

Mizmor 052

Tragic Talk

Key Concepts

Mizmor 052 is a song of enlightenment that was composed by King David after the tragic destruction of the town of Nov and its population of *Kohanim*. This destruction came about as a direct result of the slander that was perpetrated against him by a powerful supporter of King Shaul named Doeg the Edomi. Thus, the song is designed to make people aware that slander is not just a great sin, but that it can lead to tragedy.

The town of Nov was destroyed under orders of King Shaul, thinking that it was a hotbed of treason against him and his kingdom. But he did this only after he had been incited into uncontrollable rage by a slanderous report given to him by Doeg. Doeg's target in making this twisted report was actually David, whom Doeg hated. But the tragedy ended up felling innocent bystanders, the people of Nov.

Historical Background

OVERVIEW. While fleeing the ill will of Shaul HaMelech, David had taken refuge in Nov, a town completely inhabited by *Kohanim*. At that point David's status as a fugitive from the wrath of Shaul was not generally known, so he was able to appeal for help to Achimelech, the Kohen Gadol, without implicating him in the crime of aiding a fugitive. And so when Achimelech helped David by providing him with food and a weapon, he thought he was performing a simple act of charity.

But Doeg, who had lingered in the Sanctuary and was able to observe what happened between David and Achimelech revealed what happened to Shaul, presenting the facts in a twisted way. As a result, Shaul got the impression that Achimelech was consciously helping David commit an act of treason. And so Shaul was filled with rage and ordered the entire town destroyed. (See *Shmuel* I 21-22.)

A STORY OF SLANDER. Doeg made it seem that David had private business to discuss with Achimelech, suggesting that it involved a conspiracy against Shaul.

Doeg also described to Shaul how Achimelech had given David bread and a sword. These were innocent actions, but Doeg made them seem as though Achimelech was assisting David in a plot to overthrow Shaul. In fact Achimelech had not volunteered to give David anything. In response to David's request for help Achimelech said that he had no bread or weapon to give him. When David

persisted, Achimelech made available to him the bread of the Lechem HaPanim (Show Bread) from the Sanctuary and the sword of Goliath.

Furthermore Doeg informed Shaul that Achimelech had inquired of the Urim v'Tumim (an instrument of spiritual communication) on David's behalf. This was an act which was typically permitted only for a king, not an ordinary citizen. Thus, it implied a treasonous intent on Achimelech's part to support David as a usurper of the throne. (Achimelech innocently thought that David was acting as an agent of Shaul and that he was authorized to make such an inquiry.)

Doeg managed to catch Shaul at a time of day when he was most likely to burst into uncontrollable rage. As a result Shaul went wild and ordered the execution of all the *Kohanim* of Nov. And when none of Shaul's servants could bring himself to carry out such a harsh order, Shaul induced Doeg to do it himself.

Exploring the Mizmor

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

(א) לְמִנְצַחַ מְשִׁכִּיל לְדָוִד: (ב) בָּבוֹא דֹאֵג הָאֲדָמִי וַיַּגֵּד לְשָׂאוֹל וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ בֵּן דָּוִד אֶל בֵּית אַחִימֵלֵךְ:

(1) For the musician, a song of enlightenment by David. (2) When Doeg the Edomi came and informed Shaul, telling him, "David has come to the house of Achimelech."

PART 2. REBUKING DOEG. David bitterly rebukes Doeg for misleading Shaul with lies and for purposefully misinterpreting what he saw in Nov.

(ג) מַה תִּתְהַלֵּל בְּרָעָה הַגְּבוּר חֲסֵד אֵל כָּל הַיּוֹם: (ד) הוֹוֹת תִּחְשַׁב לְשׁוֹנֵף כְּתַעַר מְלֻטֵשׁ עֹשֶׂה רְמִיָּה: (ה) אָהַבְתָּ רָע מִטוֹב שֶׁקֶר מְדַבֵּר צֶדֶק סֵלָה: (ו) אָהַבְתָּ כָּל דְּבָרֵי בָלַע לְשׁוֹן מְרֵמָה: (ז) גַּם אֵל יִתְצַדֵּף לְנֹצֵחַ וַיִּסְחַף מֵאֶהָל וְשָׂרְשָׁף מֵאֲרָץ חַיִּים סֵלָה:

(3) Why do you pride yourself in evil, you mighty warrior? The kindness of G-d is all day long. (4) Your tongue plans treachery like a sharpened razor that acts deceitfully. (5) You love evil more than good, falsehood than speaking right, Selah. (6) You love all devouring words, a tongue of deceit. (7) Likewise, G-d will smash you for eternity. He will pluck you out and tear you away from the tent. He will uproot you from the land of life, Selah.

