

Mizmor 056

Count My Tears

Key Concepts

David composed this mizmor at an early point in a long period of exile as he fled from one hiding place to another, seeking to avoid King Shaul who had become his bitter enemy. David was in mortal fear of being caught. He visualized himself as a "mute dove" silenced by fear and far from home. However, he knew in his heart that as long as he trusted in Hashem, he would be safe. He realized that this experience was part of an extended challenge which Hashem had given him to prepare him to fulfill his mission in life.

Even though he knew he would be facing many tribulations along the way, he knew that Hashem was watching over him and would reward him in the end for being faithful. During the course of the mizmor David renews his trust in Hashem and his commitment to face whatever comes his way. He calls upon Hashem to take note of the tears he will be shedding, asking Him, as it were, to put the tears in His flask so that a complete record of David's trials will reflect all of his sufferings.

Historical Background

Although David knew that Shaul was out to kill him, David did not want to confront Shaul directly for Shaul was still recognized as the anointed king. And so David found it necessary to leave the historic Land of Yisrael and enter the city of Gass in the Land of the Plishtim. Because the Plishtim were traditional enemies of the Jews, David disguised himself as a madman. The king of the Plishtim was taken in by the disguise and instructed his officers to free David. However, the officers were very suspicious and David knew that they were watching him closely, waiting for him to accidentally reveal his true identity. David composed this mizmor while he was still uncertain about whether he would be found out.

Navigating Tehillim. After David's successful escape from Gass, he composed a song of gratitude and praise. This is preserved as Mizmor 034 (Reflecting Upon a Miracle).

Exploring the Mizmor

PART 1. INTRODUCTION. David introduces the mizmor, throwing himself upon the mercy of Hashem because of his dire situation. He is a "mute dove" far from home and in great danger.

(א) לְמִנְצַחַּ עַל יוֹנֵת אֶלֶם רְחֻקִים לְדָוִד מִכְתָּם בְּאַחֲזוֹ אֹתוֹ פְּלִשְׁתִּים בְּגַת: (ב) חֲנִנִי
אֱלֹקִים כִּי שָׁאַפְנִי אֶנְוֶשׁ כָּל הַיּוֹם לֶחֶם יִלְחָצְנִי: (ג) שָׁאַפּוּ שׁוֹרְרֵי כָּל הַיּוֹם כִּי רַבִּים
לְחַמִּים לִי מְרוֹם:

(1) For the musician, on the [instrument named] "mute dove of distant places," a michtam [song] of David, when the Plishtim seized him in Gass.
(2) Grant me favor, O G-d, a man is eager to devour me. Every day he has been straining to make war against me. (3) Every day my watchful foes are eager to devour me for there are many who are striving against me, O Most High.

Navigating Tehillim. David chose the special musical format named 'michtam' for this mizmor. It is the first of a series of five mizmorim (056 through 060) using the same format, whose name means 'adornment of purest gold'. The only other mizmor in Tehillim which was honored with this format is mizmor 016 (Teach Me the Way to Life).

PART 2. PROTECTION FROM FEAR. David gains courage from the knowledge that he has no reason to fear dangerous men as long as he places his trust in Hashem.

(ד) יוֹם אִירָא אֲנִי אֵלֶיךָ אֲבָטָח: (ה) בְּאֱלֹקִים אֶהְלֵל דְּבָרוֹ בְּאֱלֹקִים בְּטַחֲוִיתִי לֹא
אִירָא מָה יַעֲשֶׂה בֶּשָׂר לִי:

(4) On the day that I ought to be afraid [of dangerous enemies], I put my trust in You. (5) [I trust] in G-d; I praise His word. [Since] I trust in G-d I will not be afraid; what can mortal flesh do to me?

PART 3. DANGEROUS MEN. Now with renewed confidence, David takes another look at the dangerous men who are waiting to catch him after his departure from the court of Avimelech. He asks G-d to foil their plans.

