

Mizmor 088

Survival

Key Concepts

This mizmor expresses the mood of the Jewish nation in a long and bitter exile. The pain of exile is so onerous that the singer visualizes it in terms of a desperately ill person. The suffering invalid knows that he is close to death but he has not given up the hope of somehow surviving his ordeal. He anxiously pleads with Hashem to spare his life.

Despite the bleak context of this mizmor, it is described as a song rather than a lamentation. Ultimately, its message is uplifting. No matter how bad a person's situation may appear to be, he should never abandon his trust in Hashem and his prayers for a *yeshuah* (deliverance).

Exploring the Mizmor

PART 1. INTRODUCTION. The introductory verse describes the authorship of the mizmor and offers a note on how it is to be performed in public. The musical instrument to accompany the singing of the mizmor is named "*machalas*," a term which means "illness," suggesting the melancholy theme of the mizmor.

(א) שִׁיר מִזְמוֹר לְבָנֵי קֹרַח לְמִנְצַחַח עַל מַחֲלַת לְעֵנוֹת מִשְׁכִּיל לְהִימֹן הָאֶזְרָחִי:

(1) [This] mizmor is a song by the sons of Korach for the musician on the [instrument named] "machalas". [It involves] raising the voice in a song of enlightenment, [a role assigned] to Heiman the Ezrachi.

PART 2. PLEA TO BE HEARD. The singer begs Hashem to accept his song as a heartfelt prayer for *yeshuah*.

(ב) ה' אֱלֹהֵי יְשׁוּעָתִי יוֹם צָעַקְתִּי בַלַּיְלָה נִגְדָדְךָ: (ג) תְּבוֹא לִפְנֵיךָ תִפְלְתִי הִטָּה אָזְנֶךָ לְרִנָּתִי:

(2) Hashem, G-d of my yeshuah, I have cried out [in anguish] by day, but by night I am in Your presence [with meditation and tefillah.] (3) Let my tefillah reach You. Incline Your ear to my song of supplication.

PART 3. LAMENTATION. The singer laments the tragic state of the Jewish nation, which he compares to that of a deathly ill person. The erstwhile friends of the invalid treat him as though he was already dead. He is in great pain gets no comfort from anyone, so he has begun to think of death as a release from the agonies of life.

(ד) כִּי שָׁבַעָה בְּרַעוֹת נַפְשִׁי וַחַיִּי לְשֹׂאוֹל הִגִּיעוּ: (ה) נַחֲשֶׁבְתִי עִם יוֹרְדֵי בּוֹר הַיִּיטִי
 כְּגִבֹר אִין אֵיל: (ו) בְּמֵתִים חִפְּשִׁי כְּמוֹ חֲלָלִים שִׁכְבִּי קֶבֶר אֲשֶׁר לֹא זָכַרְתָּם עוֹד
 וְהִמָּה מִיָּדְךָ נִגְזְרוּ: (ז) שִׁתַּנִּי בְּבוֹר תַּחְתִּיּוֹת בְּמַחֲשָׁפִים בְּמַצְלוֹת: (ח) עָלִי סִמְכָה
 חֲמָתְךָ וְכָל מִשְׁבְּרֶיךָ עֲנִיתָ סֵלָה: (ט) הִרְחַקְתָּ מִיָּדְעִי מִמֶּנִּי שִׁתַּנִּי תוֹעֵבוֹת לְמוֹ כֹּלֹא
 וְלֹא אֲצֵא:

(4) For my soul has had its fill of misfortunes. My life draws near to the grave. (5). I am reckoned among those who go down to the grave. I have become like a man without strength (6) I am among the dead who are free [of further suffering], like the corpses lying in the grave, whom You have not yet chosen to remembered for life, corpses that remain cut off from [further decrees of] Your hand. (7) You have put me into the deepest pit, into utter darkness, into watery depths. (8) Your wrath bears down upon me. You afflict me with all Your crashing waves. Selah. (9) You have set my friends to be distant from me. You made me disgusting to them. I am held in isolation and cannot get out.

PART 4. TEFILLAH. The singer humbly begs Hashem to save him from the oblivion of death. He suggests that he still has so much to contribute to the honor of Hashem in this world while he is alive. Once he enters the realm of death, any useful role that he might offer will cease to exist.

