

קבלת פני המלך (ו) - עיון במזמור צב

KABBALAT SHABBAT (VI) - ANALYSIS OF PSALM 92

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I

INTRODUCTION

As noted in several of the earlier installments in this series, the recitation of Mizmor 92 is the earliest recorded addition to the (pre-)Shabbat liturgy. Although there is no mention in Talmudic literature of such a practice, it dates back to the time of the Rishonim (it isn't mentioned in any of the Siddurim of the Ge'onim). Although the association with Shabbat could not be more obvious - the superscription is the only T'hillah that explicitly points to a particular day to which the composition is dedicated - that clarity fades when looking into the Mizmor itself. As we will see in our analysis of the body of the text, it is difficult to understand the title of this psalm - nothing in the psalm suggests any connection with Shabbat. Hence, we have two questions - why is this psalm prefaced with a direct pointed at Shabbat, and why was this psalm integrated into the Shabbat liturgy? (We suspect that the answer to the former will help us solve the latter).

A third prefatory question emerges from the Mishnaic text that records the practice of the "daily psalm" recited by the Levi'im in the Mikdash as an accompaniment to the Korban Tamid: (M. Tamid 7:4)

The psalms that were chanted by the Levi'im in the Mikdash:

- 1) On the first day, they used to say *The earth is Hashem's and the fullness thereof* (Mizmor 24)
- 2) On the second day, they used to say *Great is Hashem and highly to be praised* (Mizmor 48)
- 3) On the third day, they used to say *G-d stands in the congregation of G-d, in the midst of the judges He judges.* (Mizmor 82)
- 4) On the fourth day, they used to say *Hashem, G-d to Whom vengeance belongs, G-d to Whom vengeance belongs, shine forth!* (Mizmor 94)
- 5) On the fifth day, they used to say *Sing aloud unto G-d our strength, shout unto the G-d of Jacob* (Mizmor 81)
- 6) On the sixth day, they used to say *Hashem reigns, He is clothed in majesty, Hashem is clothed, He has girded Himself with strength* (Mizmor 93)
- 7) On Shabbat, they used to say *Mizmor, a song for the Shabbat day* (Mizmor 92); Mizmor, a song for the time to come, for the day that will be all Shabbat and rest for everlasting life.

A complete survey of each of these psalms and the aptness of their recitation on the corresponding days is beyond the scope of this shiur. The most obvious difference in the Mishnah's presentation of the first six psalms and the Shabbat-psalm is the referencing. In the first six, the Mishnah cites the first verse of the body of the text, ignoring the superscription (except for sp. 94, which has none; even the two word introductory superscription of ps. 24 is elided here). Referring to the psalm of Shabbat, however, the Mishnah cites only the title. This distinction, however, is most plausible on account of the content of the title (and the lack of any associated content in the body of the text).

What interests us is the second distinction between the psalm for Shabbat and the first six. Each of the first six is presented with its day and the first line of the psalm; the final entry includes commentary on that verse - which may have been recited by the Levi'im or may be embedded commentary on the verse - Mizmor, a song for the time to come, for the day that will be all Shabbat and rest for everlasting life. Why is the final daily psalm expanded thus?

We will revisit these questions subsequent to our analysis of the Mizmor.

II

COMPOSITION OF THE PSALM:

OF SIGNATURES AND COLOPHONS

The Midrash (Midrash T'hillim 90:1) maintains that Mosheh was the author of the eleven psalms at the beginning of the fourth book of T'hillim (#90-100 - see our discussion in the first installment of this series, section III). There is, however, an alternative tradition that assigns the composition of this psalm to an earlier psalmist:

And Kayin went out from before G-d: (B'resheet 4:16; the Midrash interprets Kayin's *going out* as exiting G-d's "court") R. Hama said in the name of R. Hanina b. R. Yitzhak - he went out happy, as it says: *Behold he is going out... [and will see you and be glad in his heart]*. Adam met him and asked "What happened in your trial?"; he responded: "I did Teshuvah and was partially forgiven". Adam began to slap himself on the face and exclaimed: "Such is the power of Teshuvah - and I wasn't aware!". He immediately stood up and stated: *Mizmor Shir l'Yom haShabbat*. (B'resheet R. 22:13)

