

ANALYSIS OF T'HILLIM 122

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

IYYAR 28, 43YEARS AGO

In honor of the 43rd anniversary of the liberation of Yerushalayim, we are presenting a special essay in her honor.

On Iyyar 28, 5727 (June 7, 1967), when General Motte Gur's voice was heard throughout the country announcing "Har haBayit b'Yadenu", the official state reaction was to broadcast a reading of Mizmor 122 of T'hillim, followed by the playing of Naomi Shemer's recently debuted "Yerushalayim shel Zahav". The immediate sense of the connection with T'hillim 122 was due to the "modern Midrash" of the line "Yerushalayim haB'nuyah, k'lr sheHub'rah lah Yahdav" (which we will translate within the analysis of the psalm), reading the "Hubrah" as referring to the reunification of the East and West sides of the city. Those of us who are too young (or barely old enough) to remember need to be reminded that for 19 years, from independence until 1967, the city of Yerushalayim was a divided city, with a no-man's land running between the New City, under Israel's control, and the Old City, under Hashemite/Jordanian sovereignty. Pilgrims came from all over the Jewish world to ascend Har Tziyyon and try to catch a glimpse of the Kotel, rending their garments not only over the destruction but also over the barrier that kept us all from even visiting the "human stones" associated with the Mikdash. The powerful emotions that accompanied the sudden and miraculous reunification were the realization of the image of "a city bound together" and, thus, Mizmor 122 was the "psalm for the day".

Before beginning our analysis, here is the history of that great anthem, Yerushalayim shel Zahav; it is timely from a calendar perspective and doubly appropriate due to the current situation for us to share a little-known aspect of this glorious time in our recent history. (This piece is taken from www.jerusalemofgold.co.il - the entire version can be found there.).

It all began when Naomi Shemer was invited to compose a song for non-competitive part of the 1967 Israel Song Festival. Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek had asked that the songs to be performed on Independence Day of 1967 (May 15) be related to Jerusalem. The producer of the festival, had found no more than half a dozen recordings of songs concerning Jerusalem written by Israeli poets and composers since the turn of the century. None of the songs composed after the establishment of the State mentioned that the city was divided and that Jews could not approach the Kotel (Western Wall).

Shemer had made a conscious effort for some time to compose such a song, but to no avail. She asked to be released from the commitment. She was told to compose a song, but asserted that it did not have to do with Jerusalem. That very night "Jerusalem of Gold" was born.

In composing the song, Shemer was moved by the talmudic story concerning Rabbi Akiva who slept with his wife in a straw bin after her father had disavowed her from his property and promised her that if he had the means he would give her a "Jerusalem of Gold" came to mind. "One must remember that in those days Jerusalem was gray, and not golden", said Shemer. "So I asked myself: Are you sure, 'of gold'? And something within me replied: Yes indeed, 'of gold'". It was nighttime when she sat down to write the lyrics and melody.

This first version of the song included the first and third stanzas only. When she played the song to Rivkah Michaeli, she asked her: "What about the Old City?" Shemer said that she had already referred to the Old City in the words "U-ve-libbah homah" ("And in her heart a wall"). Michaeli replied that her father had been born in the Old City, and dreamt about it every night. Shemer then composed the second stanza commencing "Eikhah yavshu borot ha-mayim". In it, she bemoaned the fact that the market-place was empty, that no visitors frequented the Temple Mount, and that no one descended to the Dead Sea on the Jericho road. Shemer explained that in writing this stanza she saw before her eyes two thousand years of destruction, and not the nineteen years that had transpired since the establishment of the State of Israel.

The song, performed by the youthful Shuli Natan, was an instant success and touched upon the hearts of many. Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin who was present at the Festival received word that Nasser had declared the closing of the Tiran Straits, and hastened to leave the building. The military situation with Egypt had caused considerable tension in the public. "When I sang the song, it somehow broke the tension and the audience sang the refrain with me", reminisced Natan. Several days later the army began mobilizing its reserves, and the song served to encourage the soldiers.

