

## Mizmor 054

# Betrayal and Bitachon

### Key Concepts

Mizmor 054 is a *maskil* (song of enlightenment) that was composed by King David upon being betrayed by people who had previously shown him no animosity. David had become depressed by the bitter resentment that he felt toward his betrayers. But he managed to overcome his bitterness by renewing his *bitachon* (trust) that Hashem had a mission for him and would surely enable him to survive to carry it out. David composed this mizmor to share with future generations his thoughts of overcoming bitterness.

**Navigating Tehillim.** David felt very hurt by the betrayal of the people of Ziph. We were first introduced to this challenge in Mizmor 011, which describes how he found *chizuk* (emotional strength) through a renewal of *bitachon*.

### Historical Background

During the period when David was fleeing from King Shaul, he took refuge in the forests of Ziph, a district in the territory of Yehudah, south of Chevron (Hebron). Although David trusted the people of Ziph they betrayed him by reporting his presence to Shaul. They even volunteered to capture him and turn him over to Shaul's army. However, Shaul merely asked them to monitor David's movements and let him know his exact location. Shaul then set out with his troops and surrounded David's small force. Just when it seemed that David's plight was hopeless, Shaul was diverted by a report that there was a large force of Plishtim in the area. This miraculous intervention inspired David to incorporate the mizmor into the book of Tehillim. The entire incident is described in I Shmuel 23.

As it happened, some time later the people of Ziph had another opportunity to betray David. This time they reported him to be in a place called Hachilah Hill. 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. These events are described in I Shmuel 26. They are also spoken about in Mizmor 007, where David expresses remorse for having treated Shaul with disrespect.

The manner in which David responded to Shaul's pursuit demonstrated an important principle in David's struggles with his enemies. His primary interest was survival, not the destruction of those who harmed him, and so he desperately sought to avoid bloodshed wherever possible.

## Exploring the Mizmor

The mizmor has three parts. After a brief introduction, we hear David's *tefillah* for Hashem to save him. Finally, we hear a song of gratitude in which David speaks of his *bitachon* in the *yeshuah* that would surely come.

**PART 1. INTRODUCTION.** The circumstances surrounding the composition of this mizmor are introduced in the first two verses.

(א) לְמַנְצֵחַ בְּנִינֹת מְשִׁכִּיל לְדָוִד: (ב) בָּבוֹא הַזִּיפִים וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְשֹׂאוֹל הֲלֹא דָוִד  
מִסְתַּתֵּר עִמָּנוּ:

(1) For the musician, a song of enlightenment with melodies, by David. (2) when the people of Ziph came and said to Shaul, Is not David hiding out among us?

**PART 2. A PLEA FOR SURVIVAL.** David appeals directly to Hashem to save him from the danger in which he now finds himself. In his *tefillah* he speaks of being under attack by strangers, that is, by the people of Ziph, who had previously shown him no ill will. Their forces have now been added to those of Shaul, who has been pursuing him with relentless ferocity.

(ג) אֱלֹהִים בְּשִׁמְךָ הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי וּבְגִבוֹרֹתֶיךָ תִּדְיִנֵנִי: (ד) אֱלֹהִים שְׁמַע תְּפִלַּתִּי הַאֲזִינָה  
לְאֹמְרֵי פִי: (ה) כִּי זָרִים קָמוּ עָלַי וְעָרִיצִים בִּקְשׂוּ נַפְשִׁי לֹא שָׁמוּ אֱלֹהִים לְנַגְדָּם  
סֵלָה:

(3) O G-d, save me for the sake of Your Name. Impose Your judgment for me with Your power. (4) O G-d, hear my prayer. Listen to the words of my mouth. (5) For strangers have risen up against me. And ruthless men have been seeking my life. They are unmindful of G-d, Selah.

David has emphasized that his enemies are motivated by selfish interests, not the fear of G-d. And so they are undeserving of special consideration in their struggle against him.

**PART 3. BITACHON AND GRATITUDE.** David expresses his *bitachon* (trust) that Hashem will help him. Even the loyalty of his devoted followers is an indication to David that Hashem is involved in his survival. David knows that all of his enemies

will become paralyzed by the knowledge that their cause is hopeless.