The obvious difficulty in this Midrash is its dissonance; what does our Mizmor have to do with Teshuvah? The answer is partially provided by R. Levi, who reconciles the two traditions about the composition of the psalm:

R. Levi said: This psalm was composed by Adam and it was forgotten during his generation and Mosheh came along and re-composed it on his own name: *Mizmor Shir l'Yom haShabbat, It is good to give thanks to Hashem...* (ibid.)

The word for "give thanks" - להודות, may be associated with the root דרה, also meaning "confess". So far, we understand the textual allusion to Teshuvah. The Mosaic association is also clear, especially within the context of this series of psalms. The first one (ps. 90) focuses on G-d's timelessness as opposed to Man's temporal existence. The second (ps. 91) praises the person who puts all of his faith in G-d and assures him of Divine protection.

What is odd - and this is a bit of a departure from our topic - is the cryptic comment about Mosheh "composing it on his own name". The conventional read of this is to note the acrostic formed by the title: *מזמור שיר ליום השבת* - *voila* - Mosheh. This is appealing, except for the earlier passage in the Midrash. Following this explanation, Mosheh added the title line to Adam's "Teshuvah-psalm" in order to "sign" his re-composition. The upshot of this is that Adam's psalm began with *טוב להודות* - which would solve the content problem but doesn't fit with the words of the Midrash.

I would like to suggest another approach - one that also explains the extension of the citation by R. Levi.

What was Mosheh's name? Although this sounds like "who is buried in Grant's tomb?", it is a perfectly legitimate question. Mosheh, after all, was given this name by his Egyptian guardian (Pharaoh's daughter) several years after his birth.

Parenthetically, the meaning of his name is the subject of consternation since Pharaoh's daughter seems to name him based on drawing him from the water using a Hebrew name-pun (מדרש שם) for an Egyptian name! R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (נצי"ב) explains that in the name *Meses* in Egyptian means "son" (hence *Ra-meses*, meaning "son of the sun-god"). Pharaoh's daughter named him "son", and the text added this מדרש שם after the fact.

What was Mosheh's "real" name? The Rabbis offer several suggestions, including that of R. Meir:

And [the baby's mother] saw him that he was good (כי טוב הוא). R. Meir taught - [Mosheh's] name was טוב. (Sh'mot R. 1:20)

Mosheh signed the opus by putting his own (real) name at the beginning of the text. (This leaves us with the same challenge of defining how much was said by Adam; the verse would make little sense without the word טוב).

Although we have found two possible "signatures" of Mosheh here, the whole notion of signing one's name to a section of canonized text may seem a forced attempt to read in stylings of secular literature and art into T'nakh. This is not the case. Moshe Garsiel has done extensive work in identifying colophons (signatures of authors) within Biblical text.

One example he develops is in the book of Yeshayah. Anyone reading this book would readily see that the first section of the book

ends at chapter 12; from chapter 13 on, the focus of the prophecies is on the fate of the surrounding nations. Chapter 12 is itself a very short section of six verses. Note the words of vv. 2-3:

In a short article (Gevaryahu II pp. 15-22), Garsiel argues that this intense use of the root ישע here is a signature of the prophet ישעיה. (He also points to the word עזי as alluding to the king עזיה during whose reign Yeshayah prophesized.)

הנה אל ישועתי אבטח ולא אפחד
כי עזי וזמרת ייה' ויהי לי לישועה
ושאבתם מים בששון ממעיני הישועה

The second example comes from a proposal raised in a short note by Azriel Rosenfeld (Sinai vol. 110, p.96). Noting that the Midrash (Eikhah R. Petich'ta #27) assumes seven alphabetic acrostics in Eikhah - and there are only six (1 each in chapters 1, 2 and 4 and three in chapter 3), he suggests that we take a fresh look at the final chapter. This last chapter does contain 22 verses, but there seems to be no rhyme or reason behind the opening letters of each.

