

Mizmor 077

A Cry for Geulah

Key Concepts

In 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 *tefillah* for Hashem to bring the *Geulah* (Redemption).

The mizmor begins with a heart-rending cry of anguish as the singer desperately calls out to Hashem and tells of his suffering. He then briefly turns his attention to faint memories of the distant past when music could be heard in the *Bais Hamikdash*. But the ancient memories make the present even harder to bear because no end date for the *Galus* has been announced. And so the singer poses a rhetorical question. Will there be an end to this suffering?

Having asked the question, the singer immediately comes to the realization that the nation's lack of spiritual commitment is at fault and therein lies the key to the *Geulah*.

The mizmor concludes with a vivid and dramatic portrayal of the high point of the first national *Geulah*, the splitting of the sea, which culminated the exodus from Mitzrayim. By temporarily suspending the laws of nature, Hashem demonstrated that He is in total control of the world. Just as He was fully capable of redeeming His people when the time was right, so He will surely do so again.

Exploring the Mizmor

PART 1. MY ANGUISH. Asaph opens the mizmor with a cry of anguish that expresses the suffering that each Jew feels throughout the long night of *Galus*.

(א) לְמַנְצַחַ עַל-יְדִיתוֹן [יְדוּתוֹן לְאֶסֶף מִזְמוֹר: (ב) קוֹלִי אֶל-אֱלֹקִים וְאֶצְעָקָה קוֹלִי אֶל-אֱלֹקִים וְהֶאֱזִין אֵלַי: (ג) בְּיוֹם צָרָתִי אֲדַבְּרֵי דְרִשְׁתִּי יְדִי לִילָה נִגְרָה וְלֹא תִפּוּג מֵאֲנָה הַנֶּחֱם נִפְשִׁי: (ד) אֶזְכְּרָה אֱלֹקִים וְאֶהְמִיָּה אֲשִׁיחָה וְתִתְעַטֵּף רוּחִי סֶלָה: (ה) אַחֲזַת שְׁמֵרוֹת עֵינַי נִפְעַמְתִּי וְלֹא אֲדַבֵּר:

(1) For the musician, on the yedusun [instrument], a mizmor by Asaph. (2) [I lift up] my voice to G-d and cry out. [I lift up] my voice to G-d and He will hear me. (3) On the day of my distress, I sought Hashem [because of] my

suffering; my eyes flowed without respite [through the] night. My soul rejected consolation. (4) I call to mind [the judgement of] G-d and I moan. I speak and my spirit grows faint. Selah. (5) You are holding up my [sleepless] eyelids. I am crushed; I cannot speak.

PART 2. MY MEMORIES. Turning away from the unbearable present, the singer's mind turns to a recollection of the glorious past of Yisrael, when the music of praise to Hasahem was heard in the Bais HaMikdash.

(ו) חֲשַׁבְתִּי יָמִים מְקֻדָּם שָׁנוֹת עוֹלָמִים: (ז) אֶזְכָּרָה נְגִינָתִי בַלַּיְלָה עִם־לִבִּי אֲשִׁיחָה וַיִּחַפֵּשׂ רוּחִי:

(6) My thoughts turn to days of old, years long past. (7) In the night I recall my music. In my heart I reflect and my spirit searches.

PART 3. MY QUESTION. The paradox of a glorious past and a painful present provokes the singer to pose a rhetorical question of Hashem's intentions. Surely there must come a day when the bitterness of the present is replaced by a bright future! Surely Hashem will not let matters continue as they are!

(ח) הֲלֵעוֹלָמִים יִזְנַח אֲדֹנָי וְלֹא־יִסִּיף לְרָצוֹת עוֹד: (ט) הֲאֶפֶס לִנְצַח חֲסִדוֹ גָּמַר אֲמֹר לְדָר וָדָר: (י) הֲשָׁכַח חֲנוּת אֶל־אִם־קִפַּץ בְּאֵף רַחֲמָיו סָלָה:

(8) Will Hashem abandon [me] for ever, never again to show favor? (9) Has His kindness ceased forever? Has He sealed His edict for all generations? (10) Has G-d forgotten how to be merciful? Has He stifled His compassion in anger? Selah.

