



THE
TEHILLIM PROJECT

Mizmor 27

August 30, 2020

EMOTION

1. The fear and thrill of being in H-shem's hands; and
2. The overwhelming desire to be close to H-shem.

CIRCUMSTANCE

1. The month of Elul and the High Holidays; and
2. When surrendering to H-shem's hand.



Summary of Discussion

During our discussion, Rabbi Menashe set forth two main observations regarding David's emotions in Mizmor 27. First, in the first half of the Mizmor (vs. 1-6), it appears that David is filled with trust, security and confidence. "Bitachon" is the key emotion here. Second, throughout the second half of the Mizmor, the emotion changes. Bitachon turns to tefillah/prayer in almost a sense of desperation. Hence, according to Rabbi Menashe, this Mizmor strikes a balance between bitachon and tefillah.

Subsequent to our discussion, Rabbi Menashe offered the following additional thoughts and perspectives on his commentary which further identify the emotion captured by Mizmor 27:

"In looking at the two halves of Mizmor 27, I presented a seeming contradiction between bitachon, which implies a sense of serenity, and urgent tefilla, which implies that David is fearful. I mentioned that I did not initially pick up on this conflict myself, but that I saw it in the Nafshi.org website on Tehillim, and that Rav Matisyahu Solomon also writes about the interplay between bitachon and tefilla in a delicate kind of way. However, I was at a loss to grasp it and to explain why the two are not incompatible.

Upon later reflection, I realized that my thinking had been colored by a shallow, maybe even juvenile, concept of both bitachon and tefilla! In my previous thinking, bitachon essentially means, "I'm fine; I don't need anything." And tefilla essentially means, "I need something." So, I thought, which is it – does David need something or doesn't he?

I would like to redefine the "emotional" premise of both these cornerstones in our faith. But first, I would like to recall a childhood memory. I had a "big brother" (close family friend who was much older than I) who used to take me swimming in the summertime, before I was an independent swimmer (I was a late bloomer, learning to swim around age 11!) He would tell me to climb on his back and he would swim with me (holding on for dear life!) Obviously, I trusted him, because I went. But the entire time I was scared silly, and I was screaming out to him, "Don't drop me!" or "Don't go so deep!" or "I think I'm slipping!" Did I trust him that I wouldn't drown? Yes! Was I calm? No!

That's bitachon and tefilla. Do we trust that we are in Hashem's hands, and that ultimately He won't let anything bad happen to us? Yes! Is the world a scary place, and do we often feel uncertain and vulnerable, which is why we just want to cry out to Him, since, after all, He is the one we are relying upon? Also, Yes!

So, I think that the question is not so much, "How do we strike a balance between bitachon and tefilla?" The question is: "How do we develop the mind-blowing idea that we are truly in Hashem's hands – scary as it may sound – so that we can see our tefilla as 'part and parcel' of that bitachon?" (Note: The alternative is that we are relying upon something or someone else, and that's a lot more scary.... or just plain foolish!)

Summary of Discussion

Thus, I might suggest the emotion of psalm 27 to be: "The fear and thrill of being in Hashem's hand."

Rabbi Avigdor offered the following observations. The first three verses of Mizmor 27 are a reflection on battle-field experiences from David's past. Thereafter, the Mizmor turns to how David wants to be in H-shem's house, and not on the battlefield. In other words, David wants to be engaged with G-d off the battlefield. This Mizmor expresses an emotional "yearning" to be with G-d.

Rabbi Avigdor also expressed an interest in verse 10, which states that David has been abandoned by his parents. Rabbi Avigdor explained that Rashi interpreted this verse to refer to conception and pleasure; once conception was complete, the parents turn their backs on the child; G-d then takes over and created the child. In other words, the parents selfishly enjoyed the act of conceiving, but it was G-d that cared and loved for the child.

Marc Grossfeld stated that this Mizmor stands for a person's getting strength from understanding his weaknesses and fears.

The discussion turned to why we say this Mizmor twice per day before Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Colin Smith stated this is the time we answer to G-d. It is the time of judgment for us all. It is a time to seek closeness to H-shem.

Rabbi Avigdor offered a three-part hypothesis in that David is expressing the key to becoming as close as possible to G-d. The main question for him and for us is "how do I get there?" First, one must recognize that everything comes from G-d. This is represented in the first three verses of the Mizmor. Second, one must have the desire to connect with H-shem – one has to want it badly. Third, one must be ceaseless in his efforts to ask for it through davening and tefillah.

According to Rabbi Avigdor, the overriding emotion in Mizmor 27 is David's deep desire to connect with G-d.

Mitch Chargo offered the perspective that, as part of the connection process, we are supposed to see what we can do as individuals to bring G-d's sanctuary to us. In other words, Mizmor 27 should drive us to question what we can do to create a sanctuary of spirituality and connection in our own lives, homes, businesses and relationships. Through this process we can achieve closeness to G-d.

Scott Seiler stated that Mizmor 27 is a "call to action to do more".

Summary of Discussion

Analysis:

What is the emotion permeating Mizmor 27?

1. The fear and thrill of being in H-shem's hands; and
2. The overwhelming desire to be close to H-shem.

Under what circumstances (or when) is it appropriate to say or recite Mizmor 27?

1. The month of Elul and the High Holidays; and
2. When surrendering to H-shem's hand.