Rosenfeld suggests that the opening two words זכור ה' allude to the name זכריה; following the opening letter of each of the next five stichs, we have the word הנביא. The author proposes that this is not necessarily a colophon, but an allusion to the murder of Zekharyah the prophet during first temple times that was, according to some traditions, the grievous sin that caused G-d to allow His house to be destroyed. (See Urbach's Haza"l: Pirkei Emunot v'De'ot p. 404). I think that Rosenfeld's observation is keen; we

can do better with the application. The final chapter of Eikhah is clearly a later piece, written at least a generation after the destruction; it is not unreasonable to credit it to Zekharyah the prophet who motivated the completion of the rebuilding of the Mikdash (Ezra 5:2); thus, we may have a colophon that forms the acrostic of the beginning of Eikhah

זכר ה' מה היה לנו
הביט וראה את חרפתנו
נחלתנו נהפכה לזרים
בתינו לנכרים
יתומים היינו אין אב
אמתינו כאלמנות

5.

III

MIZMOR 92: THE TEXT

1. A Psalm Song for the Shabbat day.
2. It is a good thing to give thanks to Hashem, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High!
3. To declare Your loving kindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night,
4. Upon an instrument of ten strings, and upon the harp, to the melody of the lyre.
5. For you, Hashem, have made me glad through Your work; I will triumph in the works of Your hands.
6. Hashem, how great are Your works! And Your thoughts are very deep!
7. A boorish man does not know; nor can a fool understand this.
8. When the wicked spring like grass, and when all the evil doers flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed forever;
9. But you, Hashem, are most high for evermore.
10. For, behold, Your enemies, Hashem, for, behold, Your enemies shall perish; all the evil doers shall be scattered.

11. But You shall exalt my horn like the horn of a wild ox; I shall be anointed with fresh oil.
12. My eye has seen the downfall of my enemies, and my ears have heard the doom of the wicked who rise up against me.
13. The righteous flourish like the palm tree; he grows like a cedar in Lebanon.
14. Those that are planted in the house of Hashem shall flourish in the courts of our G-d.
15. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing;
16. To declare that Hashem is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

Before addressing the motifs of the text, we will assess the literary structure of the psalm. This is certainly the proper approach, as the specifics (proper translation, poetic devices, word associations etc.) all fall into place within the overall structure that is both deliberate and - as is usually the case in T'nakh - elegant.

Ignoring the superscription (v. 1), there are fifteen verses that comprise the body of the text. Significantly, the middle of those verses (#9) is made up of only four words, one of which is G-d's Name. If we then divide the body of the psalm into two even halves, using v. 9 as the "fulcrum", we arrive at two even halves of 7 verses each; each half contains three mentions of G-d's Name, totaling seven (with the "fulcrum" verse). We will argue that each of these "halves" further divides into three sections each - and these sections correlate in a "mirroring" fashion. In the final result, we not only have seven mentions of G-d's Name, two stanzas of seven verses each, but a total of seven segments to the psalm. The association with Shabbat begins to become clearer. (One further numerical symmetry and elegance has been pointed out by Bazak - each half contains 52 [26*2] words. This is significant, in his view, since 26 is the numeric value of G-d's Name).

III ANALYZING THE TEXT

A: STANZA #1 (vv. 2-8)

1. Segment A1: (vv. 2-4)

טוב להדות לה' ולזמר לשמך עליון
להגיד בבקר חסדך ואמונתך בלילות
עלי עשור ועלי נבל עלי הגיון בכנור

That these three verses comprise a self-contained unit is self-evident. The first verse operates as a topic sentence for the other two, to wit: *It is good to give thanks to Hashem* (to declare...every night) *and to sing to Your name, O Most High* (upon an instrument...of the lyre).