The Six Day War broke out on Monday, June 5, 1967. The Old City of Jerusalem was captured by the Israel Defence Forces on June 7. When the war broke out and Jerusalem was freed "Jerusalem of Gold" immediately became an anthem of sorts. During the liberation of the city, the soldiers burst out singing "Jerusalem of Gold" at the Western Wall. Television producer Yossi Ronen, who at the time reported from the scene, noted that "the excitement reached its peak. The paratroopers burst out in song, and I forgot my role as 'objective reporter' and joined with them in singing 'Jerusalem of Gold'".

What is remarkable is how much of a feeling of imminent reunification existed in Israel at the time. R. Tzvi Yehudah Kook zt"l, in his "sichah" on Yom ha'Atzma'ut that year, startled the celebrants when he cried out "but what about Hevron, what about Sh'khem?"

II

MIZMOR 122: THE TEXT

1. A Song of Maalot of David. I rejoiced when they said to me, Let us go into the house of Hashem.
2. Our feet shall stand inside your gates, O Yerushalayim.
3. Yerushalayim is built as a city which is bound firmly together;
4. There the tribes go up, the tribes of Hashem, Edut l'Yisra'el, to give thanks to the name of Hashem.
5. For thrones of judgment were set there, the thrones of the house of David.
6. Pray for the peace of Yerushalayim; those who love you shall prosper.
7. Peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces.
8. For my brothers and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within you.
9. Because of the house of Hashem our G-d I will seek your good.

It is clear from the opening line, that this is a "pilgrimage song", one intended to be sung by members of a group ascending to Yerushalayim and to the Beit haMikdash.

There are two types of group-pilgrimage to Yerushalayim:

- 1) The thrice-yearly Aliyah laRegel, on Matzot, Shavu'ot and Sukkot,
- 2) The annual bringing of Bikkurim, the first fruits, as commanded in D'varim 26:1-11. This Aliyah would take place at any time from Shavu'ot until Hanukkah, i.e. throughout the harvest season.

It is most likely that this song was composed for the Bikkurim pilgrimage, since that is the one ascent that has no specified date (see M. Bikkurim 3:2). This gives more sense to the line "I rejoiced when they told me..."

Although we have no clear description of the pomp and circumstances associated with the thrice-yearly Aliyah laRegel, we do have a clear presentation of the fanfare which accompanied the M'vi'ei haBikkurim. The majority of the third chapter of Massechet Bikkurim is devoted to a step-by-step description of the Bikkurim offering, from field to Mikdash. The Talmud Yerushalmi (ibid. 3:2) explicitly weaves our Mizmor into that ceremony:

On the road, they would sing "I rejoiced when they said to me, Let us go into the house of Hashem. In Yerushalayim, they would sing: "Our feet shall stand inside your gates, O Yerushalayim."

Rambam (Bikkurim 4:16) explains that once the entire Bikkurim entourage would enter the city gates, they would begin reading "Our feet..."; i.e. the entire psalm from that verse on.

III

THE STRUCTURE OF THE MIZMOR

As mentioned above, the Mizmor is arranged into clearly identifiable stanzas. In order to mark them, we will note linguistic and thematic nuances that help us in this identification.

STANZA I: vv. 1-3

(Since the first three words are not properly part of the text, we will begin after that introductory line). These three lines chart the progress of the pilgrim as he ascends, with his group, to the city and stands astonished at the beauty of the city. Note that the second verse ends with "Yerushalayim", which also begins the third verse, tying together his arrival ("Our feet...") with his observations about the city (...k'lr sheHubrah lah Yahdav). . We would title this stanza: "Arrival"

STANZA II: vv. 4-5

These two verses describe the goings-on in the city: Notice the repeated use of "Sham" and the unusual use of the past perfect Alu, Yash'vu. This stanza is "The City".

