

Dedicated by:

Yocheved & Nathan Lindenbaum & family

In memory of our zaydie,

- Eliyahu ben Chaim Shlomo v'Mindel Grunberger -
Murdered by the Nazis during the "Death March"
from Aushwitz, on 3 Iyar, 1945

THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

for YOM HA-ATZMA'UT - TEHILLIM PEREK 107

At 11am on Yom ha-Zikaron - Israel's Memorial Day, the county stands still to the shrill of a siren, and sixty endless seconds of national silence. But less than ten hours later, Israel begins its joyous celebration of Yom ha-Atzma'ut [Independence Day]. Even though this proximity doesn't appear to do justice to either day, it is precisely this proximity that gives extra meaning to both days. Our awareness that the dedication of those who fell enabled our independence gives us the strength to cope with the sorrow of Yom ha-Zikaron, while our awareness of that terrible price reminds us of our responsibility to channel that independence in the proper direction.

Our custom to recite Tehillim 107 before Maariv on Yom Atzmaut reflects this acute contrast between sorrow and joy during a time of redemption. In the following shiur, we undertake a careful study of Tehillim 107 in the hope that it will shed light on how and why we should thank God both at this time of year and during this era of Jewish History.

INTRODUCTION

To help appreciate certain chapters in Tehillim, there are three key questions to consider - that can help the student decode its message.

- 1) What's the 'header'
- 2) What's the 'structure'
- 3) What's the point

If you have ample time, I recommend that you first study Tehillim 107, and try this yourself. While doing so, also pay attention to some key phrases that repeat themselves - as they can help you identify its special structure.

If you prefer to jump right to the conclusions, then you can use the formatted version of this chapter (attached in pdf format) that highlights both its header and overall structure.

A quick analysis of Tehillim 107 can show how it can easily be divided into four distinct sections:

- 1) 1-3: the opening statement - A call to praise God
- 2) 4-32: the main section - four examples of redemption
- 3) 33-41: an additional section - God's providence
- 4) 42-43: conclusion - man's recognition of God's Providence

In our shiur, we will first explain this division; afterwards we will discuss its significance.

THE HEADER - A CALL FOR PRAISE (107:1-3)

Let's begin by reviewing the first three psukim (17:1-3), noting how they actually form one complete sentence:

- [1] "Praise Hashem, for He is good, His kindness is eternal;
- [2] Let this [praise] be recited by those whom God has redeemed from all adversity,
- [3] and by those whom He gathered from the lands, from east, west, north, and from the sea."

This opening statement can be understood as a '**command**' - sung by the Levi'im in the Bet ha-Mikdash - calling out to those who have gathered at the Bet Mikdash, proclaiming the requirement to praise God for His salvation.

The statement 'sets the stage' for the psukim that follow, for beginning in verse four, we find four examples of individuals redeemed by God from danger - and hence, based on this 'header' - are required to praise Him.

THE MAIN SECTION (107:4-32)

As you study the next set of psukim (107:4-32), you will immediately notice how several psukim appear to be rather repetitious. However, notice how this intentional repetition of the phrases: "va'yizaaku..." & "yodu..." - creates a very clear pattern that delimits four distinct 'sub-sections'.

To identify each sub-section, simply note the repetition of each of these two key phrases.

Let's begin with the recurring phrase of praise: "yodu la-Hashem chasdo, ve-nifle'otav li-bnei Adam" [They praise the Lord for His kindness...] which is not only repeated four times (see 107:8, 15, 21, & 31), but also thematically corresponds to the opening command of the 'header' - i.e. the obligation to praise God for His salvation.

Note however, how each of these four 'calls for praise' is preceded by another recurring phrase: "va'yizaaku el Hashem b'tzar la'hem" [and they cried out to God in their duress] (see 107:6,13,19 & 28) - preceded by a description of a specific case of distress. As you review the perek, note how four situations are introduced:

- 1) A person lost in a desert without food & water (see 4-5).
- 2) A prisoner, suffering in jail (see 107:10-12).
- 3) A person who became deathly ill (see 107:17-18).
- 4) Sailors lost at sea in a terrible storm (see 107:23-27).

Each case of distress is followed by a similar cry to God for assistance: "ve-yitz'aku el Hashem be-tza'ar lahem..." (see again 107:6, 13, 19, and 28) - followed by a description of how God had brought salvation to each person in duress:

- 1) He who was lost in a desert finds civilization (107:7).
- 2) The prisoner was released (see 107:14).
- 3) The deathly ill recovered (see 107:20).
- 4) The storm stopped, the ship arrives at port (107:29-30).

Afterward, each story of salvation is followed by a praise of God, recognizing His hand in that redemption.

Note again how each of these praises begins with the identical phrase of "yodu la-Hashem...", but is then followed by an additional pasuk, describing a special aspect of that praise (see 107:9, 16, 22, & 32).