(י) עֵינַי דָּאֲבָה מִנִּי עֲנִי קְרָאתֶיךָ ה' בְּכָל יוֹם שִׁטְחֹתִי אֶלֶיךָ כִּפְּי: (יא) הֲלִמְתִּים
 תַּעֲשֶׂה פֹלֵא אִם רַפְּאִים יִקוּמוּ יוֹדוּךָ סֵלָה: (יב) הִיִּסְפֵּר בְּקֶבֶר חֲסִדְךָ אֲמוֹנָתְךָ
 בְּאֲבָדוֹן: (יג) הִינֹדַע בְּחֹשֶׁךְ פִּלְאָה וְצִדְקָתְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ נְשִׁיָּה:

(10) My eyes are saddened by suffering, yet I call to You, Hashem, every day. I stretch out my hands to You in prayer. (11) [It will soon be too late for me.] Will You work wonders for the dead? Will it be the lifeless who arise to praise You? Selah (12) Is Your kindness declared in the grave? Is Your eternal truth declared in the place of death? (13) Are Your wonders made known in the place of darkness? Is Your generosity spoken of in the land of

oblivion?

PART 5. FINAL PLEA. In a desperate final plea, the singer declares that despite all his suffering he will not weaken his devotion to Hashem. The mizmor is unusual in that it ends on a melancholy note, with the singer still immersed in a sea of troubles. But he has made his commitment. He still cannot understand why this is happening to him. But no matter what, he is determined to remain loyal to his Creator.

(יד) וְאֲנִי אֶלֶיךָ ה' שֹׁנְעֵתִי וּבִבְקָר תִּפְלָתִי תִקְדָּמָה: (טו) לָמָּה ה' תִּזְנַח נַפְשִׁי תִסְתֵּיר פְּנֵיךָ מִמֶּנִּי: (טז) עָנִי אֲנִי וְגֹועַ מִנְעַר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֲמִידָּה אֶפְוֶנָה: (יז) עָלַי עָבְרוּ חֲרוֹנֶיךָ בְּעוֹתֶיךָ צִמְתוּתֶנִּי: (יח) סִבּוּנֵי כַמִּים כָּל הַיּוֹם הִקִּיפוּ עָלַי יָחַד: (יט) הִרְחַקְתָּ מִמֶּנִּי אֶהָב וְרַע מִיָּדַעִי מִחֶשֶׁךְ:

(14) But as for me, [while I still live] I cry out to You, Hashem. Each morning my prayer comes forward to greet You, [saying:] (15) "Why, Hashem, do You reject me? [Why do] You conceal Your face from me? (16) I have been impoverished and close to death [for so long,] since youth. Yet I have borne Your fearful [judgment in constant] dread. (17) Your rages have swept over me; Your terrors have cut me down. (18) They surround me like water all day long; they confine me on every side (19) You have distanced friend and companion from me. You have put my acquaintances [away] as if concealed in darkness.

Learning the Mizmor

PART 1. INTRODUCTION.

(א) שִׁיר מִזְמוֹר לְבְנֵי קֹרַח

This **mizmor** in the form of a **song** — שִׁיר מִזְמוֹר — was originally composed **by the sons of Korach** — לְבְנֵי קֹרַח — through the power of *nevuah* (prophecy) and subsequently incorporated by David into the Book of Tehillim.

לְמַנְצַח עַל מַחֲלָת
לְעִנּוֹת מִשְׁכִּיל לְהִימָן הָאֶזְרָחִי:

The *mizmor* is intended **for the musician** — לְמַנְצַח, who will perform it **on** the musical instrument called ***machalas*** — עַל מַחֲלָת. It involves **raising** the **voice** —

לְעֹנֹת in a **song of enlightenment** — מְשֻׁכֵּל, performed by **Heiman the Ezrachi** — לְהִימָן הָאֶזְרָחִי, who was one of the Leviim.

PART 2. PLEA TO BE HEARD.

(ב) ה' אֱלֹהֵי יְשׁוּעָתִי

Hashem, G-d — ה' אֱלֹהֵי You are my Judge, but Your Name *Hashem* is Mercy and You have also always sought my welfare, so that You alone have been the Source of my *yeshuah* — ה' אֱלֹהֵי יְשׁוּעָתִי.

יוֹם צָעֲקוֹתַי בַּלַּיְלָה נִגְדָּדְךָ:

I have cried out in wordless anguish **by day** — יוֹם צָעֲקוֹתַי, but **by night** I collect my thoughts in *tefillah* and find solace **in Your presence** — בַּלַּיְלָה נִגְדָּדְךָ.