PART 3. THE REACTION TO DOEG'S FATE. David describes the great moral lesson that people will draw from these tragic events and from Doeg's bitter fate.

(ח) וַיִּרְאוּ צַדִּיקִים וַיִּירָאוּ וְעָלְיוּ יִשְׁחָקוּ: (ט) הִנֵּה הַגִּבּוֹר לֹא יָשִׁים אֱלֹקִים מְעוֹזָו וַיִּבְטַח בְּרַב עֲשָׂרוֹ יַעֲזֵ בְהִתּוֹ:

(8) *The tzadikim will see and fear. And they will joke about him. (9) "Look the man who did not make G-d the source of his strength; but he trusted in his abundance of wealth. Let him be strong with his treachery!"*

PART 4. A DECLARATION OF BITACHON. In contrast to Doeg's bitter end, David looks forward to a bright future, continually energized by his bitachon in Hashem.

(י) וְאֲנִי כְּזֵית רַעֲנָן בְּבַיִת אֱלֹקִים בְּטַחֲתִי בְּחֶסֶד אֱלֹקִים עוֹלָם וָעֶד: (יא) אֲוִדָּה לְעוֹלָם כִּי עָשִׂיתָ וְאַקְוָה שְׁמִי כִּי טוֹב נֶגְדַת חֲסִידֶיךָ:

(10) *But I am like an ever-fresh olive tree in the House of G-d. I trust in the kindness of G-d forever and ever. (11) I will forever thank You for [what] You have done. I will hope in Your Name, for it is good — before Your devout ones.*

Despite the fact that the olive tree bears bitter fruit, the olives bring light to mankind (the oil of the *menorah*). David has faced many afflictions and difficulties, but his character has become enriched by his experiences. The leaves of the olive tree are green in both summer and winter. Correspondingly, David does not worry during "good" times or "bad" times that his bitachon will waver.

Learning the Mizmor

PART 1: INTRODUCTION.

(א) לְמִנְצַחַת מְשֻׁכָּל לְדָוִד:

For the musician — לְמִנְצַחַת who will perform it, this mizmor is a *maskil* (song of enlightenment) composed **by David** — מְשֻׁכָּל לְדָוִד. It is designed to make people aware that slander is not just a great sin, but that it leads to tragedy.

(ב) בָּבוֹא דֹאֵג הָאֶדְוִמִּי
וַיִּגַּד לְשָׂאוֹל וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ
בָּא דָוִד אֶל בַּיִת אַחִימֶלֶךְ:

The mizmor reflects what happened **when Doeg the Edomi came** — בָּבוֹא דֹאֵג

הָאֲדָמִי and informed Shaul — **וַיַּגִּד לְשָׂאוּל** about David's visit to Nov, **telling him** — **וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ** more than what actually happened. Doeg said that **David has come to the house of Achimelech** — **בָּא זָוֹד אֶל בֵּית אַחִימֶלֶךְ**, but actually David met Achimelech in a public place, the Sanctuary.

PART 2: REBUKING DOEG.

(ג) מַה תִּתְהַלֵּל בְּרָעָה הַגְּבוּר

Why do you pride yourself — **מַה תִּתְהַלֵּל** in giving out lying reports **that are evil** — **בְּרָעָה**, ingratiating yourself with Shaul, **you mighty warrior** — **הַגְּבוּר** of the Torah? Did you hope to boast about doing evil? Do you think you are a hero, returning victoriously from the field of battle after destroying Nov and its *Kohanim*? If a person takes pride in his power, it should be a pride in his ability to help others, rather than to cause harm and suffering. Do you think that the people will have been intimidated by what you have done and will now be afraid to help me?

חֶסֶד אֵל כָּל הַיּוֹם:

You will not achieve your wicked purpose, for **the kindness of G-d is all day long** — **חֶסֶד אֵל כָּל הַיּוֹם** to protect those whom you seek to victimize.

(ד) הַוּוֹת תַּחֲשֵׁב לְשׁוֹנֶדֶךָ

כְּתַעַר מִלְּטָשׁ עֹשֶׂה רְמִיָּה:

Your tongue is the instrument of your heart which **plans treachery** — **הַוּוֹת תַּחֲשֵׁב לְשׁוֹנֶדֶךָ**, instead of being used to teach Torah. **It is like a sharpened razor that acts deceitfully** — **כְּתַעַר מִלְּטָשׁ עֹשֶׂה רְמִיָּה**, cutting into the flesh when the user intended only to shave the hair.

What started out as a slight stretching of the truth ended up being the cause of a terrible tragedy. What appeared on the surface as an effort to take Achimelech to task for misuse of the Urim v'Tumim was intended to incite Shaul's wrath against David, a man that Doeg hated.