(ו) הִנֵּה אֱלֹקִים עֲזָר לִי אֲדֹנָי בְּסִמְכֵי נַפְשִׁי: (ז) [יָשׁוּב] יָשׁוּב הָרַע לְשׂוֹרְרֵי בְּאַמְתָּךְ  
הַצְּמִיתֵם: (ח) בְּנִדְבָה אֲזַבְחָה לְךָ אוֹדָה שְׂמֵךְ ה' כִּי טוֹב: (ט) כִּי מִכָּל צָרָה הֲצִילָנִי  
וּבְאֵיבֵי רְאֵתָה עֵינַי:

(6) I see G-d is helping me; my L-rd [is helping me] through those who support me (7) He will repay the evil [intended by] those who have been watching me. By Your truth make them numb. (8) I will offer sacrifices to You with devotion. I will give thanks to Your Name, Hashem, for it is good. (9) For He has rescued me from every trouble. My eye has gazed upon my foes.

David's bitterness at having been betrayed by the people of Ziph has now been tempered by his gratitude to Hashem. He promises to express that gratitude by showing his own devotion in offering thanks at having survived his difficulties. He is especially grateful that he has been permitted to overcome his bitter foes without bloodshed.

## Learning the Mizmor

### PART 1. INTRODUCTION.

(א) לְמִנְצַח בְּנִינֹת  
מְשֻׁכֵּיל לְדָוִד:

This mizmor has been prepared **for the musician** — לְמִנְצַח to be performed **with** a variety of **melodies** — בְּנִינֹת. The Ziphim's betrayal was so depressing to David that he needed many melodies to achieve a positive state of mind. Only in this way could he expect to gain the Divine inspiration (*ruach hakodesh*) that he would need to compose the mizmor. It is a **song of enlightenment** composed **by David** — מְשֻׁכֵּיל לְדָוִד.

(ב) בְּבוֹא הַזִּיפִים וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְשָׂאוּל  
הֲלֹא דָוִד מְסֻתָּתָר עִמָּנוּ:

The mizmor was composed after the time **when the people of Ziph came and said to Shaul** — בְּבוֹא הַזִּיפִים וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְשָׂאוּל, **Is not David hiding out among us?** — הֲלֹא דָוִד מְסֻתָּתָר עִמָּנוּ. This was actually a falsehood because they had not granted David shelter. He was merely camping in their district.

PART 2: A PLEA FOR SURVIVAL.

(ג) אֱלֹקִים בְּשִׁמְךָ הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי  
וּבְגִבוֹרַתְךָ תְּדִינֵנִי:

**O G-d, save me for the sake of Your primary Name** — אֱלֹקִים בְּשִׁמְךָ הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי Hashem [י-ה-ו-ה], which represents Your attribute of mercy. I need You to do this because my own *zechus* (merit) is insufficient against the forces of Shaul and the Ziphim who are able to exercise their free will and harm me. **By the force of Your might** I ask that You now **impose Your judgment for me** — וּבְגִבוֹרַתְךָ תְּדִינֵנִי.

(ד) אֱלֹקִים שְׁמַע תְּפִלָּתִי  
הֶאֱזִינָה לְאִמְרֵי פִי:

**O G-d, hear my unspoken prayer** — אֱלֹקִים שְׁמַע תְּפִלָּתִי for it is in my heart. And act upon it even before I have articulated it. But if You choose to wait, **listen to the words** that I utter **with my mouth** — הֶאֱזִינָה לְאִמְרֵי פִי.

(ה) כִּי זָרִים קָמוּ עָלַי  
וְעָרִיצִים בְּקִשׁוֹ נַפְשִׁי

**For the Ziphim are strangers** — כִּי זָרִים who have no connection with Shaul and yet they have allied with him. These men, who were not previously my enemies **have risen up against me** — קָמוּ עָלַי. **And** all the while Shaul's **ruthless men have been seeking my life** — וְעָרִיצִים בְּקִשׁוֹ נַפְשִׁי.

לֹא שָׁמוּ אֱלֹקִים לְנַגְדָּם סֵלָה:

**They are unmindful of G-d** — לֹא שָׁמוּ אֱלֹקִים לְנַגְדָּם but instead are motivated by a selfish desire to curry favor and gain power. And because they are not stopping to think whether their actions are what G-d wants, they are eager to act quickly, without mercy. Therefore, my *tefillah* is all the more urgent. **Selah** — סֵלָה.

