

Mizmor 074

Why Have You Abandoned Us?

Key Concepts

In composing this mizmor, the prophet Asaph foresaw that there would come a time such as the present when the Jewish people would be scattered around the world in a seemingly endless *Galus* (Exile). The mizmor is a lamentation for the destruction of the *Bais HaMikdash* (Temple) and a *tefillah* for Hashem to bring the *Geulah* (Redemption).

Asaph described his mizmor as a *maskil* (song of enlightenment) because it opens our eyes to the viciousness and hatred with which our enemies have carried out their charge to drive us into exile. That hatred is directly related to their resentment of the Creator's laws of morality and ethics that were introduced to the world by our forefathers, and which are expressed in the Torah.

The intellectual reasoning behind Asaph's *tefillah* to the Creator is grounded on the sacrilege and the insult to the Name of Hashem that continues to exist in the world as long as our enemies are able to maintain the harsh conditions of Exile. Even if we are unworthy we do not hesitate to throw ourselves upon Hashem's mercy. We ask Him to take into account the devotion of our forefathers and the promises He made to them and the Covenant he sealed with them.

The Exile and the destruction of the *Bais HaMikdash* seem to imply an abandonment by G-d of the Jewish people. However, we know that this is a temporary condition that came about because of our sins and that is why we try to be worthy of the *Geulah*. We have complete faith that when the time is right the Name of Hashem will be restored to universal recognition and respect. With this mizmor that was composed such a long time ago we pray that this time will come soon.

Exploring the Mizmor

PART 1. INTRODUCTION. Mizmor 073 opens with a tearful cry of the Jewish people in Exile, a cry which is the theme of the mizmor: "Why, O G-d, have You abandoned your flock?" In these dark days Hashem seems to be acting as though He has forgotten us, and so Asaph uses the language of human memory, pleading with Hashem to recall our bonding with Him when we first became a nation. That bond became secure when the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) began to dwell among

the people in the *Bais HaMikdash* on "the mountain of Tzion".

(א) מִשְׁכִּיל לְאַסָּף לָמָּה אֶלְקִים זָנַחְתָּ לְנֶצַח יַעֲשֶׂן אֶפְדָּ בְצֹאן מִרְעִיתֶךָ: (ב) זִכֹּר
עֲדִתֶךָ קִנִּיתָ קֶדֶם גְּאֻלְתָּ שָׁבַט נִחְלַתְּךָ הִרְצִיּוֹן זֶה שָׁכַנְתָּ בוֹ:

(1) *A song of enlightenment by Asaph. Why, O G-d, have You abandoned your flock [for what seems like] forever? [Why] does Your wrath smolder against the flock of Your pasture. (2) Remember Your [treasured] community [that] You took to be Your own long ago. [In Mitzrayim] You redeemed the tribe of Your [intended] heritage, [bringing them to] the mountain of Tzion, where Your Presence dwelled.*

PART 2. WHAT THEY HAVE DONE. Memories of the *Bais Hamikdash* in Tzion have triggered a reminder of the destruction wrought by our enemies when we were driven into exile. Asaph now elaborates on the brutality with which they carried out their task and the insult to the One Who called it His abode. In our *tefillah* to Hashem, these memories serve as a strong argument for Him to take action now and end the *Galus*: "Lift up Your steps".

(ג) הֲרִימָה פְּעָמֶיךָ לְמִשְׁאוֹת נֶצַח כָּל-הֶרַע אוֹיֵב בְּקֹדֶשׁ: (ד) שְׂאֵגוֹ צִרְרֶיךָ בְּקֹרֶב
מוֹעֲדֶךָ שָׁמוֹ אוֹתָתֶם אֹתוֹת: (ה) יִנְדַע כִּמְבִיא לְמַעַלָּה בְּסִבְדֵּי-עַץ קִרְדָּמוֹת: (ו) וְעַתָּה
וְעַתָּה פְּתוּחִיָּה יָחַד בְּכִשְׂוִיל וְכִילְפֹת יַהֲלֵמוּן: (ז) שִׁלְחוּ בְּאֵשׁ מִקְדָּשְׁךָ לְאַרְצָ חֲלָלוּ
מִשְׁכַּן-שְׁמֶךָ: (ח) אָמְרוּ בְּלִבָּם נִינָם יָחַד שָׁרְפוּ כָל-מוֹעֲדֵי-אֵל בְּאַרְצֶךָ:

