

for YOM HA-ATZMA'UT - TEHILLIM PEREK 107

On Yom ha-Zikaron - Memorial Day - in Israel, at 11am - the county stands still to the shrill of a siren, and sixty endless seconds of national silence. Yet, less than ten hours later, the joyous celebration of Yom ha-Atzma'ut [Independence Day] begins. Even though this proximity doesn't appear to be fair to either day, it is precisely this proximity that gives extra meaning to both. Our awareness that the dedication of those who fell made our independence possible gives us the strength to cope with the sorrow of Yom ha-Zikaron. At the same time, our awareness of that terrible price should remind us of our responsibility to channel our independence in the proper direction.

This contrast between sorrow and joy at a time of redemption is reflected in Tehillim 107. It is the custom in Israel to recite that perek before davening Maariv on Yom ha-Atzma'ut. In the following shiur, we undertake an analysis of Tehillim 107 that will us better understand why it was chosen to be read on this day.

[If possible, it is highly recommend that you first glance through this perek, noting its opening and closing sections, and paying attention to the key phrases that repeat themselves. See if you can identify a clear pattern.

At the conclusion of the shiur, you will find an appendix that shows how the chapter can be divided.]

INTRODUCTION

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: the closing statement - man's recognition

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 whom God has redeemed, and hence 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 repeat themselves. However, if you read carefully, you'll notice as well how a very distinct pattern emerges, that repeats itself four times.

To identify this section, simply note the repetition of its two key phrases. Let's begin by noting the recurring phrase of praise: "yodu la-Hashem chasdo, ve-nifle'otav li-bnei Adam" - which is repeated four times (in psukim 8, 15, 21, & 31).

However each of these four 'calls for praise' is preceded by the 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).

Then, each case of distress is followed by a similar cry to God for assistance: "ve-yitz'aku el Hashem be-tza'ar lahem..." (see 107:6, 13, 19, and 28). [Here too we find the repetition of an almost identical phrase.]

As we would expect, this prayer is followed by a description of how God had brought salvation to each individual:

- 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 how each praise 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;
[the phrase: "ve-yitz'aku el Hashem be-tza'ar lahem, mi-metzukatam yoshiyem"]
- 2) **"tza'aka"** - crying out to God for assistance;
- 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 the 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 how the parallels between these four examples and those who came to Israel after the Holocaust is rather amazing!]

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, and will then be able to find God's hand in the history of mankind, and appreciate that relationship.

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 to. 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 the Gideon, who had the potential to become king was the next leader. Unfortunately, after his victory he built an "efod zahav" instead leading Bnei Yisrael in praise of God. Recall how Sefer Shoftim takes a sharp turn downhill after that incident.]

However, it would appear that David ha'melech understood this lesson 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 their 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 "shaleyem" (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,
menachem

CHART OF THE CHAPTER (based on the above shiur)

Perek 107

OPENING STATEMENT /HEADER

-A CALL TO PRAISE GOD [to those whom He redeemed

- 1 'Give give thanks unto the LORD, for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever.'
2 So let the redeemed of the LORD say, whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the adversary;
3 And gathered them out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the sea.
[examples:]

CASE #1 - LOST IN THE DESERT

- =====
- 4 They wandered in the wilderness in a desert way; they found no city of habitation.
5 Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.
6 **Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble**, and He delivered them out of their distresses.
7 And He led them by a straight way, that they might go to a city of habitation.
8 **Let them give thanks unto the LORD** for His mercy, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!
9 For He hath satisfied the longing soul, and the hungry soul He hath filled with good.

CASE #2 - DETAINED IN PRISON

- =====
- 10 Such as sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron--
11 Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the Most High.
12 Therefore He humbled their heart with travail, they stumbled, and there was none to help--
13 **They cried unto the LORD in their trouble**, and He saved them out of their distresses.
14 He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their bands in sunder.
15 **Let them give thanks unto the LORD** for His mercy, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!
16 For He hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder.

CASE #3 - DYING OF ILLNESS

- =====
- 17 Crazed because of the way of their transgression, and afflicted because of their iniquities--
18 Their soul abhorred all manner of food, and they drew near unto the gates of death--
19 **They cried unto the LORD in their trouble**, and He saved them out of their distresses;
20 He sent His word, and healed them, and delivered them from their graves.
21 **Let them give thanks unto the LORD** for His mercy, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!
22 And let them offer the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare His works with singing.

CASE #4 - LOST AT SEA

- =====
- 23 They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters--
24 These saw the works of the LORD, and His wonders in the deep;
25 For He commanded, and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves thereof;
26 They mounted up to the heaven, they went down to the deeps; their soul melted away because of trouble;
27 They reeled to and fro, and staggered like a drunken man, and all their wisdom was swallowed up--
28 **They cried unto the LORD in their trouble**, and He brought them out of their distresses.
29 He made the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof were still.
30 Then were they glad because they were quiet, and He led them unto their desired haven.
31 **Let them give thanks unto the LORD for His mercy**, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!
32 Let them exalt Him also in the assembly of the people, and praise Him in the seat of the elders.

EPILOGUE - REDEMPTION OF A NATION AND ITS LAND

- =====
- A fruitful land to desolation:**
33 He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and watersprings into a thirsty ground;
34 A fruitful land into a salt waste, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.

- A desolate land becomes fruitful, the nation returns:**
35 He turneth a wilderness into a pool of water, and a dry land into watersprings.
36 And there He maketh the hungry to dwell, and they establish a city of habitation;
37 And sow fields, and plant vineyards, which yield fruits of increase.
38 He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly, and suffereth not their cattle to decrease.

- Punishment for sinful behavior:**
39 Again, they are minished and dwindle away through oppression of evil and sorrow.
40 He poureth contempt upon princes, and causeth them to wander in the waste, where there is no way.
41 Yet setteth He the needy on high from affliction, and maketh his families like a flock.

- Conclusion: / Closing statement**
42 The upright see it, and are glad; and all iniquity stoppeth her mouth.
43 Whoso is wise, let him observe these things, and let them consider the mercies of the LORD. {P}