PART 4. MY ANSWER. Having meditated upon his question Asaph begins to grasp an explanation of the present situation, offering hope for the future. The suffering that the nation is experiencing is a harsh but necessary cure for the spiritual sickness that has led the people to weaken their devotion to G-d. By reflecting upon this the people will look to Him once more, and will acknowledge that everything that happens in the world is an expression of His purpose.

(יא) וְאָמַר חֲלוּתִי הִיא שָׁנוֹת יָמִין עֲלִיוֹן: (יב) [אֶזְכִּיר] אֶזְכּוֹר מֵעַלְלִיָּהּ כִּי־אֶזְכָּרָה מְקֻדָּם פְּלִאָה: (יג) וְהִגִּיתִי בְּכָל־פְּעֻלָּהּ וּבַעֲלִילוֹתֶיהָ אֲשִׁיחָה: (יד) אֱלֹקִים בְּקִדְשׁ דִּרְכָּהּ מִי־אֶל־גְּדוֹל פְּאֻלְקִים: (טו) אֲתָהּ הָאֶל־עֲשֵׂה פְלֵא הוֹדַעְתָּ בְּעַמִּים עֲזָה:

(11) [Then] I realized, "It is my spiritual sickness, this change of the right hand of the Most High. (12) I recall the works of G-d when I remember Your ancient wonders. (13) I will reflect upon all that You have done and I will

Speak about Your deeds. (14) O G-d, Your way is based on holiness. What power is as great as G-d? (15) You are the G-d, doing wonders. You make known Your might among the peoples.

PART 5. LESSON OF THE PAST. Asaph concludes the mizmor with a vivid and dramatic recreation of the climactic scene at the splitting of the Sea when Hashem revealed His overwhelming power to all of mankind, friend and foe alike. Asaph wants every person to take this lesson to heart and commit to the path of righteousness that Hashem has been urging all these years. Hashem will then once again provide Yisrael with leaders like Moshe and Aharon to usher in the Geulah.

(טז) גֹּאֲלָתָּךְ בְּזֵרוּעַ עַמְּךָ בְּנִי-יַעֲקֹב וַיּוֹסֶף סֵלָה: (יז) רְאוּךָ מִיַּם אֱלֹקִים רְאוּךָ מִיַּם יַחִילוּ אֶף יִרְגְּזוּ תְהַמּוֹת: (יח) זֶרְמוּ מִיַּם עֲבוֹת קוֹל נִתְּנוּ שְׁחָקִים אֶף-חֲצָצִידָה יִתְהַלְכוּ: (יט) קוֹל רַעְמָךְ בְּגִלְגֹּל הָאֵירוּ בְּרָקִים תִּבְּל רְגִזָּה וַתִּרְעַשׂ הָאָרֶץ: (כ) בְּיָם וַדְּרָךְךָ [וּשְׁבִילֶיךָ] וּשְׁבִילֶךָ בְּמַיִם רַבִּים וְעַקְבוֹתֶיךָ לֹא נִדְעוּ: (כא) נַחִיתָ כְּצֹאן עַמְּךָ בְּיַד-מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן:

(16) With Your powerful strength, You redeemed Your nation, the sons of Yaakov and Yosef, Selah. (17) the waters of the Sea of Reeds saw You, O G-d — רְאוּךָ מִיַּם אֱלֹקִים. The waters saw You and were terrified. Even the depths trembled. (18) The clouds streamed water. The heavens sounded forth, even Your arrows [of lightnin]g went forth. (19) The rumble of Your thunder was in the whirling wind. Lightning lit up the world. The earth trembled and roared. (20) Your way was through the sea and Your path went through the mighty waters. Your footsteps could not be discovered. (21) You led Your nation like a flock by the hand of Moshe and Aharon.

Learning the Mizmor

PART 1. MY ANGUISH

(א) לְמִנְצַחַ עַל יְדוּתוֹן לְאַסָּף מִזְמוֹר:

This song has been prepared **for the musician** — לְמִנְצַחַ, to be performed **on the yedusun** instrument — עַל-יְדוּתוֹן. It is a **mizmor** — מִזְמוֹר composed **by Asaph** — לְאַסָּף. Asaph presented the mizmor in the form of a tefillah being said by the Jewish nation during a long and bitter Galus at some point in the future.