(ג) תָּבוֹא לִפְנֵיךָ תְּפִלָּתִי

הַטָּה אֲזַנְךָ לְרִנָּתִי:

Now in the night reopen the gates of prayer and **let my *tefillah* reach You** — תָּבוֹא לִפְנֵיךָ תְּפִלָּתִי. But also by day, **incline Your ear** and give consideration to my heartfelt **song of supplication** — הַטָּה אֲזַנְךָ לְרִנָּתִי, the outpouring of my innermost spirit.

PART 3. LAMENTATION.

(ד) כִּי שָׁבַעַה בְּרָעוֹת נַפְשִׁי

וְחַיִּי לְשֵׂאוֹל הִגִּיעוּ:

For my soul has had its fill of misfortunes — כִּי שָׁבַעַה בְּרָעוֹת נַפְשִׁי. It cannot absorb any additional sufferings in this long Galus and so there is no reason to continue them. **My life draws near to the grave** — וְחַיִּי לְשֵׂאוֹל הִגִּיעוּ and I am already like a dead man. Surely, I will not survive if these misfortunes continue.

(ה) נְחַשְׁבֹּתִי עִם יוֹרְדֵי בּוֹר

הַיִּיתִי כְּגֹבֵר אֵין אֵיל:

In the darkness of this Galus, I am unable to save myself from those who want to harm me. I feel as though I cannot even move my limbs and so I am like a dead man, ready to be buried. **I am reckoned among those who** are destined to **go**

down to the grave — נחֲשַׁבְתִּי עִם יוֹרְדֵי בּוֹר . This is because **I have become like a man without any strength** — הֵייתִי כְגֹבֵר אֵין אֵיִל .

(ו) בַּמֵּתִים חֲפָשִׁי כְּמוֹ חֲלָלִים שֹׁכְבֵי קֶבֶר
אֲשֶׁר לֹא זָכַרְתָּם עוֹד
וְהִמָּה מִיַּדְךָ נִגְזְרוּ:

I feel like **I am among the dead who are free** — בַּמֵּתִים חֲפָשִׁי from the troubles of this world. In this endless Galus, I am **like one of the corpses lying in the grave** — אֲשֶׁר לֹא זָכַרְתָּם עוֹד and summoned to live again, **whose bodies remain cut off from further harsh decrees of Your hand** — וְהִמָּה מִיַּדְךָ נִגְזְרוּ. But I am not dead at all. My very troubles are proof that I am still among the living.

(ז) שִׁתַּנִּי בְּבוֹר תַּחְתִּיּוֹת
בְּמַחְשָׁכִים בְּמַצְלוֹת:

You have put me into a Galus of many deaths, and it is like **the deepest pit** — שִׁתַּנִּי בְּבוֹר תַּחְתִּיּוֹת. You have put me **into utter darkness** — בְּמַחְשָׁכִים, **into watery depths** — בְּמַצְלוֹת, from which there is no escape. As a nation, I am shut out from the sunlight under which the welfare of nations normally blossoms and prospers.

(ח) עָלֵי סִמְכָה חֲמַתְךָ
וְכֹל מִשְׁבָּרֶיךָ עֲנִיתָ סֵלָה:

Your wrath bears down upon me — עָלֵי סִמְכָה חֲמַתְךָ, more than other nations because You expect more of me. **You afflict me with all Your crashing waves** of disasters that go on and on, incessantly and without pause, **Selah** — וְכֹל מִשְׁבָּרֶיךָ עֲנִיתָ סֵלָה.

(ט) הִרְחַקְתָּ מִיַּדְעֵי מִמֶּנִּי
שִׁתַּנִּי תוֹעֵבוֹת לְמוֹ
כִּלְאֵי וְלֹא אֵצְאָ:

I can find no sympathy among the people and nations who were friendly to me in

the past. **You have distanced my friends** and allies **from me** — הַרְחַקְתָּ מִיָּדַי because people don't want to be associated with failure or tragedy. **You made me disgusting to them** — שִׁתַּנִּי תוֹעֵבוֹת לָמוֹ; **I am held in isolation** like a leper or a corpse **and cannot get out** — כִּלְאָ וְלֹא אֵצֵא. They don't come to me and I am unable to go to them.

PART 4. TEFILLAH.