(ו) כָּל הַיּוֹם דְּבָרֵי יַעֲצָבוּ עָלַי כָּל מִחְשַׁבְתָּם לָרָע: (ז) יְגוּרוּ [יִצְפִּינוּ] יִצְפוּנוּ הַמָּה
עֲקֵבֵי יִשְׁמְרוּ כְּאִשָּׁר קוּוּ נַפְשִׁי: (ח) עַל אֲוֹן פִּלְט לָמוּ בְּאֵף עַמִּים הוֹרֵד אֱלֹקִים:
(6) Every day they cause my words [to be of] grief. All their thoughts about

me are for evil. (7) They gather and hide in ambush; they watch my every step, hoping [to take] my life. (8) [This is] because of the [perceived] offense of escaping from them. O G-d, in Your anger take [the] peoples down [from their plans].

PART 4. SECURITY IN HASHEM'S CARE. David is now prepared to face a long period of being tested as he continues to seek refuge, going from one hideout to another in his wanderings. However, he knows that he is not alone. Hashem is watching him closely and nothing is forgotten. So he asks Hashem to even count his tears, saving them in His flask, for each tribulation is experienced in a different way.

(ט) נְדִי סִפְרִתָּה אֶתָּה שִׁימָה דְמַעְתִּי בְּנֹאדְךָ הֲלֹא בְּסִפְרִתְךָ: (י) אֲזוּ יָשׁוּבוּ אוֹיְבֵי אַחֹר בַּיּוֹם אֶקְרָא זֶה יַדְעֵתִי כִּי אֱלֹקִים לִי: (יא) בְּאֵלֶקִים אֶהְלֵל דָּבָר בְּה' אֶהְלֵל דָּבָר: (יב) בְּאֵלֶקִים בְּטַחְתִּי לֹא אִירָא מֶה יַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם לִי:

(9) You have counted my wanderings. Place my tears in Your flask [as well]. Are they not [also] in Your counting? (10) Then my foes will retreat on the day I cry out. [With] this I [will] know that G-d is with me. (11) [When there are judgments] by G-d I will praise His word. [When there are kindnesses] by Hashem, I will praise His word. (12) In G-d I trust; I will not fear. What can man do to me?

PART 5. GRATITUDE. David has survived until now by trusting in Hashem. He looks forward to the opportunity to thank Hashem in the future.

(יג) עָלַי אֱלֹקִים נִדְרֶיךָ אֲשַׁלֵּם תּוֹדֹת לְךָ: (יד) כִּי הִצַּלְתָּ נַפְשִׁי מִמּוֹת הֲלֹא רַגְלִי מִדַּחִי לְהִתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי אֱלֹקִים בְּאוֹר הַחַיִּים:

(13) Upon me is [the duty], O G-d, [to make good] my vows [of gratitude] to You. I will make thanksgiving offerings to You ... (14) ... because You rescued my soul from death. Will You not rescue my feet from stumbling in the future, to walk before G-d in the light of life.

Learning the Mizmor

PART 1. INTRODUCTION.

(א) לְמִנְצַחַן עַל יוֹנֵת אֵלִים רְחֻקִים

A song **for the musician** — לְמִנְצַחַן, to be performed **on** the instrument called the "mute dove of distant places" — עַל יוֹנֵת אֵלִים רְחֻקִים. The name of the

instrument refers to David himself. David was a great warrior, but there was a time in fleeing King Shaul when he was far from home and forced to be as mute as a defenseless dove because he had to hide his true identity. He was also mute in the sense that he didn't question Hashem's plan for him. Despite being anointed king, he found himself a hunted man.

לְדוֹד מִכְתָּם

This song is a **michtam** composed **by David** — לְדוֹד מִכְתָּם. A 'michtam' is a very fine composition, whose name means 'adornment of purest gold'.

בְּאַחֲזוֹ אֶתֹו פְּלִשְׁתִּים בְּגַת:

David composed the song while in captivity, when officers of **the Plishtim seized him in Gass** — בְּאַחֲזוֹ אֶתֹו פְּלִשְׁתִּים בְּגַת and brought him to Avimelech, the king of the Plishtim. Since David was powerless, he disguised himself as a madman. Ultimately, Avimelech set him free, refusing to believe that he was David, the King of Yisrael.