(3) *Lift up Your steps to eternal destruction of the enemy [haters for] all the evil [they perpetrated] in the Sanctuary. (3) Your tormentors have raged in the midst of [the Bais HaMikdash,] Your meeting place. (4) They established their symbols as symbols [of truth]. (5) [They cried out:] Let it be known as [if we are] bringing [our blows] against [the One] Above [as we wield our] axes into the dense wood. (6) And now, [they have attacked] all its carved designs together, hacking away with hammer and chisels. (7) They have set fire to Your Sanctuary. They have desecrated the abode of Your Name [toppling it] to the ground (8) They said In their hearts, "Let us destroy them altogether." They have burned down all of G-d's meeting places in the Land.*

PART 3. PLEA FOR A SIGN OF GEULAH. Despite the desperate urgency of the *Geulah*, we have not yet seen any indication that it is beginning, and so the *tefillah* to Hashem continues, as we ask again, "How long?" Clearly Hashem's direct and

visible action is called for.

(ט) אֹתֵינוּ לֹא רָאִינוּ אִין-עוֹד נְבִיא וְלֹא-אֶתְנוּ יָדַע עַד-מָה: (י) עַד-מָתִי אֱלֻקִים יַחְרֹף צָר יִנְאַץ אוֹיֵב שְׂמֹךְ לְנִצַּח: (יא) לָמָּה תִשְׁיֵב יָדְךָ וַיִּמְיֶנֶךָ מִקְרָב [חֹקֵד] חִיקֶךָ כֹּלָּה:

(9) We have not [yet] seen our [anticipated] signs [of the Geulah]. There is no longer a prophet and there is none among us who knows how long [we will have to wait]. (10) How long, O G-d, will the tormentor insult? Will the foe revile Your Name forever? (11) Why do You withhold Your [left] hand? And Your right hand? Remove [Your hand] from within Your bosom and drive out the enemy.

PART 4. RECALLING PAST YESHUOS. To validate our argument for Hashem's direct action, we think back upon the times past when He brought *yeshuos* to our people. These signs of His might were not random occurrences, but an ongoing reflection of the control that Hashem continues to exert over all of Creation, especially in the cosmos, where the boundaries of time and space are visible on a daily basis.

(יב) וְאֱלֻקִים מִלְּפִי מִקֶּדֶם פָּעַל יְשׁוּעוֹת בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ: (יג) אֶתָּה פּוֹרֶרֶת בְּעֶזְךָ יָם שְׁבֵרֶת רָאשֵׁי תַנִּינִים עַל-הַיָּם: (יד) אֶתָּה רִצַּצְתָּ רָאשֵׁי לוֹיְתָן תַּתְּנִנוּ מֵאֲכָל לֶעָם לְצִיִּים: (טו) אֶתָּה בָּקַעְתָּ מַעֲיָן וְנָחַל אֶתָּה הוֹבֵשֶׁת נְהָרוֹת אֵיתָן: (טז) לָךְ יוֹם אֶף-לָךְ לַיְלָה אֶתָּה הַכִּינוֹתָ מְאוֹר וְשֶׁמֶשׁ: (יז) אֶתָּה הִצַּבְתָּ כָּל-גְּבוּלוֹת אֶרֶץ קִיץ וְחֹרֶף אֶתָּה יִצְרָתָם:

(12) For G-d was [already] my King in earlier times, performing yeshuos throughout the earth. (13) You shattered the Sea with Your might. You smashed the heads of sea serpents (the army of Pharaoh) upon the water. (14) You crushed the head of Leviathan (i.e. Pharaoh and his generals). You gave [his treasure as] food to the people of the wilderness. (15) You split open springs and streams. You dried the mighty rivers. (16) Yours is the day, also Yours is the night. You have set the moon and the sun [into their orbits]. (17) You established all the boundaries of earth. Summer and winter, You fashioned them.