(ה) אָהַבְתָּ רָע מִטּוֹב

In your position as a respected man of learning who was present when Achimelech met with me, you had the opportunity to do good but **you love evil** [putting Achimelech's actions in a bad light], **more than good** — **אָהַבְתָּ רָע מִטּוֹב** [such as offering a plausible explanation for Achimelech's actions to keep peace with Shaul].

שָׁקַר מִדְבַר צְדָק סְלָה:

You also loved **falsehood** — שָׁקַר for its own sake, more **than speaking what is right** and true — מִדְבַר צְדָק and so you were pleased to falsely claim that Achimelech knew I was a fugitive. You **always [Selah]** — סְלָה preferred speaking evil which is harmful even when true (*lashan hara*) and you especially prefer to speak evil when it is untrue. I know that this is your attitude, because your thoughts are revealed by your actions. For example, if you truly loved good you would have been permitted to alter the truth for the sake of peace. But you did the reverse.

(ו) אָהַבְתָּ כָּל דְּבָרֵי בְלֵעַ
לְשׁוֹן מְרָמָה:

You love all devouring words — אָהַבְתָּ כָּל דְּבָרֵי בְלֵעַ, such as the destructive words that consumed the lives of Achimelech and his family. You have loved to use **a tongue of deceit** — לְשׁוֹן מְרָמָה, for you pretended to be acting as a loyal supporter of Shaul and his right to the kingship. But your true motive was jealousy of me. You resented that I, a relatively young man, might be the next king, whereas a learned person such as yourself was being sidelined.

When you saw me with Achimelech, you were in position to warn him that the assistance he was providing me would be considered treasonous by Shaul. You could easily have saved him, but you refrained from doing this because you wanted to destroy me. When you spoke to Shaul, the tongue you used was complicit in the crime you described. You chose your words to him carefully and deceitfully so that the truth would be hidden.

(ז) גַּם אֵל יִתְצַדֵּךְ לְנֶצַח
יִחַתְדֵךְ וַיִּסְחֶדֶךָ מֵאֶהֱל
וַיִּשְׁרָשֶׁדֶךָ מֵאֶרֶץ חַיִּים סְלָה:

Likewise — גַּם, your fate will correspond to what you have done. You destroyed the town of Nov and **G-d will smash you for eternity** — אֵל יִתְצַדֵּךְ לְנֶצַח. Thus, you will not achieve the honor for which you yearned. Your crime began when you lingered in the Sanctuary in Nov (*Shmuel* I 21:8) to overhear private conversations. Accordingly, **He will pluck you out and tear you away from the tent** — יִחַתְדֵךְ וַיִּסְחֶדֶךָ מֵאֶהֱל of the honored *chachamim* of the Sanhedrin. As you uprooted the family of Achimelech, so will **G-d uproot you from the land of life** in the World to

Come, **Selah** — וְשִׁשְׁדָּ מֵאַרְץ חַיִּים סֵלָה —

PART 3: THE REACTION TO DOEG'S FATE

(ח) וַיִּרְאוּ צְדִיקִים וַיִּירְאוּ
וְעָלְיוּ יִשְׁחָקוּ:

I will not feel sorry for Doeg, for if he were to get away without penalty, it would have a demoralizing effect upon all the *tzadikim* (righteous people). But now **the tzadikim will see** Doeg's fate **and fear** the thought of sinning — **וַיִּרְאוּ צְדִיקִים וַיִּירְאוּ** even more than ever before. And as for Doeg, **they will joke about him** — **וְעָלְיוּ יִשְׁחָקוּ**, saying:

(ט) הִנֵּה הַגִּבּוֹר לֹא יָשִׁים אֱלֹקִים מְעוֹזוֹ
וַיִּבְטַח בְּרֹב עֲשָׂרוֹ יַעֲזֹ בְהוֹתוֹ:

Look, the mighty man who did not make G-d the source of his strength — הִנֵּה הַגִּבּוֹר לֹא יָשִׁים אֱלֹקִים מְעוֹזוֹ; but he trusted in his abundance of wealth — וַיִּבְטַח בְּרֹב עֲשָׂרוֹ that he acquired from Shaul in return for his treachery. **Now let him be strong with his treachery — יַעֲזֹ בְהוֹתוֹ !**

PART 4: A DECLARATION OF BITACHON.

(י) וְאֲנִי כְּזַיִת רֵעֵנָה בְּבַיִת אֱלֹקִים
בְּטַחְתִּי בְּחֶסֶד אֱלֹקִים עוֹלָם וָעֶד:

Doeg wanted to linger in the House of G-d, but he will be uprooted from there because he placed his trust in his own schemes. **But I shall be like an ever-fresh olive tree in the House of G-d — וְאֲנִי כְּזַיִת רֵעֵנָה בְּבַיִת אֱלֹקִים**. And this is because **I trust in the kindness of G-d forever and ever — בְּטַחְתִּי בְּחֶסֶד אֱלֹקִים עוֹלָם וָעֶד**. My *bitachon* in Hashem is stronger than Doeg's *bitachon* in himself. Since I know that the kindness of Hashem is forever, I will not let myself be sidetracked by temporary benefits which lead away from what is true and right.