PART 3. BITACHON AND GRATITUDE.

(ו) הִנֵּה אֱלֹקִים עֹזֵר לִי  
אֲדַנִּי בְּסִמְכֵי נַפְשִׁי:

**I see** — הִנֵּה that **G-d is already helping me** — אֱלֹקִים עֹזֵר לִי. **My L-rd** — אֲדַנִּי

is helping me **through** the action of **those** loyal men **who support me** — בְּסִמְכֵי נַפְשִׁי.

(ז) [ישוב] יָשִׁיב הָרַע לְשֹׂרְרֵי

**He will repay the evil** intended **by those** Ziphim **who have been watching me** — יָשִׁיב הָרַע לְשֹׂרְרֵי and informing Shaul of my position.

בְּאַמְתָּךְ הַצְּמִיתָם:

Hashem, it was Your choice to anoint me as the next king. **By** demonstrating to them **Your truth** — בְּאַמְתָּךְ, which they have denied, **make them** frightened and **numb** — הַצְּמִיתָם so that their betrayal will cease!

(ח) בְּנִדְבָה אֲזַבְחָה לָּךְ

אוֹדָה שְׂמֶדֶךָ ה' כִּי טוֹב:

Then, in a spirit of gratitude to You rather than in a spirit of anger towards Your enemies, **I will offer public sacrifices to You with devotion** — בְּנִדְבָה אֲזַבְחָה לָּךְ. **I will give thanks to Your Name** of mercy, **Hashem, for it is good** — אוֹדָה ה' כִּי טוֹב and shows mercy to all creatures.

(ט) כִּי מִכָּל צָרָה הֲצִילָנִי

וּבְאֵיבֵי רָאִתָּה עֵינָי:

**For He has rescued me from every trouble** — כִּי מִכָּל צָרָה הֲצִילָנִי. **My eye has gazed upon my foes** — וּבְאֵיבֵי רָאִתָּה עֵינָי and seen how they have failed in their endeavors, but without my having to be the cause of their death.

## 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.

### Tefillos for Life - Your Plea for Yeshuah.

[54:3] KINDNESS. — אֱלֹקִים בְּשֵׁמֶךָ הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי וּבְגִבוּרַתְךָ תְּדִינֵנִי — "O G-d, save me for the sake of Your Name. Impose Your judgment for me with Your power." Ask Hashem to save you through the power of the Name Hashem representing His kindness [ל-ה-ו-ה].

**Tefillos for Life - Your Relationship with Hashem**

[54:4] HEAR MY TEFILLOS. - אֱלֹקִים שְׁמַע תְּפִלָּתִי הַאֲזִינָה לְאִמְרֵי פִי - "O G-d, hear my prayer. Listen to the words of my mouth.." Ask Hashem to listen to your *tefillos* whether spoken or unspoken.

**Tefillos for Life - Your Gratitude.**

[54:6] LOYALTY. - הִנֵּה אֱלֹקִים עֹזֵר לִי אֲדֹנָי בְּסִמְכֵי נַפְשִׁי - "I see G-d is helping me; my L-rd [is helping me] through those who support me." Thank Hashem for the loyalty of the people who have helped you in times of difficulty.

[54:8] DEVOTION. - בְּנִדְבָה אֲזַבְחָה לָךְ אוֹדָה שְׂמֵךְ ה' כִּי טוֹב - "I will offer sacrifices to You with devotion. I will give thanks to Your Name, Hashem, for it is good." Thank Hashem with sincerity and devotion for the times He saved you.

[54:9]. - כִּי מִכָּל צָרָה הִצִּילָנִי וּבְאֵיבֵי רְאֵתָה עֵינָי - "For He has rescued me from every trouble. My eye has gazed upon my foes."

**Sources**

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

א - אלשיך	ו - אבן עזרא, מלבי"ם, רשר"ה
ב - אלשיך, ספורנו	ז - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, מלבי"ם, רשר"ה
ג - אלשיך, דעת סופרים	ח - אלשיך, רד"ק, מצודות, מלבי"ם, רשר"ה,
ד - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, אלשיך	דעת סופרים
ה - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, ספורנו, אלשיך, מצודות,	ט - רד"ק, אלשיך
מלבי"ם	

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