(י) עֵינַי דָּאֲבָה מְנִי עֲנִי
קְרֵאתִיךָ ה' בְּכָל יוֹם
שִׁטְחֹתִי אֵלֶיךָ כִּפִּי:

My eyes are saddened by suffering — עֵינַי דָּאֲבָה מְנִי עֲנִי and tragedies. Yet **I call to You, Hashem, every day** — קְרֵאתִיךָ ה' בְּכָל יוֹם. **I stretch out my hands to You** in prayer — שִׁטְחֹתִי אֵלֶיךָ כִּפִּי.

(יא) הַלְמִתִּים תַּעֲשֶׂה פְּלֵא
אִם רְפָאִים יִקוּמוּ יוֹדוּךָ סֵלָה:

Save me before I succumb to my suffering. **Will You work wonders for us** only after we are **the dead** — הַלְמִתִּים תַּעֲשֶׂה פְּלֵא? **Will it be the lifeless who arise to praise You? Selah** — אִם רְפָאִים יִקוּמוּ יוֹדוּךָ סֵלָה.

(יב) הִיִּסְפֹּר בְּקִבְרֵ חֲסִדֶיךָ
אֲמוֹנֹתֶיךָ בְּאֲבָדוֹן:

If I die, I will be unable to appreciate Your wonders and sing Your praise. **Is Your kindness declared in the grave** — הִיִּסְפֹּר בְּקִבְרֵ חֲסִדֶיךָ? **Is Your eternal truth declared in the place of death** — אֲמוֹנֹתֶיךָ בְּאֲבָדוֹן?

(יג) הִיָּדַע בְּחֹשֶׁךְ פְּלֵא
וְצִדְקֹתֶיךָ בְּאֶרֶץ נִשְׁיָה:

Are Your wonders made known in the place of darkness — הִיָּדַע בְּחֹשֶׁךְ? **Is Your generosity and compassion spoken of in the land of oblivion** — וְצִדְקֹתֶיךָ בְּאֶרֶץ נִשְׁיָה? where the dead lie forgotten?

PART 5. FINAL PLEA.

(יד) וְאָנִי אֵלֶיךָ ה' שׁוֹעֵתִי
וּבִבְקָר תִּפְלְתִי תִקְדָּמָךְ:

But as for me, while I still live **I cry out to You, Hashem** — וְאָנִי אֵלֶיךָ ה' שׁוֹעֵתִי. In my eagerness to be close to You, **each morning** before I do anything else, **my prayer comes forward to** greet only **You** — וּבִבְקָר תִּפְלְתִי תִקְדָּמָךְ for only You can help me. And then it will be in the light of morning, when the redemption comes, that Your compassion will become known.

(טו) לָמָּה ה' תִּזְנַח נַפְשִׁי
תִּסְתִּיר פָּנֶיךָ מִמֶּנִּי:

This is what I cry. "**Why, Hashem, do You reject me** — לָמָּה ה' תִּזְנַח נַפְשִׁי? Why do **You conceal Your face from me** — תִּסְתִּיר פָּנֶיךָ מִמֶּנִּי and why don't You respond to my heartfelt *tefillah*? Surely, the afflictions suffered by my body, can atone for the errors of my soul!"

(טז) עָנִי אָנִי וְגִוַע מִנְעָר
נִשְׁאַתִּי אִמְיָךְ אָפוּנָה:

I have been impoverished and close to death for so long, **since youth** — עָנִי. **Yet** despite my weakness, **I have borne Your fearful judgment in** constant **dread** of impending disaster — נִשְׁאַתִּי אִמְיָךְ אָפוּנָה.

(יז) עָלַי עָבְרוּ חֲרוֹנֶיךָ
בְּעוֹתֶיךָ צָמְתוּתֵנִי:

Your rages have swept over me — עָלַי עָבְרוּ חֲרוֹנֶיךָ; **Your terrors have cut me down** — בְּעוֹתֶיךָ צָמְתוּתֵנִי.

(יח) סִבּוּנִי כְּמִים כָּל הַיּוֹם
הַקִּיפוּ עָלַי יַחַד:

They surround me as though I were standing in **water throughout the day** — הַקִּיפוּ עָלַי יַחַד. **There** has been no relief from disasters, one following the other.

(יט) הִרְחַקְתָּ מִמֶּנִּי אֶהָב וְרֵעַ
מִיַּדְעֵי מַחְשָׁדָּי:

You have distanced friend and companion from me — אֶהָב וְרֵעַ
and there has be no one to comfort me and commiserate with me. **You have put**
my acquaintances completely out of sight, as if concealed **in darkness** —
מִיַּדְעֵי
מַחְשָׁדָּי.

Sources

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

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

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