

Mizmor 064

Counsellors of Bitterness

Key Concepts

David composed this mizmor as an earnest *tefillah* to Hashem during the period when he was being hunted for treason against Shaul HaMelech. As in other mizmorim that David authored during this time, he blamed his woes on the counsellors to Shaul who were seeking to curry favor by spreading ugly rumors and slanderous accusations against him.

In the mizmor David pleads with Hashem to shield him from the conspiracies that instigated Shaul. The perpetrators of these conspiracies, such as Doeg the Edomi, were driven by hatred and ambition. David understood very well how they used the innuendo and carefully chosen words to destroy his reputation and make him seem suspect.

David ends the mizmor by asking Hashem to take retribution against the perpetrators in a way that will bring greater glory to His Name. Thus, David asks that the bitter counsellors be undone by the very weapons of slander that they used against him. The form of punishment will reveal to all the nature of the crime for which it is being imposed.

Exploring the Mizmor

PART 1. PLEA FOR PROTECTION. David pleads with Hashem to shield him from having to live in fear of his shrewd enemies who are secretly conspiring against him as well as those who are publicly defaming him.

(א) לְמַנְצַחַ מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד: (ב) שְׁמַע אֱלֹקִים קוֹלִי בְּשִׁיחֵי מִפְּחַד אוֹיֵב תִּצַּר חַיִּי: (ג)
תִּסְתִּירֵנִי מִסוּד מְרַעִים מִרְגָּשֵׁת פְּעָלֵי אָוֶן:

(1) For the musician, a mizmor by David. (2) O G-d, Hear my voice as I speak. Guard my life from the fear of the enemy. (3) Shield me from the secret gathering of evil men, from the public assemblage of evildoers.

PART 2. THE PERPETRATORS. David elaborates on the behavior of his enemies, explaining why they are so unsettling to him. The perpetrators who are causing him this anguish operate by telling lies about him and by secretly conspiring against him. He compares the sharpness of their tongues to a sword and the bitterness of

the words they speak to a well-aimed arrow. Their verbal techniques are so subtle that the perpetrators believe themselves to be immune to discovery and criticism .

(ד) אֲשֶׁר שָׁנְנוּ כִּחְרַב לְשׁוֹנָם דָּרְכוּ חֶצֶם דְּבַר מָר: (ה) לִירוֹת בְּמִסְתָּרִים תָּם פְּתָאִם יִרְהוּ וְלֹא יִירָאוּ: (ו) יִחְזְקוּ לָמוֹ דְּבַר רָע יִסְפְּרוּ לְטָמוֹן מוֹקְשִׁים אָמְרוּ מִי יִרְאֶה לָמוֹ: (ז) יִחְפְּשׂוּ עוֹלֹת תִּמְנְוּ חֶפֶשׁ מִחֶפֶשׁ וְקָרַב אִישׁ וְלֵב עֵמֶק:

(4) They have sharpened their tongue like the sword and have aimed a bitter word as their arrow (5) to shoot from a hidden ambush at a blameless man. They shoot him unexpectedly and they are not afraid. (6) They encourage each other with their evil word. They speak [softly] in order to conceal [verbal] traps. They say, Who will see them? (7) [They say] Let them investigate [our] crimes. [Even when] they have completed a diligent search, [they will come up empty-handed because] man is within and the heart is deep.

PART 3. RETRIBUTION. David expresses his confidence in the actions that Hashem will surely take in response to his *tefillah*. The retribution will be well-designed and will be calibrated measure-for-measure against the offense.

(ח) וַיִּרְם אֱלֹקִים חֵץ פְּתָאוֹם הָיוּ מִכּוֹתָם: (ט) וַיִּכְשִׁילוּהוּ עָלֵמוֹ לְשׁוֹנָם יִתְנַדְּדוּ כָּל רֵאֵה בָּם:

(8) But G-d will shoot the arrow [of retribution] at them. They will be suddenly struck down. (9) Their own tongue will trip them up. All who see them will recoil [in shock].

PART 4. CONCLUSION. David concludes the mizmor by describing the anticipated impact of Hashem's action upon the people of the world. The method and effectiveness of the retribution will be a revelation of Hashem's power and wisdom.

(י) וַיִּירָאוּ כָּל אָדָם וַיִּגִּידוּ פֶּעַל אֱלֹקִים וּמַעֲשֵׂהוּ הַשְּׂכִילִי: (יא) יִשְׂמַח צַדִּיק בְּה' וְחָסָה בּוֹ וַיִּתְהַלְלוּ כָּל יִשְׂרָי לֵב:

(10) Then all men will be awed and they will declare it is G-d's doing. They will comprehend His action. (11) The tzadik will rejoice in [gratitude to] Hashem and take refuge in Him. All who are upright in heart will exult.