The first two verses employ a technique commonly used in Biblical poetry known as "gapping". A clause is presented and the subsequent clause builds upon the first, eliding words that have already appeared and assuming their continued effect. In our case, the word "good" applies to the second clause of v. 2 - *It is a good thing to give thanks to Hashem, and (It is a good thing) to sing praises to Your name, O Most High!* This is technically referred to as "forward gapping"; when a verse omits the repeating word in the earlier phrase, relying on its mention in the second stich, this is "backward gapping".

Although the Halakhah (BT Berakhot 12a) infers from v. 3 that a mention of G-d's steadfast faith must be mentioned every morning and our faith in Him be declared every evening, the simple read is that the psalmist is averring that it is good to always be praising G-d. Note Yehoshua 1:8 - that you meditate upon [the Torah] day and night, which is understood to mean constantly (see, however, R. Yose's application in BT Menahot 99b). Weiss (Emunot v'De'ot b'Mizmorei T'hillim, p. 144) maintains that the pair *בקר-לילות* forms a *merismus*; it means "always."

The shifting in v. 2 from referring to G-d in the third person (*it is good to give thanks to Hashem*) to a direct address (*and to sing to Your name*) shouldn't bother us; the psalmists were comfortable with this "flexibility" in their compositions. What does seem a bit odder is the switch from singular (*בקר* - morning) to plural (*לילות* - evenings). Berlin (Grammatical Aspect of Biblical Parallelism, HUCA 50, pp. 30-35) points out that the phenomenon of word-pairs in which one is singular and the other plural is not at all uncommon.

Each instrument in v. 3 is introduced with the poetic alei. An asor is a ten-stringed lyre (nevel), such that the proper term is נבל עשור (see T'hillim 33:2, 144:9). The first half of the verse is a *hendiadys* (meaning “one that is two”), where the two components of the instrument (the noun - נבל and its adjective עשור) are split into two separate phrases.

As we demonstrated in our third installment in the Hallel series, the word *higayon* in Biblical Hebrew means “speech” or “vocalization” (this led us to reevaluate the common translation of T'hillim 19:15). Therefore, the הגיין בכנור means singing which accompanies the harp. Weiss (ibid. p. 145) suggests that הגיין may be a specific musical direction. (The combination הגיין בכנור is unmatched in T'nakh, therefore we have no contextual clues to help us here.)

This first segment of the psalm might be titled ***Singing to G-d***.

2. Segment A2: (vv. 5-7)

כי שמחתני ה' בפעלך במעשי ידיך ארנן
מה גדלו מעשיך ה' מאד עמקו מחשבתך
איש בער לא ידע וכסיל לא יבין את זאת

The justification for this division is also clear from the text. These three verses provide the motivation for the above-mentioned singing: The psalmist's awareness of the profundity of G-d's creation (and/or His ongoing activity in the world) and his concomitant appreciation that not everyone is privy to this revelation.

פעליך stands in designed apposition to פועלי און (vv. 8, 10); as opposed to those who act evilly in the world, G-d's actions are constructive. This apposition supports the understanding that the praise given to G-d in the first segment is not due to the wonders of primordial creation but rather out of appreciation for His ongoing benevolence with the world.

The amazement expressed with the opening מה in v. 6 is the reaction to the reflection of v. 5. Note the polar correspondence of גדלו and עמקו. The “depths” recognized by the psalmist imply two things: The profundity of G-d's actions and the inability of Man to perceive them.

The final verse in this segment is a piece of the appreciation; to explain this, we need to step away from T'hillah 92.

The Gemara (BT Sotah 40a), presuming that it is improper for the congregation to remain silent when the Shaliach Tzibbur says מודים אנחנו לך (“we give thanks”) in the public T'fillah. Asking what the congregation should say at that time, several opinions are proffered. R. Papa, in a familiar role, maintains that we should say all formulas (see BT Berakhot 11b, 59a, 59b, 60a, Megillah 21b); hence, the combination recitation is known as מודים דרבנן.