(ב) קוֹלִי אֶל אֱלֹקִים וְאַצְעָקָה

קוֹלִי אֶל אֱלֹהִים וְהֶאֱזִין אֵלַי:

I lift up **my voice to G-d and cry out** with all my heart — **קוֹלִי אֶל-אֱלֹהִים**
וְאֶצְעָקָה. **My voice** is only **to G-d** — **קוֹלִי אֶל-אֱלֹהִים**, and so **He will surely listen**
to me — **וְהֶאֱזִין אֵלַי** even though I may not receive an immediate answer to my
 plea. For He sees my misery and knows of my sufferings.

(ג) בְּיוֹם צָרָתִי אֶדְנֶי דָרַשְׁתִּי יְדִי

לַיְלָה נִגְרָה וְלֹא תַפּוּג

מֵאַנְהָה הַנְּחָם נַפְשִׁי:

On the day of my distress, I sought Hashem — **בְּיוֹם צָרָתִי אֶדְנֶי דָרַשְׁתִּי**
 asking Him to help me understand how I have failed Him and aroused His anger
 against me. Because of **my suffering** — **יְדִי** **my eyes flowed without respite**
 even **at night** — **לַיְלָה נִגְרָה וְלֹא תַפּוּג**, which is ordinarily a time of rest.
 Throughout the long night of the *Galus* — **my soul rejected consolation** — **מֵאַנְהָה**
הַנְּחָם נַפְשִׁי.

(ד) אֶזְכְּרָה אֱלֹהִים וְאֶהְמָיָה

אֶשִׁיחָה וְתַתְּעִטֵּף רוּחִי סֵלָה:

When **I call to mind** the judgment of **G-d** upon me — **אֶזְכְּרָה אֱלֹהִים**, **I moan** —
וְאֶהְמָיָה because I am reminded of my sins. **I speak** — **אֶשִׁיחָה** of His
 kindnesses to me in the past **and my spirit grows faint** — **וְתַתְּעִטֵּף רוּחִי** in
 regret that I am no longer in His favor, **Selah** — **סֵלָה**.

(ה) אַחֲזִית שְׁמֵרוֹת עֵינַי

נִפְעַמְתִּי וְלֹא אֶדְבֵּר:

I feel as though **You are holding** up **my eyelids** — **אַחֲזִית שְׁמֵרוֹת עֵינַי** and I stare
 out sleeplessly into the night. **I am so crushed** that **I cannot speak** — **נִפְעַמְתִּי**
וְלֹא אֶדְבֵּר.

PART 2. MY MEMORIES

(ו) חֲשַׁבְתִּי יָמִים מִקֶּדֶם
שָׁנוֹת עוֹלָמִים:

Now, in the midst of this bitter *Galus*, **my thoughts turn to days of old** – חֲשַׁבְתִּי יָמִים מִקֶּדֶם, to seek comfort by recollecting the kindnesses that You performed with my ancestors in **years long past** – שָׁנוֹת עוֹלָמִים.

(ז) אֶזְכְּרָה נְגִינָתִי בַלַּיְלָה
עִם לִבִּי אֲשִׁיחָה וַיִּחַפֵּשׂ רוּחִי:

In this dark **night** of *Galus* I recall my music – אֶזְכְּרָה נְגִינָתִי בַלַּיְלָה, which I performed in the *Bais HaMikdash*. In my heart I reflect – עִם לִבִּי אֲשִׁיחָה, and my spirit searches – וַיִּחַפֵּשׂ רוּחִי. I commune with my heart – עִם לִבִּי אֲשִׁיחָה, and my spirit searches – וַיִּחַפֵּשׂ רוּחִי as I try to understand why Hashem has not yet brought the *Geulah*.

PART 3. MY QUESTION

(ח) הֲלֵעוֹלָמִים יַזְנִיחַ אֲדֹנָי
וְלֹא יִסִּיף לְרַצוֹת עוֹד:

Will Hashem abandon me for ever – הֲלֵעוֹלָמִים יַזְנִיחַ אֲדֹנָי, never again to show favor to me – וְלֹא יִסִּיף לְרַצוֹת עוֹד? How can this be? In the past, after a period of anger He always relented and took me back into His favor. Has He changed His way?

(ט) הֲאֵפֶס לְנֶצַח חֲסֵדוֹ,
גַּמְרָא אֶמַר לְדָר וָדָר:

Has His kindness ceased forever – הֲאֵפֶס לְנֶצַח חֲסֵדוֹ? Was his promise to us intended only for certain generations? Has He sealed His edict for all generations – גַּמְרָא אֶמַר לְדָר וָדָר, never again to relent for his wrath?

