

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

TEHILLIM: THE BOOK OF PSALMS

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Dedicated by Shari and Jay Gold and Family in memory of Rabbi Bennett Gold (Rav Dov ben Dovid Meir) whose Yahrtzeit is gimmel Sivan.

MIZMOR 122:
"Rejoice O Jerusalem, Rejoice"

"A song of Ascents. Of David.

I rejoiced when they said to me,

'We are going to the house of the Lord.'

Our feet stood inside your gates, O Jerusalem,

Jerusalem built up, a city knit together,

To which tribes would make pilgrimage, the tribes of the Lord, As was enjoined upon Israel -
to praise the name of the Lord.

There the thrones of judgment stood,

Thrones of the house of David.

Pray for the well-being of Jerusalem;

May those who love you be at peace.

For the sake of my brothers and friends,

I pray for your well-being.

For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,

I seek your good."

Perhaps it is appropriate to focus on this famous psalm in commemoration of Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem day). To give a little introduction: Over three thousand years ago King David conquered the land of the Yevusim - Jerusalem, and prepared the way for his son to build the House of God on its mountain. With the destruction of the Second Temple and the exile, the Israelites lost sovereignty over Jerusalem until 1967. At the close of the Six-Day War, the radio sent a message, which reverberated throughout the world. "Har ha-bayit be-yadenu" (the Temple Mount is in our hands). A moment of silence, and then the radio-anchor recited psalm 122 - "I rejoiced when they said to me, We are going to the house of the Lord."

The significance of the recitation is great in that it teaches us that from even the most secular perspective, the city of Jerusalem is tied up to the ancient biblical tradition. Jerusalem, historically, has played a central role in the dream for unification for all Jews from all over the world. Let's break down the psalm into its three components.

I have discussed in previous lectures the title "Shir Hama'alot," but I will note one interpretation of this phrase. "Ma'alot" can be defined as rising to greater heights, and it might refer to a poetic style employed by the psalmist, which seeks to build the stanzas atop one another. The final words act as the ultimate 'ma'ala' - height where the idea of the psalm comes to a climax.

Verses 1-2 inaugurate the psalm with a call of joy and freedom at the notion of commencing the journey to the House of God. This idea is illuminated when we read of the special connection King David had with Jerusalem, and with the House of God. In Samuel II chapter 6, we read of the exultation with which David returned the Ark of God to Jerusalem: "... David went and brought up the Ark of God ... to the City of David, amid rejoicing. When the bearers of the Ark of the Lord had moved forward six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. David whirled with all his might before the Lord ..." (6:12-14).

The emphasis on the House of God lies in his plea to God to build the Beit Hamikdash. In chapter 7 we read:

When the king was settled in his palace and the Lord had granted him safety from all the enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan: "Here I am dwelling in a house of cedar, while the Ark of the Lord abides in a tent!" Nathan said to the King, "Go and do whatever you have in mind, for the Lord is with you." (7:1-3)

It is only afterwards that Nathan receives a prophecy that David will not build the House of the Lord, but rather his son will do it. Interestingly, the prophecy does not relate in Samuel the reason for God not choosing David for this feat. In Chronicles I 17: God does offer an explanation: "For you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight" (22:7).

One can imagine the tension King David must have felt at not having been able to build the House of the Lord, because he fought the battles of the Lord. Yet he accepts his position with humility, praising God for all he has received. In a truly remarkable display of faith in God, David concludes his speech with these words: "And now, O Lord God, You are

God and Your words will surely come true, and You have made this gracious promise to Your servant. Be pleased, therefore, to bless Your servant's house that it abide before You forever, for You, O Lord God, have spoken" (7:28-29).

The call of joy, and the description of the initial steps into the gates of Jerusalem, represent the first level of the pyramid of praise embodied in the psalm. From here, we turn to the nature of the city, its characteristics and foci.

The second segment of the psalm (4-5) displays Jerusalem as the meeting place for all of Israel - to come and praise God. In addition to the important social and religious implications, it acts as the national juridical center for Israel: "... to which tribes would make pilgrimage, the tribes of the Lord ... to praise the name of the Lord. There the thrones of judgment stood, thrones of the house of David."

It is important to note that the religious and national significance relate to the entire people, with the implicit assumption that all Israelites will make the journey to Jerusalem at certain times to bind the nation together socially and religiously.

The final 'ma'ala' relates not to the joy of its being built, nor to the function it holds on the specific levels, but to the essence of the city and what it ultimately stands for: "Sha'alu shelom Yerushalayim, yishlayu ohavayikh." (Pray/ask for the peace of Jerusalem; [Jerusalem] pray for the peace of Your loved ones.) A reciprocal relationship of peace exists between Jerusalem and its people. The author poetically turns to Jerusalem to respond in kind to the peace offered by the Israelites as they return to their land throughout Israel.

The last two verses serve to summarize the point of the psalm as a whole. The symmetry of -

1) for the sake of my brothers and friends,

2) for the sake of the house of the Lord our God -

reflects the intrinsic connection the House of the Lord has with the 'brothers and friends,' the nation of Israel, who serves God through that House.

The two together, the 'beit Hashem' and the 'achai ve-rei'ai,' speak one word, a word of peace.