

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

by Rabbi David Sykes

Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Hertzberg זצ"ל was born in Dinov, Galicia, in 1894. He was a scion of great Tzaddikim, including the Taz, Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, and Rabbi Zvi Elimelech of Dinov, also known as the Bnei Yissoschar, after whom he was named. Rabbi Hertzbergs father, Rabbi Avraham, was one of five brothers, known as the Five Books of the Torah, who were among the Yoshvim in Belz, outstanding scholars who pursued Torah study and Hassidism. Rabbi Avraham was the personal librarian of the Belzer Rebbe, Rabbi Yissochar Ber, and, for a time, taught his son, Rabbi Arele, who went on to succeed his father as Belzer Rebbe. Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Hertzberg was a brilliant Torah scholar with a sharp and creative mind. He was blessed with a phenomenal memory, was able to recall and cite any reference in all of Talmud Bavli, and was thoroughly fluent in major commentaries and Chassidic works.

In 1923, Rabbi Hertzberg immigrated to America, and in 1928 he and his family moved to Baltimore, Maryland, where some of his relatives already lived. Rabbi and Rebbetzin Hertzberg warmly opened their hands and hearts to everyone in need. When Rabbi Ruderman זצ"ל came to Baltimore, Rabbi Hertzberg helped him find a suitable place for his Yeshiva, Ner Israel, and, several times, when the Yeshiva was in a difficult financial situation, Rabbi Hertzberg mortgaged his house in order to be able to lend funds to the Yeshiva.

After the Holocaust, many young survivors came to Baltimore, broken, alone, and penniless. Rabbi and Rebbetzin Hertzberg undertook to become like father and mother to these refugees. They showered them with love, took care of all of their needs, and shared their sorrows and joys for the rest of their lives. When these survivors needed a building to house a Cheder for their children, Rabbi and Rebbetzin Hertzberg made their Shul available and helped to set up a kitchen to prepare meals for the children.

Rabbi Hertzbergs children had his writings published posthumously in Hebrew by Machon Yerushalayim, under the title Tzaddik BEmunaso (A Righteous Man [Lives] by His Faith). This title hints both to Rabbi Hertzbergs Hebrew name and to his very essence. It is stated in Pirkei Avos that the world stands on three things: Torah, Avodah, and Gemilus Chasadim. Rabbi Hertzberg זצ"ל was a giant in each of these areas. While much has been said and written about his Torah knowledge and his acts of kindness, less has been said and written about his Avodah. Introductory Chapters to Tehillim sheds great light on Rabbi Hertzbergs Divine service and deep faith, and reflects his unusually profound integration of mind and heart.

The Book of Tehillim is unique among the Books of the Bible in that it is not only studied, but is also recited or said as a form of prayer. Rabbi Hertzbergs essay is not simply an introduction to the study of Tehillim; rather, in these chapters, Rabbi Hertzberg introduces us to the spiritual experience of saying Tehillim and to the unique place it has occupied in the life and history of the Jewish People. In doing so, he imparts to the reader a better understanding of what Tehillim is all about, and a more meaningful and profound approach to its recitation.

Rabbi Hertzberg was a rabbi in several Shuls in Baltimore. In 1946, he established Beth Abraham Congregation. I was privileged to have known Rabbi Hertzberg for several years and to have been his student in the study of Talmud. Rabbi Hertzberg passed away in 1971, on the 27th of Nissan. I have undertaken to translate this essay both because of the tremendous light it sheds on the Book of Tehillim and in order to honor Rabbi Hertzbergs blessed memory.