

Mizmor 130

From the Depths

Key Concepts

As in many of the previous mizmorim of this series, the mizmor reflects a time when the Jewish people are in Exile and pleading for the *Geulah* (Redemption). In the mizmor David speaks for Klal Yisrael as the people beg Hashem to forgive the sins that are preventing the time for which they have been waiting so long. The mizmor is noteworthy for the powerful metaphors and images that it invokes.

Navigating Tehillim. This is the eleventh in the series of 15 mizmorim to be sung by the Leviim in the Beis HaMikdash while standing on the 15 steps leading up from the women's courtyard to the men's courtyard.

Exploring the Mizmor

The mizmor consists of four parts, of two *pesukim* each. During the course of the mizmor David pursues the possibility of people coming close to Hashem, no matter how low they have sunk. The key is Hashem's quality of forgiveness, which is essential to the survival of the world.

PART 1. A PLEA TO BE HEARD. The Jewish nation rues its tragic situation, which is compared to having sunk to the lowest depths of the sea. And yet despite being so far removed from Hashem we call upon Him to hear our prayers.

(א) שִׁיר הַמַּעְלוֹת מִמַּעַמְקִים קָרָאתִיךָ ה'; (ב) אֲדֹנָי שְׁמַעָה בְּקוֹלִי תִהְיֶינָה אָזְנוֹיךָ
קִשְׁבוֹת לְקוֹל תַּחֲנוּנָי;

(1) *A Song of the Steps. From the depths I have called You, Hashem. (2) My L-rd hear my voice. May Your ears be attentive to the sound of my pleas.*

PART 2. FORGIVENESS. The nation pleads with Hashem to forgive us — truly the world could not exist if He insisted upon strict judgment.

(ג) אִם עֲוֹנוֹת תִּשְׁמַר יְיָ אֲדֹנָי מִי יַעֲמֹד; (ד) כִּי עֲמָךְ הַסְּלִיחָה לְמַעַן תִּגְוָרָא;

(3) *If You, O G-d, kept iniquities, O my L-rd who could survive. (4) Because forgiveness is with You so that You be held in reverence.*

PART 3. WAITING FOR THE DAWN. The nation speaks of its yearning for the *Geulah*, using the powerful metaphor of the night watchmen who guard the city walls and who eagerly await the dawn.

(ה) קוֹיִתִּי ה' קוֹתָה נַפְשִׁי וְלִדְבָרוֹ הוֹחֲלֵתִי: (ו) נַפְשִׁי לֹא־דָנִי מִשְׁמָרִים לְבִקֹּר שְׁמָרִים לְבִקֹּר:

(5) *I have put my hope in Hashem. My soul has been hoping. I look expectantly for His word [to be fulfilled]. (6) My soul [yearns] for my L-rd [more than] the watchers for the dawn watch for the dawn.*

PART 4. THE GEULAH IS COMING! The singer addresses the nation and urges them to have confidence and prepare for the *Geulah*. He reminds them that the *Geulah* can come at any time because the power to forgive is totally in the hands of Hashem.

(ז) יַחַל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל ה' כִּי עִם ה' הַחֶסֶד וְהַרְבֵּה עֲמוֹ פְדוּת: (ח) וְהוּא יַפְדֶּה אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכָּל עֲוֹנוֹתָיו:

(7) *Let Yisrael look expectantly for Hashem. With Hashem there is kindness, and with Him abundant redemption. (8) And so He will surely redeem Yisrael from all its iniquities.*

Learning the Mizmor

PART 1. A PLEA TO BE HEARD.

(א) שִׁיר הַמַּעְלוֹת

This is the eleventh **song of the steps** — שִׁיר הַמַּעְלוֹת.

מִמַּעְמְקִים קָרָאתִיךָ ה':

From deep below **the** murky **depths** — מִמַּעְמְקִים of this Exile, **I** have **called** upon **You, Hashem** — קָרָאתִיךָ ה' to save me. I am oppressed and dejected, and because of my sins I have become distant from You. I take no pride in my low status, but throw myself at Your mercy.

(ב) אֲדַנִּי שְׁמָעָה בְּקוֹלִי

O my L-rd, hear my voice — אֲדַנִּי שְׁמָעָה בְּקוֹלִי though it comes from such great depths and even though it lacks clarity.

תְּהַיינָה אָזְנֶיךָ קִשְׁבוֹת
לְקוֹל תַּחֲנוּנָי:

May Your ears be attentive — תְּהַיינָה אָזְנֶיךָ קִשְׁבוֹת so that You will respond with pity **to the sound of my pleas** — לְקוֹל תַּחֲנוּנָי, even when I am too overcome

to put my feelings into words.

PART 2. FORGIVENESS.

(ג) אִם עֲוֹנוֹת תִּשְׁמַר יְיָ
אֲדַנִּי מִי יַעֲמֵד:

Although I don't deserve it, I beg You to accept my *teshuvah* and grant me immediate forgiveness so that the *Geulah* can come. Please don't make me defend my past sins for I am unable to do so. The sins are too great. **If You O G-d** did not forgive men but instead **kept** a strict account of their **iniquities** — אִם עֲוֹנוֹת תִּשְׁמַר יְיָ with the intention of demanding retribution, **O my L-rd, who could survive** — אֲדַנִּי מִי יַעֲמֵד ?