Learning the Mizmor

PART 1. PLEA FOR PROTECTION.

(א) לְמִנְצַחַת מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד:

For the musician – לְמִנְצַחַת, a mizmor composed by David – מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד.

(ב) שְׁמַע אֱלֹקִים קוֹלִי בְּשִׁיחִי

מִפֶּחַד אוֹיֵב תִּצַּר חַיִּי:

O G-d, Hear my voice as I speak to You of my fears – שְׁמַע אֱלֹקִים קוֹלִי בְּשִׁיחִי.
Guard my life from having to experience the fear of the enemy – מִפֶּחַד אוֹיֵב – תִּצַּר חַיִּי.

(ג) תִּסְתִּירֵנִי מִסוּד מְרָעִים

מִרְגֵּשֶׁת פְּעָלֵי אֲוֹן:

Shield me from the secret gathering of evil men – תִּסְתִּירֵנִי מִסוּד מְרָעִים, who
are conspiring against me. Protect me from the public assemblage of evil doers
– מִרְגֵּשֶׁת פְּעָלֵי אֲוֹן, ...

PART 2. THE PERPETRATORS.

(ד) אֲשֶׁר שָׁנְנוּ כַּחֲרֵב לְשׁוֹנָם

דָּרְכוּ חֶצֶם דָּבָר מָר:

... who have sharpened their tongue like the sword – אֲשֶׁר שָׁנְנוּ כַּחֲרֵב לְשׁוֹנָם,
to publicly disgrace me. And those who conspire in secret have aimed a bitter
word as their arrow – דָּרְכוּ חֶצֶם דָּבָר מָר ...

(ה) לִירוֹת בַּמְּסִתְרִים תָּם

פְּתָאִם יִרְהוּ וְלֹא יִירָאוּ:

... to shoot from a hidden ambush at a blameless man – לִירוֹת בַּמְּסִתְרִים
תָּם, such as I. They shoot him unexpectedly – פְּתָאִם יִרְהוּ, counting on the fact
that since their victim has not harmed them, he has no reason no guard himself
from their aggressive intentions. And they are not afraid of Hashem – וְלֹא יִירָאוּ,
so there is nothing to restrain them.

(ו) יִחַזְקוּ לְמוֹ דְבַר רָע
 יִסְפְּרוּ לְטָמוֹן מוֹקְשִׁים
 אָמְרוּ מִי יִרְאֶה לָמוֹ:

They encourage each other by constantly repeating their **evil word** — יִחַזְקוּ לְמוֹ — **דְבַר רָע** about me to Shaul. **They speak** — יִסְפְּרוּ — to him in apparently harmless conversation **in order to conceal** verbal **traps** — לְטָמוֹן מוֹקְשִׁים. **They say** — אָמְרוּ, **Who will see them** — מִי יִרְאֶה לָמוֹ ?

(ז) יִחַפְּשׂוּ עוֹלֹת
 תִּמְנֶנּוּ חֶפֶשׁ מְחַפֵּשׁ
 וְקָרַב אִישׁ וְלֵב עֵמֶק:

They are confident that they will not be held accountable for their subtle remarks. They say, **Let them investigate** our **crimes** of slander — יִחַפְּשׂוּ עוֹלֹת. Even when **they have completed a diligent search** — תִּמְנֶנּוּ חֶפֶשׁ מְחַפֵּשׁ, no one will remember exactly what we said. No one will know what we meant when we spoke our slander for the intellect of a **man is within** — וְקָרַב אִישׁ and the heart is deep — וְלֵב עֵמֶק.

PART 3. RETRIBUTION.

(ח) וַיִּרְם אֶלְקִים חֵץ
 פְּתָאוֹם הָיוּ מִכּוֹתָם:

But just as they send out arrows of slander with their sharp tongue, **G-d will shoot** the **arrow** of retribution **at them** — וַיִּרְם אֶלְקִים חֵץ. **They will be suddenly struck down** — פְּתָאוֹם הָיוּ מִכּוֹתָם just as their slander caught me unawares.

(ט) וַיִּכְשִׁילוּהוּ עֲלִימוֹ לְשׁוֹנָם
 יִתְנַדְּדוּ כָּל רְאֵה בָם:

Their own tongue will trip them up — וַיִּכְשִׁילוּהוּ עֲלִימוֹ לְשׁוֹנָם. They will suddenly be brought down by the very scheme through which they intended to destroy me. **All who see them will recoil** in shock — יִתְנַדְּדוּ כָּל רְאֵה בָם because the choice of punishment has the effect of revealing the nature of the crime.

PART 4. CONCLUSION.

