. May His blessings flow to all our days **from the beginning of the World to the Next World — מִהָעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם**, I now affirm this as true by saying **Amen — אָמֵן** and I invite everyone who hears my words to say **Amen — וְאָמֵן** with me!

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 Behavior.

[41:2] SENSITIVITY. – אֲשֶׁרִי מִשְׁפִּיל אֶל דָּל – “Praises to the giver of understanding care to the invalid.” When you care for an invalid, you should

be sensitive to his needs. This is a great *mitzvah*.

[41:2] - בְּיוֹם רָעָה יִמְלֹטֵהוּ ה' - "On the day of evil, [console the patient by telling him that surely] Hashem will save him."

[41:3] CONCERN. - ה' יִשְׁמְרֵהוּ וְיַחֲיֵהוּ - "[Pray] that Hashem will protect [the patient] and give him life." Show your concern for an invalid and help him by praying to Hashem for his recovery.

Tefillos for Life - Your Refuah.

[41:5] HEALING - ה' חַנּוּנִי רַפְּאֵה נַפְשִׁי כִּי חָטָאתִי לָךְ - "Hashem, have pity on me! Heal my soul for I have sinned against You!" When you ask Hashem to heal your illness, acknowledge your sins against Him. In that way you will demonstrate that the purpose of your suffering has been served and the time has come for healing.

Tehillos for Life - Contemplation of Hashem.

[41:14] BLESSED - בְּרוּךְ ה' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִהָעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם אָמֵן וְאָמֵן - "Blessed is Hashem, the G-d of Yisrael from [the beginning of] the World to the [Next] World, Amen and Amen." May Hashem's blessings of kindness continue to flow throughout space and time.

Sources

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

ח - רש"י, רד"ק, מאיר טוב	א - המאירי, מאיר טוב
ט - רד"ק, המאירי	ב - רש"י, אבן עזרא, רד"ק, המאירי, רשר"ה
י - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, בן-רמון, ספורנו, נר לרגלי	ג - אבן עזרא, בן-רמון, אבן יחיאל, נר לרגלי
יא - רד"ק, רשר"ה	ד - רד"ק, בן-רמון,
יב - רש"י, רשר"ה	ה - רש"י, רד"ק
יג - רד"ק, המאירי, מאיר טוב	ו - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, נר לרגלי, מאיר טוב
יד - רד"ק, ספורנו, אבן יחיאל, מאיר טוב	ז - רש"י, בן-רמון, אלשיך, מאיר טוב

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