(י) הַשְּׂכַח חַנוּת אֵל
אִם קִפְצָא בְּאַף רַחֲמֵי סֵלָה:

Has G-d forgotten how to be merciful – הַשָּׂכַח חַנּוּת אֵל – He has clearly stated that He does remember, as it says "*I recall for you the kindness of your youth*" (*Yirmiyahu 2:3*). **Has He now stifled His compassion in anger – אִם-קָפַץ בְּאַף –** **אִם-רַחֲמָיו סָלָה – Selah – רַחֲמָיו**

PART 4. MY ANSWER

(יא) וְאָמַר חֲלוּתִי הִיא
שָׁנוֹת יָמִין עֲלִיּוֹן:

After examining all the alternatives which might explain this long Exile, **I realized**, "**It is** my fault, **my own spiritual sickness – וְאָמַר חֲלוּתִי הִיא** that is the cause of **this** seeming **change of the right hand of the Most High – שָׁנוֹת יָמִין עֲלִיּוֹן**, as it says, "*He has withdrawn His right hand*" (*Eichah 2:3*), although previously, it had been described as "*glorious in power*" (*Shemos 15:6*). Whereas G-d remains Most High, it is we who have been affected. Even if the Shechinah is in exile, it remains Most High.

(יב) אֶזְכֹּר [אֶזְכִּיר] מַעֲלֵי יָהּ
כִּי אֶזְכְּרָה מִקִּדְּם פְּלֹאֵךְ:

Although I am suffering from this seemingly endless *Galus*, I seek to console myself and comfort my people. And so **I recall the works of G-d – אֶזְכֹּר מַעֲלֵי יָהּ**, which reflect Your qualities of kindness and truth throughout all eternity. I especially reminded of these things **when I remember Your ancient wonders – כִּי אֶזְכְּרָה מִקִּדְּם פְּלֹאֵךְ** in which you demonstrated your power to change the laws of nature.

(יג) וְהִגִּיתִי בְּכָל פְּעֻלָּךְ
וּבְעֲלִילוֹתֶיךָ אֲשִׁיחָה:

I will reflect upon all that You have done for us in the past – **וְהִגִּיתִי** **בְּכָל-פְּעֻלָּךְ**, starting with Creation and continuing through the release from slavery in Mitzrayim **and I will speak** to others **about Your elaborate deeds – וּבְעֲלִילוֹתֶיךָ אֲשִׁיחָה** so that all will see how You guide the history of the world with justice.

(יד) אֱלֹקִים בְּקֹדֶשׁ דִּרְכֶךָ

מִי אֵל גָּדוֹל בְּאֱלֹקִים:

The thought that comes to mind when I contemplate your deeds **O G-d, Your way is based on** concepts of **holiness** — **אֱלֹקִים בְּקֹדֶשׁ וְרִנָּה**, to achieve the spiritual and physical welfare of your creatures and to do justice for all. To implement Your goals You draw upon unlimited power. **What power is as great as G-d — מִי אֵל גָּדוֹל בְּאֱלֹקִים ?** But no expression of Your power is ever an end unto itself. All of Your way is towards the absolute good.

(טו) אַתָּה הָאֵל עֹשֶׂה פֶלֶא

הוֹדַעְתָּ בְּעַמִּים עֲזָרָה:

You are not simply one power among many; You are the one sole true and absolute Power. **You are the one G-d — אַתָּה הָאֵל**. And to demonstrate this truth **You do wonders — עֹשֶׂה פֶלֶא** for the world to see. You demonstrate that Your Kingdom is not just in the heavens, but here on earth. Through Your spectacular miracles **You make known Your invincible might among the peoples — הוֹדַעְתָּ בְּעַמִּים עֲזָרָה**. Thus, they learn to see You as the one sole unfettered and absolute Power, upon Whose will the existence of all things depends. The miraculous exodus from

PART 5. LESSON OF THE PAST

(טז) גָּאֲלַתָּ בְּזְרוּעַ עֲמֹךְ

בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּסֶף סֵלָה:

With Your powerful strength [Your outstretched arm] **You redeemed Your nation — גָּאֲלַתָּ בְּזְרוּעַ עֲמֹךְ, the sons of Yaakov and Yosef, Selah — בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּסֶף סֵלָה**. Yaakov fathered a nation of 12 tribes and by giving them sustenance in Mitzrayim Yosef projected their continuity into future generations. And by redeeming them from Mitzrayim through miracles that overrode the laws of nature, You provided all of mankind with a testimony to the Creation of the world.