PART 5. A FINAL PLEA. We conclude the *tefillah* with a heartfelt plea for Hashem to raise the priority of our request. In justifying this request we point out the desecration of Hashem's Name that our enemies continue to perpetrate. We also allude to the suffering and the impoverishment that our people have endured

under the yoke of our enemies. The harm that we are experiencing is clearly entwined with the harm being done to the glory of Hashem's Name. Thus, the *Geulah* will ultimately restore that glory in the world.

(יח) זָכַר-זֹאת אוֹיֵב חַרְף ה' וְעַם נָבֵל נֶאֱצַו שְׁמָדָ: (יט) אֶל-תַּתֵּן לְחַיֵּת נֶפֶשׁ תּוֹרֶךְ חַיֵּת עֲנִיָּה אֶל-תִּשְׁפַח לְנֶצַח: (כ) הִבֵּט לְבַרִית כִּי מָלְאוּ מִחֲשֵׁי-אָרֶץ נְאוֹת חָמָס: (כא) אֶל-יָשֵׁב דָּךְ נִכְלָם עֲנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן יִהְלֹו שְׁמָדָ: (כב) קוֹמָה אֱלֹקִים רִיבָה רִיבָךְ זָכַר חֲרָפְתָךְ מִנִּי-נָבֵל כָּל-הַיּוֹם: (כג) אֶל-תִּשְׁפַח קוֹל צִרְרֶיךָ שְׁאוֹן קָמִידָ עֲלֶה תָמִיד:

(18) Be mindful of this: The foe reviles Hashem and a base people reviles Your Name. (19) Don't deliver the soul of Your turtledove to the wild beast. Don't forget the community of Your poor forever. (20) Look to the covenant, for the dark places of the earth are filled with dens of lawlessness. (21) Don't turn back the downtrodden in shame. Let the poor and destitute praise Your Name [in gratitude]. (22) Arise, O God, champion Your cause. Be mindful of Your daily insults from base men. (23) Don't ignore the voice of your enemies, the clamor of Your adversaries that incessantly rises up.

Learning the Mizmor

PART 1. INTRODUCTION

(א) מִשְׁכִּיל לְאָסָף
לָמָה אֱלֹקִים זָנְחָתָ לְנֶצַח
יַעֲשֵׂן אַפָּךְ בְּצֵאן מִרְעִיתָךְ:

A song of enlightenment by Asaph — מִשְׁכִּיל לְאָסָף. The people of Yisrael are crying out to Hashem: **Why, O G-d, have You abandoned** your flock **forever** — לָמָה אֱלֹקִים זָנְחָתָ לְנֶצַח? We desperately want to be close to You. What purpose is served by casting us off for such a long time that it seems as though it has been forever? Why **does Your wrath smolder** — יַעֲשֵׂן אַפָּךְ like smoke from a fire that has gone out, **against the flock of Your pasture** — בְּצֵאן מִרְעִיתָךְ? We have no Shepherd other than You. No shepherd would wish to see his flock destroyed.

(ב) זָכַר עֲדָתָךְ קָנִיתָ קְדָם
גְּאֵלְתָּ שִׁבְט נַחֲלָתָךְ
הַר צִיּוֹן זֶה שְׁכֵנְתָּ בוֹ:

Remember Your treasured **community** — זָכַר עֲדָתָךְ, the people that **You took**

to be Your own long ago — קְנִיתָ קֹדֶם in Mitzrayim. They are the people that **You redeemed** — גָּאַלְתָּ from slavery through Your many wonders. When all others had abandoned You, they were the united **tribe** — שֵׁבֶט that was to be **Your own precious heritage** — נַחֲלֶתְךָ for all time. They are the tribe which You brought to **the mountain of Zion, where Your Presence dwelled** — הַר־צִיּוֹן זֶה — שְׁכַנְתָּ בוֹ. We now ask that You take active possession of us once more, return to Zion and redeem us from this Exile.

PART 2. WHAT THEY HAVE DONE

(ג) הָרִימָה פְּעָמֶיךָ לְמִשְׁאוֹת נֹצַח
כָּל הַרַע אוֹיֵב בְּקֹדֶשׁ:

Give us a sign that You are ready to redeem us. **Lift up Your steps** — הָרִימָה פְּעָמֶיךָ **to begin an eternal destruction** — לְמִשְׁאוֹת נֹצַח of the **enemy** because of **all the evil** they perpetrated **in the Sanctuary** — כָּל־הַרַע אוֹיֵב בְּקֹדֶשׁ.