BENCHING 'GOMEL'

Review these four cases once again (as summarized below) and they'll probably sound familiar, as these are the four cases when, according to halacha, a person is required to "bench gomel":

- I. One who crossed a desert (4-5).
- II. One who was released from prison (10-12).
- III. One who fell deathly ill and recovered (17-18).
- IV. One who returned from travel at sea (23-27).

[See Mesechet Brachot 54b, and Shulchan Aruch/ Orach Chaim 219. It should also be noted that during the time of the Temple, these four cases required that a person bring a 'korban toda' - a sacrifice of thanksgiving (see 107:22). Today, we "bench gomel" instead of bringing a korban, usually after an 'aliya' to the Torah.]

THE PATTERN

To summarize our study thus far, let's review this four-stage pattern that repeats itself four times in this section:

- 1) "**tzara**" - a situation of distress;
- 2) "**tza'aka**" - crying out to God for assistance;
[the phrase: "ve-yitz'aku el Hashem be-tza'ar lahem, mi-metzukatam yoshiyem"]
- 3) "**yeshu'a**" - salvation;
- 4) "**hodaya**" - thanks, i.e. praise to God.
[the phrase: "yodu la-Hashem chasdo, ve-nifle'otav li-vnei adam" followed by a more specific pasuk of hodaya]

In this manner, the main section (107:4-32) provides four examples for the opening statement (107:1-3) of this psalm. The repetition of these key phrases serves as the key to identifying this internal structure of the psalm, as well as its theme.

From this section alone, we can learn a very important lesson. When a person is in distress (1), he is expected to pray to God for assistance (2). He should also relate to the possibility that his distress is in punishment of his wayward behavior (see psukim 11, 17, & 20). Upon his deliverance (3), he is expected to thank Hashem and tell the story of his salvation in public (4).

[See 107:22 - "... and they shall bring thanksgiving offerings, and tell His deeds in joy".]

Let's see now how the perek continues, and how its theme becomes more complex.

THE ADDITIONAL SECTION (107:33-41)

Even though we would expect this pattern to continue until the end of the perek, it doesn't. Instead, 107:33-41 forms an independent section that no longer follows this 'cycle' (nor does it describe situations of individual distress and redemption).

Review this 'additional' section, noting how it describes God's overall "hashgacha" [providence] over land and nature. For example, as a consequence of the deeds of the nation, God can take a fruitful land and cause it to become a desert (see 107:33-34). He can also do exactly the opposite, taking a swamp-land and make it prosper (see 107:35).

The psalm also describes how society can prosper and then fail, the failure -in punishment of their deeds (see 107:36-39). Similarly, God will uplift the afflicted by this society and return them to the prosperity that they deserve (107:40-41).

Now we must explain what this additional section adds to the message of the main section.

HASHGACHA IN BOTH REALMS

Even though both sections of this psalm discuss man's recognition of God's "hashgacha", each deals with a different realm. The main section deals with the cases that relate to individuals, while the additional section relates to communal life and God's providence over the land and His nation.

God expects man to see God not only in relation to the events of his own life, but also to find His hand in historical events and the rise and fall of societies. As man himself exists in both realms, he must understand that his relationship with God manifests itself in both.

In the manner, the opening section (107:1-3) serves as an introduction to both sections, as it points to a historical aspect of our national existence as well.

"Hodu la-Hashem ki tov, ki le'olam chasdo. Yomru ge'ulei Hashem asher ga'alam mi-yad tzar, u-me'artzot kibbetzum mi-mizrach u-ma'arav, mi-tzafon, u-miyam."

Jews in distress who were saved and gathered together from **all four corners of the earth** are required to praise Hashem (i.e. to say Hallel) for their deliverance. Note that even the four examples of individual redemption reflect typical cases of the return of exiles to their land (traveling deserts and seas, battling illness, etc.)

[Btw, note the amazing parallels between these four cases and the stories of the thousands of refugees who fled to Israel before and after the Holocaust!]

THE CLOSING STATEMENT (107:42-43)

The final two psukim of this perek emphasize what becomes incumbent upon us to recognize:

"Let the upright see this and rejoice, as the mouth of the wrongdoers is stopped.

Let the wise man take note of these things;
and he will recognize God's kindness" (107:42-43).

In this closing pasuk: "mi chacham ve-yishmor eileh, ve-yitbonu chasdei Hashem", we find the primary lesson of the entire perek. One who is wise - he will understand this concept of hashgacha - Divine Providence, and that will enable him to find and then appreciate the Hand of God in the history of Mankind.