(ד) כִּי עֲמַד הַסְּלִיחָה
לְמַעַן תִּתְּנָה:

Because — כִּי, in creating the world You established that the quality of **forgiveness is with You** — עֲמַד הַסְּלִיחָה. You knew the world could not exist on the basis of strict judgement alone. Therefore, You provided forgiveness **so that** — לְמַעַן people would see an opportunity to do *teshuvah* and **You would be held in reverence** — תִּתְּנָה. Otherwise, sinful man would continue to be distanced from You and the world could not exist.

PART 3. WAITING FOR THE DAWN.

(ה) קִוִּיתִי ה' קִוִּיתִי נַפְשִׁי
וְלִדְבַר הוֹחֲלֵתִי:

I have put my hope in Hashem — קִוִּיתִי ה' to grant me happiness in this world even though I have no guarantees. Similarly, **my soul has been hoping** — קִוִּיתִי נַפְשִׁי to be taken to Him when I die, **but** since He has specifically promised to extricate me from this Exile, **I look expectantly for Him to keep His word** — וְלִדְבַר הוֹחֲלֵתִי and bring the *Geulah*.

(ו) נַפְשִׁי לֹא דַנִּי

I know the dawn of *Geulah* will follow this long night of exile but I don't know when that dawn will break. In the meantime **my soul** desperately yearns **for my L-rd** — נַפְשִׁי לֹא דַנִּי to bring the *Geulah* now.

משמרים לבקר שמרים לבקר:

My yearning for the dawn of *Geulah* is more intense than that of the night watchmen who guard the city walls all night and eagerly await daybreak when they can go to sleep. Thus, my soul yearns for the *Geulah* even more **than** those **watchers for the dawn** – **משמרים לבקר** **watch for the dawn** – **שמרים לבקר**. They know the first light is sure to come but that does not lessen their eagerness to see it happen.

PART 4. THE GEULAH IS COMING!

(ז) יחל ישראל אל ה'

כי עם ה' החסד

והרבה עמו פדות:

O nation of **Yisrael**, **look expectantly for Hashem** – **יחל ישראל אל ה'** to bring the *Geulah* and in this way you will prepare yourself for it. Don't be discouraged, thinking that you are not fully deserving. Even though the appointed time for the dawn has not yet come, **with Hashem there is the kindness** – **כי עם ה' החסד** of His mercy, **and with Him** there are **abundant** means for **redemption** – **והרבה** **עמו פדות**, as He has repeatedly demonstrated in the past.

(ח) והוא יפדה את ישראל

מכל עונותיו

And so He will surely redeem Yisrael – **והוא יפדה את ישראל** and bring the *Geulah*. Our sins will not stand in the way because He will encourage the people to do *teshuvah* and then He will redeem the nation **from all its iniquities** – **מכל עונותיו**.

Living the Mizmor

Listed below are some of the thoughts you might have in mind when you say the words of the mizmor as *tefillos* expressing your gratitude to Hashem and as *tehillos* expressing your recognition of Hashem.

Tefillos for Life - Your Relationship with Hashem.

[130:1] FROM THE DEPTHS. – **ממעמקים קראתיך ה'** – "From the depths I have called You, Hashem." Approach your *tefillah* to Hashem with great humility, acknowledging your unworthiness.

[130:2] – אֲדֹנָי שְׁמְעָה בְּקוֹלִי, תִּהְיֶינָה אָזְנוֹיךָ קְשׁוּבוֹת לְקוֹל תַּחֲנוּנָי – *“My L-rd hear my voice. May Your ears be attentive to the sound of my pleas.”*

Tefillos for Life - Your Teshuvah.

[130:3] FORGIVENESS. – אִם עֲוֹנוֹת תִּשְׁמַר יְיָ אֲדֹנָי מִי יַעֲמֵד – *“If You, O G-d, kept iniquities, O my L-rd who could survive.”* Ask Hashem to grant His forgiveness for your sins and at the same time thank Him for the opportunity to do *teshuvah* and be forgiven.

[130:4] – כִּי עִמָּךְ הַסְּלִיחָה לְמַעַן תִּוָּרָא – *“Because forgiveness is with You so that You be held in reverence.”*

Lessons for Life - Your Attitude.

[130:5] HOPE. – קִוִּיתִי ה' קוֹתָה נַפְשִׁי וְלִדְבָרוֹ הוֹחֵלְתִי – *“I have put my hope in Hashem. My soul has been hoping. I look expectantly for His word [to be fulfilled].”* Declare your total commitment to Hashem and your dependence on His kindness.

[130:6] – נַפְשִׁי לֹא־דָנִי מִשְׁמָרִים לְבַקֵּר שְׁמָרִים לְבַקֵּר – *“My soul [yearns] for my L-rd [more than] the watchers for the dawn watch for the dawn.”*

Tehillos for Life - Contemplation of Hashem.

[130:7] KINDNESS. – כִּי עִם ה' הַחֶסֶד וְהַרְבֵּה עֲמוּ פְדוֹת – *“With Hashem there is kindness, and with Him abundant redemption.”* Praise Hashem for His qualities of kindness and forgiveness of sin.

[130:8] – וְהוּא יִפְדֶּה אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכָּל עֲוֹנוֹתָיו – *“And so He will surely redeem Yisrael from all its iniquities.”*

Sources

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

- ה - רד"ק, המאירי, מלבי"ם
ו - אבן עזרא, המאירי, ספורנו, מלבי"ם
ז - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, ספורנו, מלבי"ם, נר לרגלי
ח - רד"ק
- א - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, המאירי, ספורנו, אבן יחיאל,
מלבי"ם, נר לרגלי
ב - אבן עזרא, ספורנו, אבן יחיאל,
ג - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, המאירי
ד - אבן עזרא, המאירי, אבן יחיאל, מלבי"ם

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