STANZA III: vv. 6-7

These two verses are clearly tied together, as they both use the paired Shalom and Shalvah, wishing peace and tranquility to the city and those who love her. This stanza is aptly titled "Peace".

STANZA IV: vv. 8-9

This final stanza is highlighted by the anaphora of L'ma'an, in which both the welfare of the co-celebrants and of the city is the focus of the blessing and prayer. We might title this stanza: "Blessing".

IV

ANALYSIS OF THE PSALM

SUPERSSCRIPTION

The title "Shir haMa'a lot" is shared by fifteen consecutive psalms, of which ours is the third. There is much discussion and dispute about the meaning of this superscription (one variant is at the beginning of ps. 121 - Shir laMa'alot; in addition to which David's name is added in 122, 124, 131 and 133). The Gemara (BT Sukkah 53b) credits the composition of these fifteen psalms to David and associates them with the "damming up" of the netherworldly waters which threatened to flood the world when David drilled holes beneath the future site of the altar. Others understand them as songs composed in honor of the return from Bavel during the period known as "Shivat Tziyyon" (6th-5th c. BCE), based on the verse in Ezra (7:9): Yisud haMa'aleh miBavel. Others understand the superscription as a musical notation, indicating that the songs were to rise in tone or volume. Yet another, related interpretation, reads "HaMa'alot" as a literary marker, indicating that these fifteen psalms all share a literary style of word-play where the word at the end of a verse appears, in one form or another, at the beginning of the next verse, creating a "chain" (Heb Sharshur) which

continues to ascend. A common interpretation (which we have utilized in an earlier essay on "Dayyenu") ties the fifteen "Shirei haMa'aleh" with the fifteen Maalot in the courtyard of the Mikdash, upon which the Levi'im would stand and sing during the Simchat Beit haShoeaveh. The most conventional explanation for this superscription is that these were psalms composed for the Olei Regel. This approach is anchored in the many mentions of Yerushalayim, Tziyyon etc. - even Aharon is mentioned in one of them (#133). Our Mizmor is probably the strongest source of support for this theory.

The superscription does not end, in our case, with the word Maalot; David's name is appended. The casual reader would assume that the prefix lamed means to credit David with authorship; this presents us with several problems within the text itself. First of all, how could David compose a psalm for pilgrims - to a House that doesn't yet exist? This is not so difficult in and of itself, since he could have composed it in anticipation of such pilgrimages - remember, his great desire was to build that House himself (see II Sh'mu'el 7). Once we get into the psalm itself, a greater problem presents itself - how can the psalmist wax rhapsodic about "... thrones of judgment were set there, the thrones of the house of David"? Praising the Davidic dynasty before its successful creation is a bit odd.

One might counter that David composed this prophetically - but that is difficult on three counts.

First of all, as we noted in an earlier essay, Rambam's definition of Ruach haKodesh that he associates with the composition of T'hillim precludes prophecy.

Even if we reject his approach to this general question, keep in mind that T'hillim were composed to be sung in the Mikdash; what meaning would there be to singing a psalm whose words make no sense at the time?

Finally, the use of the past perfect Yash'vu indicates that these thrones have been in place for quite some time; a prophetic wording would be Yeish'vu (will sit).

How then can we reconcile the Davidic "colophon" here?