(ב) חֲנִנֵי אֱלֹקִים כִּי שָׂאֲפְנֵי אֲנוֹשׁ כָּל הַיּוֹם לֶחֶם יִלְחָצְנִי:

Grant me Your favor, O G-d — חֲנִנֵי אֱלֹקִים even though I have left the *kedushah* (sanctity) of Eretz Yisrael and gone to the land of the Plishtim. I had to leave **for there is a man** (Shaul) **who is eager to devour me** — כִּי שָׂאֲפְנֵי אֲנוֹשׁ. **Every day he has been straining to make war against me** — כָּל הַיּוֹם לֶחֶם יִלְחָצְנִי.

(ג) שָׂאֲפוּ שׁוֹרְרֵי כָּל הַיּוֹם כִּי רַבִּים לֶחֱמִים לִי מְרוֹם:

And now that I am among the Plishtim my situation is even worse. **Every day my watchful foes here are eager to devour me** — שָׂאֲפוּ שׁוֹרְרֵי כָּל הַיּוֹם **for there are many who are striving against me, O Most High** — כִּי רַבִּים לֶחֱמִים לִי מְרוֹם, Who sees all and has the power to rescue me!

PART 2. PROTECTION FROM FEAR.

(ד) יוֹם אִירָא אֲנִי אֶלֶיךָ אֲבָטָח:

Even on **the day that I ought to be afraid** — יוֹם אִירָא because of the great danger I am in, **I put my trust in You** — אֲנִי אֶלֶיךָ אֲבָטָח for I know it is in Your

power to rescue me.

(ה) בְּאֱלֹקִים אֶהְלֵל דְּבָרוֹ
בְּאֱלֹקִים בְּטַחַתִּי לֹא אִירָא
מָה יַעֲשֶׂה בָּשָׂר לִי:

I put my trust in **the G-d** of truth — **בְּאֱלֹקִים**. **I praise His word** — **אֶהְלֵל דְּבָרוֹ** for I know He keeps His promise, the promise He made by anointing me to replace Shaul as king. And since **I trust in G-d** — **בְּאֱלֹקִים בְּטַחַתִּי**, **I will not be afraid** — **לֹא אִירָא** for **what can mortal flesh do to me** — **מָה יַעֲשֶׂה בָּשָׂר לִי** when it is not the will of G-d? My very trust in Hashem is a reason for Him to save me for Hashem protects those who rely upon Him alone.

PART 3. DANGEROUS MEN.

(ו) כָּל הַיּוֹם דְּבָרֵי יַעֲצִבוּ
עָלַי כָּל מַחֲשַׁבְתֵּם לָרָע:

I know they cannot harm me, but still **every day**— **כָּל הַיּוֹם** they cause me mental distraction so that **my words are** expressions of **grief** and sadness — **דְּבָרֵי יַעֲצִבוּ**. This is because **all their thoughts about me are for evil** — **עָלַי כָּל מַחֲשַׁבְתֵּם לָרָע**, for the Plishtim question my disguise and suspect me to be a spy. Even after Avimelech released me, his officers contemplate harming me.

(ז) יְגוּרוּ [יִצְפִּינוּ] יִצְפוּנוּ
הִמָּה עֵקֶבֶי יִשְׁמְרוּ
כְּאֲשֶׁר קוּוּ נַפְשִׁי:

After I leave Avimelech's palace, **they gather and hide in ambush** — **יְגוּרוּ יִצְפוּנוּ**, looking and waiting for a chance that after an hour or two of playing the fool, I might revert to my true self. **They watch my every step** — **הִמָּה עֵקֶבֶי יִשְׁמְרוּ** to see how I am walking, **hoping to have the opportunity to take my life** — **כְּאֲשֶׁר קוּוּ נַפְשִׁי**.

(ח) עַל אֲוֹן פִּלְט לָמוֹ
בְּאֶף עַמִּים הוֹרֵד אֱלֹקִים:

They wanted to catch me **because of** what they deemed as **my offense of escaping from them** — **עַל אֲוֹן פִּלְט לָמוֹ**. **O G-d, take the peoples down** from

their plans against me **in Your anger**, — **בְּאַף עַמִּים הוֹרֵד אֱלֹקִים** !