YOM HA-ATZMA'UT

From the opening psukim alone, it becomes clear why this perek was chosen to be recited on Yom ha-Atzma'ut. During the first half of the twentieth century, especially during the Holocaust, Am Yisrael was in terrible distress. The State of Israel became the refuge for tens of thousands of Jews who had nowhere else to turn. Thousands of Jews, unwanted in their own countries, came to the land of Israel from all directions, by land and by sea. There were numerous cases of individual and group salvation, and as these people returned to the land of their ancestors, the land itself 'came back to life'.

A land that lay desolate for thousands of years became fruitful and prosperous once again. One who is 'wise' can perceive that God may be giving a message to His people (through these events) - the time has come to return to their land.

TEHILLIM 107 and SEFER SHOFTIM

As you may have noticed already, the 'cycle' that we discerned in the main section is very similar to the 'cycle' of Am Yisrael's history as described in Sefer Shoftim. In fact, the overall structure of Tehillim 107 is very similar to the overall structure of Sefer Shoftim.

In our study of Sefer Shoftim, we identified the following sections:

CHAPTERS TOPIC

1-2	Introduction to the 'cycle'
3-16	The 'cycle' itself (examples)
17-22	An additional section (making an educational point)

However, the cycle in Sefer Shoftim was slightly (but significantly) different. There we found the repetition of the following four stages:

- 1) tzaara - Bnei Yisrael leave God, and hence are punished
- 2) tzaaka - They cry out to God for salvation
- 3) yeshu'a - God sends redemption via the SHOFET
- 4) **sheket** - National stability and quiet are restored;
but then the cycle starts over again.

Note how the cycle in Tehillim 107 (described above) is almost identical, except for the final stage:

- A) tzaara - a situation of distress (caused by sin)
- B) tzaaka - crying out to God for assistance
"v'yitzaku el Hashem b'tzr la'hem, m'mtzukatam yoshi'aym"
- C) yeshuah - salvation
- D) **hodaya** - thanksgiving, i.e. praise to God
"yodu l'hashem chasdo, v'niflo'tav l'vnei adam"

In contrast to Sefer Shoftim where the final stage was "sheket", Tehillim 107 calls for a more 'active' recognition by Am Yisrael of God's hand in our redemption. This 'passive' reaction in Sefer Shoftim caused the cycle to continue to repeat itself. Had Bnei Yisrael been more 'active' and praised God properly for their redemption during the time of the Shoftim, that time period may have been more successful.

[Note that in Sefer Shoftim there was one example of "hodaya", i.e. "shirat devorah" (and hence its emphasis).

Note as well how the shofet who followed Devorah was Gideon, who had the potential to become king - because of the accomplishments of his leadership. Unfortunately, after his victory he built an "efod zahav" instead of leading Bnei Yisrael in praise of God. Recall how Sefer Shoftim takes a sharp turn downhill after that incident.]

This contrasting parallel between Tehillim 107 and Sefer Shoftim highlights the lesson that David ha'melech, the primary composer of Sefer Tehillim, learned from Sefer Shoftim.

Recall that Sefer Shoftim was written by Shmuel ha'navi, the same prophet who anointed David to become king. In the next time period after Sefer Shoftim, i.e. the time period of David, Bnei Yisrael are in distress once again from the Philistim and from many other surrounding nations. First Shaul, and later David become national leaders who achieve military victory over these enemies and bring salvation to Am Yisrael.

It is here where David is different than all who led Am Yisrael before him. Note how David understands the above message and sings God's praise (in song) after each of his victories (see Shmuel II chapter 22, also the Haftara for shvii shel pesach), better known as "shirat David".

In fact, psalm 107 (and most all of Sefer Tehillim) was written during the time period of David. Many other psalms were written by David when he was in distress ["tzaara"]. To confirm this, simply review the headers of chapters 31 thru 35 and 51 thru 65!

Likewise, David wrote numerous psalms praising God for His redemption; simply review chapters 105 thru 118 and 145 thru 150 to confirm!

It would seem from Sefer Tehillim that David ha'melech internalized the message of Sefer Shoftim (and his 'rebbe' Shmuel). Most likely, it is for this reason that David's offspring were chosen to be the dynasty (see Shmuel II chapter 7, read carefully!) that would lead Bnei Yisrael to redemption in messianic times.

BA'YAMIM HA'HEYM, B'ZMAN HA'ZEH

It is also not by chance that the Bet ha'Mikdash was finally built by David's son Shlomo. It is also not by chance that the time period of David is the first time in Jewish history when Am Yisrael reaches a position of international stature, and reaches positive political relationships with neighboring countries.

Should we be able to internalize this same message in our own generation, we would then be worthy of achieving a similar result.

For those who do recite Hallel on Yom ha-Atzma'ut, be it chapter 107 and/or Hallel "shaleym" (113 thru 118) [with or without a "bracha"], the message of Tehillim 107 can help guide us in the proper direction.

b'virchat geulah krovah,
Menache