The entire question rests on a premise (credited above to "the casual reader") which can be demonstrated to be false. The associating of a psalm to a person via the prefix lamed (e.g. liV'nei Korach, Mizmor l'Asaph etc.) does not necessarily imply authorship; it may be dedication, inspiration or assignation. In other words, the psalm may have been composed in honor of that individual; it may have been inspired by the deeds of that individual or it may have been composed for that individual (or group) to perform. Sa'adiah's approach is most relevant here; since he ascribes all T'hillim to David, he must explain the various assignations in another manner. Indeed, he explains that those psalms were composed for those individuals (or for their children) to sing in the Mikdash. This is how he explains the difficult "T'fillah l'Mosheh" (ps. 90) - it was composed for Mosheh's descendants (Levi'im) to perform. A clear example of "dedication" or "inspiration" is ps. 72, which opens with the one word superscription: liSh'lomoh. None of the opinions among Haza"l or the Rishonim (which we assayed in our introductory shiur to Hallel) allow for Solomonic participation in the composition of

T'hillim - even if psalms were written later than David. One might counter that that odd introduction proves nothing - but psalm 127 follows a more familiar pattern: Shir haMaalot liSh'lomoh, patterned after our superscription, with the substitution of Shlomoh for David.

Hence, we have no problem reading this psalm as postdating David, written during a period when the Temple had stood for a while and there was already a powerful and positive history of "thrones of the House of David" which adorned the history of the city.

STANZA I: ARRIVAL

I rejoiced when they said to me, Let us go into the house of Hashem.

Our feet shall stand inside your gates, O Yerushalayim.

Yerushalayim is built as a city which is bound firmly together;

Notice the shift from first person singular to plural within the first line - "I rejoiced" becomes "Nelekh". The surprisingly quick transformation of the individual to a member of the group is one of the subtle messages of the text in its praise of Yerushalayim. "B'omrim Li" can be understood two ways: I rejoiced when they told me, or I rejoiced in those that told me. The meanings are quite distinct and depend on how we understand the nature of the happiness. Is the psalmist happy because it is time to ascend to the city? Is he responding to the call of the "town crier"? (M. Bikkurim 3:2)? Or is he taking pleasure in his company in the pilgrimage. The first read is more likely, but the second one is not impossible within this context. Truth to tell, Yerushalayim elicits both types of happiness - we are ecstatic when we are afforded the opportunity to go, and our co-travelers are also a source of happiness in that we delight in their company.

The first verse expresses a feeling of movement and ends with the word Nelekh which sets the tone for dynamic transition.

This is immediately offset by Om'dot - "our feet stood in your gates, Yerushalayim". Standing is not only the opposite of walking, it also represents stasis. This does not necessarily imply an arrival at a final destination, but the interplay and dialectic between dynamism and stability.

Note how quickly the journey has reached its apex - from the distant call of Nelekh, we are immediately brought into the city gates. The psalmist subtly expresses his sense of time contraction (what Haza"l referred to as "K'fitzat haDerekh"). The silence here regarding the journey itself is not due to its insignificance, rather to the sense of immediate arrival which retrospectively turns the ascent into a quick blur.

In the first verse, the psalmist addressed his audience, sharing his excitement about the impending Aliyah. He immediately shifts his target, turning to the city itself and speaking to her: "In your gates".

The final verse of this stanza may be understood as one compound idea or two independent reflections. The psalmist stands in amazement at the built city - but what are we to make of the

second stich: *k'lr sheHubrah Lah Yahdav"? Does the prefix kaf describe the built city, or is it a separate facet of his wonder? That will depend on how we interpret this phrase.

As mentioned in the opening section, there are those who would interpret "the bound together city" as referring to the East and West, the New and Old cities. While this makes for an emotionally compelling recitation, it is unlikely that this was the psalmist's intent (considering that there were no East/West or New/Old divisions until 1869).

Some Rishonim explain that the intent is not a description of the city, but rather its effect - it is a city that binds the people together. This is born out by the following verse that describes the assemblage of the tribes "there". Although this works well in the context of the psalm - and is undoubtedly a valid and worthy sentiment - it does not fit the words well. The phrase describes the city, not its inhabitants or visitors.