David is like an olive tree planted firmly in the House of G-d. In comparison, Doeg may have lingered in the House of G-d, but his roots were planted outside of it, in a contaminated place.

(יא) אֹדֶד לְעוֹלָם כִּי עָשִׂיתָ
וְאַקוּהָ שְׂמֵךְ כִּי טוֹב
נִגְדַת חֲסִידֶיךָ:

Hashem, I am confident that You will save me and execute stern judgment against Doeg. I trust that You will continue to show me Your mercy and so **I will forever thank You publicly for what You have done** – אֹדֶד לְעוֹלָם כִּי עָשִׂיתָ. And so **I will continue to put my hope in Your Name, for it is good** – וְאַקוּהָ שְׂמֵךְ כִּי טוֹב and I have *bitachon* that You will do good for me and my people. I will serve You openly **before Your devout ones** – נִגְדַת חֲסִידֶיךָ for they are my model of good deeds and good *middos*.

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.

Tehillos for Life - Contemplation of Hashem.

[52:3] KINDNESS. – חֶסֶד אֵל כָּל הַיּוֹם – “*The kindness of G-d is all day long.*” Hashem’s kindness is always accessible to protect the victims of persecution.

[52:7] JUDGMENT. – אֵל יִתְצֵד לְנֶצַח יַחַדְךָ וַיִּסְחַךְ מֵאֵהָל וְשִׂרְשָׁךְ מֵאֶרֶץ חַיִּים – “*Likewise, G-d will smash you for eternity. He will pluck you out and tear you away from the tent. He will uproot you from the land of life.*” When Hashem’s wrath is invoked by evil behavior, He executes a harsh judgment.

Lessons for Life - Your Behavior.

[52:4] DECEITFUL TONGUE. – הַוּוֹת תַּחֲשֵׁב לְשׁוֹנֶךָ כְּתַעֲרַר מְלַטֵּשׁ עֹשֶׂה רְמִיָּה – “*Your tongue plans treachery like a sharpened razor that acts deceitfully.*” Evil talk is like a sharpened razor that cuts into the flesh when the user intended only to shave off the hair. You may fool yourself into thinking that evil talk is harmless, nothing more than words. But it can cut deep and is a great sin.

Lessons for Life - Your Attitude.

[52:5] LOVING EVIL. – אֶהְבֵּת רָע מִטוֹב שְׂקָר מִדָּבָר צָדִיק – “*You love evil more*

than good, falsehood than speaking right." Sinful behavior does not just happen. It begins with a sinful frame of mind which tolerates evil and is ultimately attracted to it.

[52:6] אָהַבְתָּ כָּל דְּבַרֵי בָלַע לְשׁוֹן מְרֵמָה - "You love all devouring words, a tongue of deceit."

[52:8] FEAR OF SIN. - וַיִּרְאוּ צְדִיקִים וַיִּיכָאוּ - "The tzadikim will see and fear." No one is immune from sin. Even a tzadik should think about the lessons to be learned from the downfall of an evil man.

[52:9] MOTIVE OF SIN. - הִנֵּה הַגִּבּוֹר לֹא יָשִׁים אֱלֹקִים מְעוּזוֹ וַיִּבְטַח בְּרַב עֲשָׂרוֹ - "Look the man who did not make G-d the source of his strength; but he trusted in his abundance of wealth." A person who relies on his own wealth instead of the good will of Hashem, will be motivated to act unethically to achieve his objectives.

[52:10] MOTIVE OF GOODNESS. - וְאֲנִי כְּזֵית רֹעֵנָן בְּבַיִת אֱלֹקִים בְּטַחְתִּי בְּחֶסֶד - אֱלֹקִים עוֹלָם וְעַד - "But I am like an ever-fresh olive tree in the House of G-d. I trust in the kindness of G-d forever and ever." Plant your roots in the place where the Torah is studied, for that will inspire you to good deeds.

Tefillos for Life - Your Gratitude.

[52:11] HOPE. - אֹדֹךָ לְעוֹלָם כִּי עָשִׂיתָ וְאֶקְוֶה שְׂמֵךְ כִּי טוֹב - "I will forever thank You for [what] You have done. I will hope in Your Name, for it is good." Express your intention to continue to thank Hashem for all He has done. By showing your appreciation you will be deserving of hope in the future.

Sources

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

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

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