PART 4. SECURITY IN HASHEM'S CARE.

(ט) נָדִי סַפְּרָתָה אֲתָה
שִׁימָה דְּמַעְתִּי בְּנֹאדְךָ
הֲלֹא בְּסַפְּרָתְךָ:

You have counted my wanderings — **נָדִי סַפְּרָתָה אֲתָה** in exile as a penitence for my sins. But stages of my exile have not been equal in terms of suffering. Some have induced more weeping because of their more intense anguish. **Therefore, place my tears in Your flask** — **שִׁימָה דְּמַעְתִּי בְּנֹאדְךָ** as well so that they will not be forgotten. **Are they not also in Your counting** — **הֲלֹא בְּסַפְּרָתְךָ** together with Your record of all my sufferings?

(י) אָז יָשׁוּבוּ אוֹיְבֵי אַחֲזָר בְּיוֹם אֶקְרָא
זֶה יִדְעֵתִי כִּי אֱלֹקִים לִי:

Then my foes will be forced to retreat on the day I cry out to You — **אָז יָשׁוּבוּ זֶה יִדְעֵתִי כִּי** **אֱלֹקִים לִי**. **With this I will know that G-d is with me** — **אֱלֹקִים לִי** and is watching over me.

(יא) בְּאֱלֹקִים אֶהְלֵל דְּבָר
בְּה' אֶהְלֵל דְּבָר:

Whatever happens to me, **if bestowed by the judgment of G-d** — **בְּאֱלֹקִים I will praise it as His word** — **אֶהְלֵל דְּבָר**; if bestowed by the kindness of Hashem — **אֶהְלֵל דְּבָר** — **I will praise it as His word** — **בְּה'**.

(יב) בְּאֱלֹקִים בְּטַחְתִּי לֹא אִירָא
מֶה יַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם לִי:

For in G-d I trust and therefore **I shall not fear** — **בְּאֱלֹקִים בְּטַחְתִּי לֹא אִירָא** any man, even a man of nobility. **What can such a man do to me** — **מֶה יַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם לִי** if it is not G-d's will?

PART 5. GRATITUDE.

(יג) עָלַי אֱלֹקִים נִדְרִיךָ
אֲשַׁלֵּם תּוֹדַת לְךָ:

Upon me is the duty, **O G-d**, to make good my **vows** of expressing gratitude to **You** — עָלַי אֱלֹקִים נִדְרִיךָ — whenever You rescue me from adversity. **Accordingly**, **I will** surely **make thanksgiving offerings to You** — אֲשַׁלֵּם תּוֹדַת לְךָ, ...

(יד) כִּי הִצַּלְתָּ נַפְשִׁי מִמָּוֹת
הֲלֹא רַגְלִי מִדְּחִי
לְהִתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי אֱלֹקִים בְּאֶרֶץ הַחַיִּים:

... **because You** rescued my soul from death — כִּי הִצַּלְתָּ נַפְשִׁי מִמָּוֹת — many times in the past. **Will You not** — הֲלֹא — **rescue my feet from stumbling** — רַגְלִי — in the past. **Will You not** — הֲלֹא — **rescue my feet from stumbling** — רַגְלִי — in the future, **to walk before G-d** — לְהִתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי אֱלֹקִים — and to do so **in the light of life** — בְּאֶרֶץ הַחַיִּים — in the Land of Yisrael where I will have the opportunity to devote myself to learning Torah in the company of *talmidei chachamim* (Torah scholars).

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 Anguish.

[56:2] DIRECT THREAT. — חֲנֹנִי אֱלֹקִים כִּי שָׂאֲפְנִי אֲנוּשׁ כָּל הַיּוֹם לַחֵם יִלְחָצֵנִי — “Grant me favor, O G-d, a man is eager to devour me. Every day he has been straining to make war against me.” Turn to Hashem for help when you are in personal danger.