(ד) שָׂאֲגוּ צִרְרֶיךָ בְּקֹרֶב מוֹעֲדֶךָ
שָׂמוּ אוֹתוֹתֶם אֹתוֹת:

Those who were our tormentors, are also **Your tormentors** for they **have raged** — שָׂאֲגוּ צִרְרֶיךָ **in the midst of** the *Bais HaMikdash*, **Your meeting place** — בְּקֹרֶב מוֹעֲדֶךָ, which You consecrated for Your meeting with Yisrael. It was Your rule over the earth that they sought to drive away. **They established their symbols as** the **symbols** of truth — שָׂמוּ אוֹתוֹתֶם אֹתוֹת.

(ה) יִנְדַע כְּמִבְּיָא לְמַעַלָּה
בְּסֶבֶךְ עֵץ קִרְדָּמוֹת:

When they violently attacked the gates of the holy structure, they cried out: **Let it be known** — יִנְדַע as though we are **bringing** our blows **against** the One **Above** in Heaven — כְּמִבְּיָא לְמַעַלָּה, as we wield our **axes into the dense wood** — בְּסֶבֶךְ עֵץ קִרְדָּמוֹת,

(ו) וְעַתָּה פְּתוּחֶיהָ יַחַד
בְּכַשִּׁיל וְכִילְפַת יְהִלְמוֹן:

And now, after having been inspired by these declarations to destroy the *Beis HaMikdash*, they attacked **all its carved designs together** — וְעַתָּה פְּתוּחֶיהָ יַחַד, **hacking** them **away with hammer and chisels** — בְּכַשִּׁיל וְכִילְפַת יְהִלְמוֹן to

remove even the remnants of ornamental work from the fragments which they find among the ruins. They have been filled with such rabid hatred that even now, they work avidly to erase from the remaining fragments every trace of the holy task for which they were originally consecrated.

(ז) שְׁלַחוּ בְּאֵשׁ מִקֹּדֶשְׁךָ
לְאָרֶץ חִלְלוּ מִשְׁכַּן שְׁמֶךָ:

They have set fire to Your Sanctuary – שְׁלַחוּ בְּאֵשׁ מִקֹּדֶשְׁךָ. They have desecrated the abode of Your Name by toppling its walls and throwing its holy vessels to the ground – **לְאָרֶץ חִלְלוּ מִשְׁכַּן־שְׁמֶךָ.**

(ח) אָמְרוּ בְּלִבָּם נִינֵם יַחַד
שָׂרְפוּ כָּל מוֹעֲדֵי אֵל בְּאֶרֶץ:

They said In their hearts, – אָמְרוּ בְּלִבָּם “Let us destroy them altogether – נִינֵם יַחַד.” They have burned down all of the houses of prayer, G-d's meeting places in the Land – שָׂרְפוּ כָּל מוֹעֲדֵי אֵל בְּאֶרֶץ.

PART 3. PLEA FOR A SIGN OF GEULAH

(ט) אוֹתֵינוּ לֹא רָאִינוּ
אֵין עוֹד נְבִיא
וְלֹא אֶתֵנוּ יָדַע עַד מָה:

We have been in Exile for such a long time and we have watching patiently for the signs of the coming *Geulah* that Your prophets had promised, but **we have not seen our** anticipated **signs – אוֹתֵינוּ לֹא רָאִינוּ. There is no longer a prophet – אֵין עוֹד נְבִיא** who can tell us when the time of the *Geulah* will come, **and there is none among us who knows how long – וְלֹא אֶתֵנוּ יָדַע עַד מָה –** we will have to wait.