(יז) רָאוּךְ מֵיַם אֱלֹקִים

רָאוּךְ מֵיַם יַחֲלִיּוּ אֶף יִרְגְּזוּ תְהוֹמוֹת:

When Your fierce judgement against the *resha'im* was revealed to the world in Mitzrayim, it was as though **the waters** of the Sea of Reeds **saw You, O G-d — רָאוּךְ מֵיַם יַחֲלִיּוּ** of being in the presence of such power. **Even the depths trembled — אֶף יִרְגְּזוּ**

תהמות and were split apart.

(יח) זָרְמוּ מֵיִם עֲבוֹת
קוֹל נִתְּנוּ שְׁחָקִים
אֶף חֲצָצִידָה יִתְּהַלְכוּ:

The clouds streamed water – זָרְמוּ מֵיִם עֲבוֹת. Heavy rains poured down on the warriors of Mitzrayim inundating them as they attempted to cross the sea. **The heavens sounded forth** with frightening thunder – **קוֹל נִתְּנוּ שְׁחָקִים, even Your arrows** of lightning **went forth** – אֶף חֲצָצִידָה יִתְּהַלְכוּ.

(יט) קוֹל רַעְמָה בְּגִלְגֹּל
הָאִירוּ בְּרָקִים תִּבֵּל
רָגְזָה וַתִּרְעַשׂ הָאָרֶץ:

The rumble of Your thunder was in the whirling wind – קוֹל רַעְמָה בְּגִלְגֹּל. **Lightning** flashed and **lit up the world** – הָאִירוּ בְּרָקִים תִּבֵּל, **the earth trembled and roared** – רָגְזָה וַתִּרְעַשׂ הָאָרֶץ, shaken to its very foundations.

(כ) בַּיָּם דִּרְכָּךְ וּשְׁבִילְךָ בְּמֵיִם רַבִּים
וְעִקְבוֹתֶיךָ לֹא נִדְעוּ:

Your way was through the sea – בַּיָּם דִּרְכָּךְ, **and Your path went through the mighty waters** – וּשְׁבִילְךָ בְּמֵיִם רַבִּים. **But** You accomplished what You set out to do, **Your footsteps could not be discovered** – וְעִקְבוֹתֶיךָ לֹא נִדְעוּ **because** the sea returned immediately to cover the track and all of nature reverted to its ordinary routine, without showing the least trace of the agitation and upheaval it had just experienced. This was a lesson to mankind that everything that happens in the world is Hashem's doing, even though there is no fingerprint or track.

(כא) נָחִיתָ כְּצֹאן עֹמֵד
בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן:

You led Your nation like a flock [of sheep] – נָחִיתָ כְּצֹאן עֹמֵד **by the hand of Moshe and Aharon** – בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן. Just as the shepherd provides for all the needs of his flock so did Hashem provide for His nation, even giving them the

leaders appropriate to the mission. Surely, Hashem will again provide leaders since Yisrael is no less deserving of redemption than the nation that came out of Mitzrayim.

Sources

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

א - מצודות, המאירי, אבן יחייא	יב - המאירי, נר לרגלי
ב - רד"ק	יג - רש"י, מצודות, אבן יחייא, נר לרגלי
ג - רש"י, רד"ק, בן רמוך, נר לרגלי, מאיר טוב	יד - רש"י, לרגלי
ד - נר לרגל,	טו - רד"ק, מלבי"ם, המאירי, רש"י
ה - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, מצודות, ספורנו, רש"י	טז - רד"ק, מצודות, אבן יחייא
ו - רש"י	יז - רד"ק
ז - רש"י, מלבי"ם	יח - אבן עזרא, מצודות, בן-רמוך,
ח - רד"ק, מלבי"ם	יט - מצודות
ט - רש"י, רד"ק, מלבי"ם	כ - רש"י, אבן עזרא, מלבי"ם
י - רש"י, מלבי"ם	כא - רד"ק, המאירי,
יא - רש"י, מלבי"ם, רש"י, נר לרגלי	

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