R. Ovadiah S'forno suggests that the praise here is for the fullness of the city, that it is populated from wall to wall as if it were built at one time (Yahdav). R. Menahem haMe'iri (echoed by Amos Hakham in Da'at Mikra) suggests a variation on this idea, that the entire city is built and filled up. It is important to note that in ancient times - indeed, until the 20th century - a city that had gaping spaces was considered undesirable. Walled cities were usually built with the intention that more people would immigrate to the city; hence, the walls were built around a greater area than was already built up. If the city never attracted large numbers, it continued to have open spaces - which, in today's eco-friendly society, is considered an asset. If a city were truly a good place to live, everyone would want to be there. The crowded conditions of Yerushalayim were testimony to the greatness of the city and its popularity.

R. Elhanan Samet suggests another approach, one that takes us back, ironically, to the "1967 Midrash". The city of David was not the "Old City" that we know. It was a long, narrow town that stretched north and south and had, as its highest place, the Har haBayit, on its north side. To its immediate west were mountains that were higher than the Temple Mount. In the 9th and 8th centuries BCE, this area was settled by wealthy people who built larger homes. This other city was called "The Upper City" (Ha'lr ha'Elyonah) and occupied most of the area of today's "Old City". Notice that the western half - indeed, most of the Old City - is higher than Har haBayit.

At some point, perhaps during the reign of Hizkiah (c. 720 BCE), the two cities were joined. This may be the intent of *lr sheHubrah lah Yahdav".

If we accept any of the later interpretations, the second stich is tied in with the first - it is either an example or the meaning of B'nuyah. If we prefer those Rishonim who explain that the city binds people together, then it is an independent paean to the city, in addition to the praise for the Yerushalayim haB'nuyah.

STANZA II: THE CITY

There the tribes go up, the tribes of Hashem, Edut l'Yisra'el, to give thanks to the name of Hashem.
For thrones of judgment were set there, the thrones of the house of David.

Again, the tension between dynamism and stasis is present in this praise. In the first verse, the focus is on the ascent of the tribes (either as pilgrims or for judgment - see D'varim 17:8) whose very assemblage is testimony to the existence of Yisra'el. This ascent, as with Nelekh, is dynamic. The next verse, echoing the opening sheSham of the previous one, also describes what happens Sham. This description is not, however, of movement and festive assemblage. It focuses on the stable presence of judges and kings in the city. These two verses share another feature. Included in the list of alternative explanations for Maalot, the literary style of "linking" was noted. These two verses utilize that style - Sh'vatim - Shivtei Kah, and Kis'ot l'Mishpat, Kis'ot l'Veit David.

The phrase Edut l'Yisra'el is a difficult one to interpret - indeed, the text at Qumran has Adat Yisra'el which, within the context of the verse, is a much smoother read.

This dialectic - between the dynamic ascent and the stable "thrones of justice" - reflects an essential duality in our relationship with the city. Yerushalayim is a place of growth, of change, of enrichment; yet it is a city that is never changing, reflecting the stable truth of our faith.

This dichotomy can be expressed in other terms that bear great relevance to our world. Yerushalayim is a city of spirituality, of "other-worldliness". Yet, at the same time, it is the seat of our government, the center of our national institutions. It is, at one, our religious and national capitol. One of the unique facets of Am Yisra'el is this unification, which sees the message of the Torah as inextricably bound up with the society it was meant to perfect. That society is a complete one, with economic, educational, military and political infrastructures that need wise statecraft in their governance. We are, as R. Saadiah stated, only a nation by virtue of our Torah. Nonetheless, we are a nation and not, in fashionable western terms, a "religion".

Spirituality is, by its nature, a dynamic process. This is exemplified by the tribes who ascend, bearing testimony to Yisra'el. Statecraft, in order to succeed, must play the opposite role and maintain ultimate stability and reliability.

STANZA III: PEACE

Pray for the peace of Yerushalayim; those who love you shall prosper.

Peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces.

The psalmist turns to his fellows, likely those who have joined him in his pilgrimage, and adjures them to pray for both the city (stasis) and those who "love you" (those fellow pilgrims - dynamism). The psalmist has gone back to addressing the city herself; Ohavayikh.