(י) עַד מָתַי אֶלְקִים יַחַרְףְּ צָר
יִנְאָץ אוֹיֵב שְׁמֶךָ לְנֶצַח:

How long, O G-d, will the tormentor insult Your Name – עַד מָתַי אֶלְקִים יַחַרְףְּ צָר, asking why you do not show Yourself and claiming that You are unable to end the *Galus*. **Will the foe be allowed to revile Your Name forever – יִנְאָץ אוֹיֵב ? שְׁמֶךָ לְנֶצַח ?**

(יא) לָמָּה תִשְׁיֵב יָדְךָ וַיִּמְיֶנֶךָ
מִקְרֹב חִיקְךָ כְּלֵה:

Why do You withhold Your left hand, which symbolizes Your might, — **לָמָּה** from executing justice against the enemy? **And** why do You withhold **Your right hand**, which symbolizes Your kindness, — **וַיִּמְיֶנֶךָ** from protecting Your people? **Remove** Your hand **from within Your bosom** — **מִקְרֹב חִיקְךָ** and **drive out the enemy** — **כְּלֵה!**

PART 4. RECALLING PAST YESHUOS

(יב) וַאֲלֵקִים מִלְּכִי מִקֶּדֶם
פִּעַל יְשׁוּעוֹת בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ:

For G-d was already my King in earlier times when we were in Mitzrayim — **וַאֲלֵקִים מִלְּכִי מִקֶּדֶם**. Although His kingdom extends into the distant heavens, He was **performing yeshuos** for us **throughout the earth** — **פִּעַל יְשׁוּעוֹת בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ** even in the lands of our enemies. And He did so without even requiring the active involvement of Yisrael in our own defense.

(יג) אַתָּה פִּוּרְרַת בְּעֵזֶךָ יָם
שִׁבְרַת רָאשֵׁי תַנִּינִים עַל הַמַּיִם:

You hardened and then **shattered the Sea** into many pieces **with Your might** — **אַתָּה פִּוּרְרַת בְּעֵזֶךָ יָם** so that the tribes of Yisrael could pass. **You smashed the heads of sea serpents** (the army of Pharaoh) **upon the water** — **שִׁבְרַת רָאשֵׁי תַנִּינִים עַל-הַמַּיִם**, which they worshipped as a god.

(יד) אַתָּה רָצַצְתָּ רָאשֵׁי לְוִיָּתָן
תַּתַּנְנוּ מֵאֲכָל לֶעָם לְצִיִּים:

You crushed the head of Leviathan (i.e. Pharaoh and his generals) — **אַתָּה רָצַצְתָּ** **רָאשֵׁי לְוִיָּתָן**. **You gave** his treasure as **food to** Yisrael, **the people of the wilderness** — **תַּתַּנְנוּ מֵאֲכָל לֶעָם לְצִיִּים**.

(טו) אַתָּה בְּקַעַת מַעַן וַנַּחַל
אַתָּה הוֹבִשְׁתָּ נְהָרוֹת אֵיתָן:

You split open the rock to yield **springs and streams** — **אַתָּה בְּקַעַת מַעַן וַנַּחַל**,

which Moshe brought forth from the rock. **You dried the mighty rivers** — אַתָּה הוֹבַשְׁתָּ נְהָרוֹת אֵיטָן, the Yarden and its tributaries.

(טז) לְךָ יוֹם אֶף לְךָ לַיְלָה
אַתָּה הַכִּינֹתָ מְאוֹר וְשֶׁמֶשׁ:

There is only One Power, for You control both light and darkness. **Yours is the day of Geulah, also Yours is the night of Galus**— לְךָ יוֹם אֶף לְךָ לַיְלָה. **You have set both the moon and the sun** into their orbits — אַתָּה הַכִּינֹתָ מְאוֹר וְשֶׁמֶשׁ because they are not separate powers, but are all under Your direction. Therefore nothing stands in Your way to bring *yeshuos* to Your people.

(יז) אַתָּה הַצַּבְתָּ כָּל גְּבוּלוֹת אֶרֶץ
קִיץ וְחֹרֶף אַתָּה יִצְרַתָּם:

You established all the boundaries of earth — אַתָּה הַצַּבְתָּ כָּל גְּבוּלוֹת אֶרֶץ for the benefit of its creatures. **Summer and winter, You fashioned them** — קִיץ וְחֹרֶף אַתָּה יִצְרַתָּם together with the corresponding phenomena of heat and cold, as well as all the other opposites in the natural world.