(י) וַיִּירָאוּ כָּל אָדָם
וַיִּגִּידוּ פֶּעַל אֱלֹקִים
וּמַעֲשֵׂהוּ הַשְּׂכִילִי:

Then all men will be awed – וַיִּירָאוּ כָּל אָדָם **and they will declare** that what they have seen **is G-d's doing** – וַיִּגִּידוּ פֶּעַל אֱלֹקִים. **They will** think about it and **comprehend His action** – וּמַעֲשֵׂהוּ הַשְּׂכִילִי as a just retribution, in contrast with what the wicked assumed when they said, "Who will see?"

(יא) יִשְׂמַח צְדִיק בְּה'
וְחָסָה בּוֹ וַיִּתְהַלְלוּ כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵב:

The tzadik will rejoice in gratitude to **Hashem** – יִשְׂמַח צְדִיק בְּה', when he realizes that he is free of the threat from the wicked. **And the tzadik will take refuge in Him** – וְחָסָה בּוֹ with full trust and confidence. **All who are upright in heart will exult** – וַיִּתְהַלְלוּ כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵב in gratification at trusting in Hashem, knowing that their hopes are fulfilled and they will not suffer embarrassment at being let down.

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.

[64:2] MY VOICE. – שְׁמַע אֱלֹקִים קוֹלִי בְּשִׁיחִי – "O G-d, Hear my voice as I speak." When you ask Hashem's help, let your voice be heard, at least to yourself. It is not enough just to think your plea.

Tefillos for Life - Your Yeshuah.

[64:2] THREAT. – מִפְּחַד אוֹיֵב תִּצַּר חַיִּי – "Guard my life from the fear of the enemy." Ask Hashem to disable the power of those who threaten you so that you need not live in fear.

[64:3] CONSPIRACIES. – תִּסְתִּירֵנִי מִסּוֹד מְרַעִים מְרַגְּשֵׁת פְּעֻלֵי אֶוֹן – "Shield

me from the secret gathering of evil men, from the public assemblage of evildoers." Ask Hashem to prevent the schemes of your enemies from becoming a reality.

Tefillos for Life - Your Anguish.

[64:4] BITTERNESS. – אֲשֶׁר שָׁנְנוּ כַחֲרֵב לְשׁוֹנָם דְּרָכָם חָצָם דְּבַר מָר – “*They have sharpened their tongue like the sword and have aimed a bitter word as their arrow.*” Express your anguish to Hashem at the bitterness being demonstrated against you by those who hate you. Perhaps if Hashem sees your suffering, He will have pity on you.

Lessons for Life - Your Attitude.

[64:8] RETRIBUTION. – וַיִּרֶם אֱלֹקִים חֵץ, פְּתָאוֹם הָיוּ מִכּוֹתָם – “*But G-d will shoot the arrow [of retribution] at them. They will be suddenly struck down.*” Trust Hashem to take retribution against the perpetrators of evil.

Tehillos for Life - Your Contemplation of Hashem.

[64:9] RETRIBUTION. – וַיִּכְשִׁילוּהוּ עָלֵימוֹ לְשׁוֹנָם יִתְנַדְּדוּ כֹל רֹאֵה בָם – “*Their own tongue will trip them up. All who see them will recoil [in shock].*” Hashem invokes retribution in a way that demonstrates His power and His wisdom.

Tehillos for Life - Public Acclaim.

[64:10] ALL MEN. – וַיִּירָאוּ כָּל אָדָם וַיִּגִּידוּ פֶּעַל אֱלֹקִים וּמַעֲשָׂהוּ הַשְּׂכִילוֹ – “*Then all men will be awed and they will declare it is G-d’s doing. They will comprehend His action.*” The people of the world will ultimately declare the greatness of Hashem, for the evidence of His power will be clear to all.

Tefillos for Life - Your Gratitude.

[64:11] TZADIKIM. – יִשְׂמַח צַדִּיק בְּה' וְחָסָה בּוֹ וַיִּתְהַלֵּל כֹּל יִשְׂרָיִל – “*The tzadik will rejoice in [gratitude to] Hashem and take refuge in Him. All who are upright in heart will exult.*” Seek to be one of those tzadikim who exult in relying totally upon Hashem. Their exultation expresses their gratitude and relief at being vindicated by Hashem’s actions.

Sources

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

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ז - רשר"ה | א - מלבי"ם |
| ח - אבן עזרא, רד"ק | ב - רד"ק, מצודות, רשר"ה |
| ט - רש"י, אבן עזרא, רד"ק, אלשיך | ג - רש"י, רד"ק, אלשיך, מלבי"ם |
| י - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, אלשיך, מלבי"ם | ד - רש"י, רד"ק, אלשיך |
| יא - רש"י, אבן עזרא, רד"ק | ה - רש"י, רד"ק, אלשיך |
| | ו - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, רשר"ה |

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