

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

TEHILLIM: THE BOOK OF PSALMS

By Rav Avi Baumol

Psalm 28

Perspective Through the Eyes of the Psalmist

Psalm 28 outlines for us David's concern about such individuals, indeed the worst type of enemies, whom, for some reason, your own nation, or the nations around you, still consider to be friends, not enemies.

1. To David,

To you God I call, my rock, do not be silent from me, lest You should depart from me and leave me as a prisoner.

2. Hear my pleas when I call out to You O God, when I lift my hands to Your holy place.

3. Do not let me be drawn into the throes of the wicked ones, to those malevolent people, those who speak of peace amongst their friends, but have evil in their hearts.

4. Give them their due, return to them their evil actions, let retribution be upon them.

5. For they do not understand the ways of God, (they are beyond repentance), destroy them do not build them up.

6. Blessed are You God for You have heard my pleas.

7. God my strength my defender, in Him I trusted in my heart, I was helped and my heart rejoiced, and with my song I shall thank Him...

The psalm splits into three sections, similar to our classic Amida prayer we recite thrice daily. The first section is one of praise to God: "to You God I call out," not to anyone else. Please listen to my cry, I am about to ask from You a request; please heed my words, for I am at my wits' end. Part two focuses on the request itself. The final section has the author blessing and thanking God after having felt that his prayer was heard. He concludes with a song of thanks - "umishiri ahodenu," "and with my song I shall thank Him."

Let us focus first on the midsection of the psalm, the main petition on the part of the author. What is his plea? It is not to protect him from sworn enemies, for he will defend himself from them on his own, nor is it to strengthen himself and his allies. Instead he has one specific request: "Al timshecheni im reshaim," "Do not let me be drawn into the trap of those evil people." David was nervous about who his friends were, with whom he was striking up a deal, and the consequences he might suffer from them over time.

David himself had to deal with individuals who claimed to be his friends but were ready to literally stab him in the back. The clearest example is King Saul who, suffering from paranoia (and perhaps schizophrenia), repeatedly makes peace with David following his numerous attempts to kill him. Each time David is reassured of their friendship and each time it is broken, nearly costing David his life.

David must have experienced this eerie superficial relationship within his own camp as well as with the surrounding nations, as he held power over Jerusalem and Israel for forty years. This uneasiness about the evil enemies who veil their wickedness under the guise of "peace treaties" or "living in harmony" troubled the king and led him to direct his pleas to God. God alone knows the thoughts of

individuals, and can determine what lies in the recesses of our minds.

David's verb "timshecheni" (don't let me be drawn or pulled) warrants discussion. "Al timshecheni im reshaim" (don't let me be dragged or pulled into the counsel of the wicked) reflects David's understanding that the most dangerous enemies are not the ones who publicly call for your destruction (though they are certainly dangerous). Rather they are the ones who publicly stand up and talk about peace and coexistence, while behind the scenes they direct murderous and treacherous acts. To them David prays he not be drawn. Why should he feel threatened by these people? The answer for David is that he knows what lurks behind their lips. In fact, it is clear to everyone what the enemy has in mind, yet the popular position is to succumb to the enemies whims and strike deals with them. This David flatly rejects, and for this reason he remains powerful in Israel for so long. (His undoing at the end of his life stems from internal struggles both private and familial, but that is for another discussion.)

In verse 5 David justifies his harsh plea for their destruction. For them there is no pity in David's words, no mercy or recognition of their socio-economic background. Rather, he seeks complete decimation. Why the harsh words? When people act treacherously they can do so unintentionally or intentionally and intention is fundamental to determining their judgment. When those "po'alei aven" (evildoers) act, David says they do so from a lack of understanding of God and His connection with His people. They do so out of malice and intention to destroy. In this regard they deserve no pity, but solely retribution.

David concludes his psalm with praise of God and an acknowledgment of his words being received, recognizing God as his source of strength and his safeguard. He can now rejoice

in knowing he has done his share to relieve himself from his foes.

"Umishiri ahodenu," "and from my song I will thank Him." David possesses the remarkable ability to intertwine the most frightening thoughts of death and destruction with prayers of song and dance and rejoicing to God. We should learn from his words.

Our situation in Israel is complex. It is a web of diplomacy, world perception and inner politics which turns a simple idea into a complicated one. When there are evildoers who publicly and privately declare their mission to destroy you from the face of the earth, our response should be clear. And yet, to a certain degree, we find ourselves in the same predicament as King David. "Al timshecheni im reshaim" – do not let us be drawn into the web of the evil ones who might feign peace but ultimately show their true evil intentions.

Let us pray that God responds to our prayers and gives us security in our land in the same way King David reigned over Israel and Jerusalem in peace and prosperity.