[56:3] — שָׂאֲפוּ שׁוֹרְרֵי כָּל הַיּוֹם כִּי רַבִּים לַחֲמִים לִי מְרוֹם — “Every day my watchful foes are eager to devour me for there are many who are striving against me, O Most High.

Lessons for Life - Your Attitude.

[56:4] BITACHON. — יוֹם אִירָא אֲנִי אֵלַיךְ אֲבַטָּח — “On the day that I ought to be afraid [of dangerous enemies], I put my trust in You.” No matter how

hopeless your situation seems, trust in Hashem to take care of you, for you are always in His hands.

[56:5] - בַּאֲלֵקִים בְּטַחְתִּי לֹא אֵיכָא מַה יַעֲשֶׂה בְּשָׂר לִי - "[Since] I trust in G-d I will not be afraid; what can mortal flesh do to me?"

Tefillos for Life - Your Plea for Yeshuah.

[56:7] FOIL THEIR PLANS. - וַיִּגְוּוּ וַיִּצְפוּנוּ הַמָּה עֵקְבֵי יִשְׁמְרוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר קוּוּ נַפְשִׁי - "They gather and hide in ambush; they watch my every step, hoping [to take] my life." My enemies are scheming against me because they cannot reconcile themselves to my existence. I depend upon You, Hashem, to foil their plans so that I can continue to survive.

[56:8]. - עַל אֲוֹן פִּלְט לָמוּ בְּאֵף עַמִּים הוֹרֵד אֱלֹקִים - "[This is] because of the [perceived] offense of escaping from them. O G-d, in Your anger take [the] peoples down [from their plans]."

Tefillos for Life - Your Relationship with Hashem.

[56:9] COUNT MY TEARS. - שִׁימָה דְמַעְתִּי בְּנֹאדְךָ הֲלֹא בְּסִפְרֶתְךָ - "Place my tears in Your flask [as well]. Are they not [also] in Your counting?" Ask Hashem to take an accounting of all the sufferings you have endured.

[56:10] - אִזּוּ יִשׁוּבוּ אוֹיְבֵי אַחֲוֹר בְּיוֹם אֶקְרָא זֶה יִדְעֵתִי כִּי אֱלֹקִים לִי - "Then my foes will retreat on the day I cry out. [With] this I [will] know that G-d is with me."

[56:11] BITACHON. - בַּאֲלֵקִים אֶהְלֵל דְּבַר בְּה' אֶהְלֵל דְּבַר - "[When there are judgments] by G-d I will praise His word. [When there are kindnesses] by Hashem, I will praise His word." Be ready to react trustingly to Hashem's behavior towards you, whatever it may be, for you know He has your welfare in mind.

[56:12]. - בַּאֲלֵקִים בְּטַחְתִּי לֹא אֵיכָא מַה יַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם לִי - "In G-d I trust; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

Lessons for Life - Your Gratitude.

[56:13] YESHUAH. - עָלַי אֱלֹקִים נְדַרְיָךְ אֲשֶׁלֶם תּוֹדַת לְךָ - "Upon me is [the duty], O G-d, [to make good] my vows [of gratitude] to You. I will make thanksgiving offerings to You...." Be sure to express the gratitude you feel for having been saved by Hashem. Let your gratitude be as sincere as your

plea to be saved.

[56:14]. - **כִּי הִצַּלְתָּ נַפְשִׁי מִמּוֹת** - "... because You rescued my soul from death."

Sources

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

ח - רש"י, מלבי"ם,	א - רש"י, אבן עזרא, המאירי, אלשיך, מלבי"ם
ט - רש"י, רד"ק, המאירי, אלשיך, מלבי"ם	ב - רש"י, רד"ק, ספורנו, אלשיך
י - אבן עזרא, אבן עזרא, מלבי"ם	ג - רש"י
יא - רש"י, רשר"ה	ד - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, בן-רמון, מצודות, רשר"ה
יב - רד"ק	ה - אבן עזרא, מלבי"ם
יג - ספורנו, מצודות	ו - רש"י, בן-רמון, מלבי"ם
יד - רש"י, רד"ק	ז - רש"י, רד"ק, בן-רמון, אלשיך, מלבי"ם

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