PART 5. A FINAL PLEA

(יח) זָכַר זֹאת אוֹיֵב חֲרָף ה'
וְעַם נָבֵל נֶאֱצוּ שְׂמֹךְ:

Hashem, **be mindful of this** — זָכַר זֹאת and save us: **The foe reviles Hashem** as he marches to annihilate us — אוֹיֵב חֲרָף ה', **and a base people reviles Your Name** — וְעַם נָבֵל נֶאֱצוּ שְׂמֹךְ, so don't leave us in their power indefinitely.

(יט) אֵל תִּתֵּן לְחַיֵּית נֶפֶשׁ תּוֹרֵךְ
חַיֵּית עֲנִיִּיךָ אֵל תִּשְׁכַּח לְנֶצַח:

Yisrael is faithful to You like the turtledove, which is famous for its fidelity to its mate. **Don't deliver the soul of Yisrael, Your innocent, defenseless turtledove,** to the vicious Bavel, **the wild beast** — אֵל תִּתֵּן לְחַיֵּית נֶפֶשׁ תּוֹרֵךְ. **Don't forget the community of Your poor forever** — חַיֵּית עֲנִיִּיךָ אֵל תִּשְׁכַּח לְנֶצַח.

(כ) הַבֵּט לְבָרִית
כִּי מְלֵאוּ מִחֲשָׁבֵי אֶרֶץ נְאוֹת חָמָס:

Even if we are unworthy, **look to the Covenant** — הַבֵּט לְבָרִית, the absolute

pledge that You gave to our forefathers, **for the dark places of the earth** where Yisrael is exiled **are filled** — **כִּי מְלֵאוּ מַחְשְׁבֵי-אָרֶץ** — **with dens of lawlessness** — **נְאוֹת חַמָּס** and so were constantly at risk of violence.

(כא) אֶל יוֹשְׁבֵי דָךְ נִכְלָם
עָנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן יִהְלְלוּ שְׁמֶךָ:

Don't turn back the downtrodden in shame — **אֶל-יוֹשְׁבֵי דָךְ נִכְלָם** because their prayers were not answered. **Let the poor and destitute** of Yisrael in Exile find with You the answer to their plea for help and **praise Your Name** — **עָנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן יִהְלְלוּ** **שְׁמֶךָ** in gratitude, so that they will be the heralds of Your *yeshuah*.

(כב) קוֹמָה אֱלֹקִים

רִיבָה רִיבֶךָ זְכוֹר חֲרַפְתֶּךָ מִנִּי נָבֵל כָּל הַיּוֹם:

Arise, O God — **קוֹמָה אֱלֹקִים**, if You don't do it for our benefit, **champion Your own cause** — **רִיבָה רִיבֶךָ** and Your goals for mankind that have been challenged with the argument, "Where is your G-d?" **Be mindful of Your daily insults from base men** — **זְכוֹר חֲרַפְתֶּךָ מִנִּי-נָבֵל כָּל-הַיּוֹם**.

(כג) אֶל תִּשְׁכַּח קוֹל צִרְיֶיךָ

שָׁאוֹן קִמְיָךְ עֹלָה תָמִיד:

Don't ignore the voice of your enemies — **אֶל-תִּשְׁכַּח קוֹל צִרְיֶיךָ**, **the clamor of Your adversaries that** seems to **incessantly rise up** against You in Heaven — **שָׁאוֹן קִמְיָךְ עֹלָה תָמִיד**. They themselves are constantly announcing their wickedness.

Sources

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

א - רש"י, המאירי, בן-רמון, אבן יחיאל, מצודות,	ז - המאירי, מצודות, מלבי"ם
ב - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, בן-רמון, מצודות, רש"י	ח - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, בן-רמון
ג - רש"י, אבן עזרא, רד"ק	ט - רש"י, רד"ק
ד - רש"י, רש"י	י - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, ספורנו, מצודות
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ו - רד"ק, המאירי, בן-רמון, מצודות, רש"י	יב - רד"ק, אלשיך
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יט - רש"י, רד"ק, אלשיך
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יד - רש"י, רד"ק, ספורנו, מצודות
טו - רש"י, רד"ק
טז - רש"י, רד"ק, ספורנו, אלשיך
יז - רד"ק
יח - רש"י, רד"ק

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