The first verse only expresses the prayer for peace and tranquility; the second does much to clarify the terms that will indicate success. There not only needs to be peace b'Heyleikh - meaning security

and protection, there also needs to be tranquility b'Arm'notayikh. The palace in question might even refer to the royal dwelling - or even the Mikdash itself. There is little question that a society that is besieged is sorely tested as to the mettle of its members. Will they devour each other in desperation or will they unite to fight for survival? This is a question that most peoples, at one time or another, have had to answer. The resolution was not always pleasant, but we have a proud history of answering the call and putting our differences aside in common cause.

A much more difficult challenge faces the society that is secure from outside threats. The lack of an enemy can often serve to tear apart the very fabric of the civitas, allowing insignificant issues to cloud the brightest day. Therefore, the psalmist blesses the city that she should be safe from the outside and also at peace internally.

STANZA IV: BLESSING

For my brothers and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within you.

Because of the house of Hashem our G-d I will seek your good.

Who are the "brothers and friends" in v. 8? Weiss suggests that they are the tribes who are unified by the city. While this is an attractive read, I believe that a more contextually consistent understanding would be that these are the co-celebrants who have come up with the psalmist. The psalmist continues to address the city - and will do so until the conclusion of the Mizmor.

At the end of the psalm he goes back to the opening theme, forming perfect bookends around the psalm. He began with his gladness at being told it was time to go up to the house of Hashem. Now, he commits to seek the welfare of Yerushalayim because of that selfsame house.

V

POSTSCRIPT

R. Reuven Margaliyot, in his HaMikra v'haMesorah, shares an insight which is both fascinating on its own merit and is instructive to us as we conclude our study of this "psalm of the day" for Yom Yerushalayim.

At the twilight of the first commonwealth, after the exile of Yehoyachin (597 BCE), the false prophets in Yerushalayim were assuring the populace that the exiles would return post haste and that sovereignty would be restored. They also communicated with the exiles, telling them to "sit on their suitcases". Yirmiyahu, the one true prophet at the time who spoke out against them, warned the people that they would be in for a multi-generation stay and that they should settle in, get married, raise families and create lives for themselves in Bavel.

Towards the end of his letter to the exile community, Yirmiyahu states:

And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray to the

Lord for it; for in its peace shall you have peace. (Yirmiyah 29:7)

This command is the source for the "Prayer for the welfare of the government", mentioned in Avot (3:2).

Margaliyot points out that Rabbinic tradition had a different take on this verse, one which led in a curious direction.

He notes the Midrash that states that everything that happened to Yoseph happened to Tziyyon (Tanhuma Vayyigash). Among the events they share, the Midrash states: Regarding Yoseph it states: "Go see the welfare of the flock" and regarding Tziyyon it states: "Seek the welfare of the city". As Margaliyot points out, this seems to be a strange reading of the text in Yirmiyahu, since he was telling them to seek the city to which they were exiled (Bavel) and not the city from which they were exiled (Tziyyon). He cites several other Midrashim which read the verse in Yirmiyahu in a similarly odd fashion.

Margaliyot explains that linguists have identified a curious phenomenon in T'nakh. When a word ends with a letter and the following words begins with the same letter, that letter is often dropped; he brings several examples of this in T'nakh. Therefore, he reads the verse as follows:

v'Dirshu et Sh'lom ha'Ir Asher Y'tza'tem Mlsham...

Yirmiyahu's message to the exilic community was profound - even as you are building your lives in Bavel, seek the peace of Yerushalayim, for your welfare is dependent upon hers.

We all love the city of our dreams and want only the best for her inhabitants - but we must also be cognizant that so long as Yerushalayim is not at peace, none of us are. We must always be Doresh Sh'lom Yerushalayim, for her peace is the harbinger of our own:

BiSh'lomah Yih'yeh Lakhem Shalom

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