The first formula suggested is the version preferred by Rav:

מודים אנחנו לך על שאנו מודים אנחנו לך
We thank You that we thank You.

There are several ways to understand this cryptic phrase. The simplest is that we recognize that our relationship with haKadosh Barukh Hu - the sensitivity to His creation and ongoing interaction with the world and the wherewithal and vehicle to properly thank Him - is itself worthy of gratitude.

After our psalmist proclaims his deep and abiding awareness of the depth of G-d's wisdom and deeds, he reflects appreciatively that even his meager grasp of this Divine hand is not given to all. Indeed, there is a measure of thanksgiving for having the awareness to perceive the Divine.

It is possible that “that” which the fools do not understand refers forward to the observations of the next verse. Note a similar ambiguity in D'varim 4:44 (compare Rashi and S'forno ad loc.)

We might title this segment ***Awareness of G-d***.

3. Segment A3: (v. 8)

בפרח רשעים כמו עשב ויציצו כל פעלי און להשמדם עדי עד

There are numerous citations in T'nakh where Man is compared to grass (see, inter alia, Yeshayah 40:6-8 , T'hillim 102:12); this comparison is always negative. Just as the grass grows aimlessly, so is Man's life aimless and without purpose. Just as it is the appearance and sprouting of the grass which leads to its destruction, so does Man's appearance in the world (or on a center stage in society and/or history) lead to his downfall. This sentiment need not be general about all mankind; the righteous and sagacious are purposeful and their appearance in the world is a blessing to the world and themselves. Clearly, then, this analogy is apt for the wicked and mindless people - both the כסיל (fool) of v. 7 and the רשע of v. 8.

The success of the wicked is temporary; just as the grass sprouts after the rain but wilts under the heat of the sun, so does the wicked one sprout when opportunity knocks - but that very opportunism is the cause of his destruction. This explains the lamed prefix before the last clause - they sprout in order to be utterly destroyed.

This mini-segment might be titled ***Self-Destruction of the Wicked***.

X: FULCRUM (v. 9)

ואתה מרום לעלם ה'

As opposed to the wicked ones who sprout only to be destroyed, Hashem is מרום (which may mean במרום [accusativus loci]). There are two appositions established here:

- 1) The wicked ones, for all of their temporary flourishing, are still only as high as grass; Hashem is to be found at the most super-nal of heights.
- 2) The wicked ones sprout and are then destroyed; Hashem's presence is continual and eternal.

Hence, the וַאִי at the beginning of the verse is "vav adversative"; not a conjunct, rather a disjunct. To wit - ***but You, on the other hand, are most high forever Hashem.***

This observation not only stands in distinction to the earlier mention of the wicked ones, it is also the shadow under which the following segment falls.

B: STANZA #2 (vv. 10-16)

1. Segment B1: (vv. 10-12)

כי הנה איביך ה' כי הנה איביך יאבדו יתפרדו כל פעלי און
ותרם כראים קרני בלתי בשמן רענן
ותבט עיני בשורי בקמים עלי מרעים תשמענה אזני

As we found in the verse before the center, this first verse recounts how the enemies of G-d who act against His design of creation are lost and destroyed.

The use of *anadiplosis* (repetition of a phrase - כי הנה איביך ה' כי הנה איביך) serves to create a tricolon in the verse, setting it up in parallel to the tricolon in v. 8.

In justifying the parameters of this segment, we note that the enemies are presented not only in apposition to G-d's eternal loftiness, but also to the success of the righteous (the psalmist is among them). His success is not only measured in outliving the wicked, but also in seeing their downfall.

The raising of the horn is consistently viewed as a sign of military success (see, inter alia, I Sh'muel 2:10 and our notes to T'hillim 97:12 in the 3rd installment in this series). It is the second half of v. 11 that is more difficult to interpret.

Many suggest that בלתי is related to the root בלל, to mix together (specifically with oil - see Vayyikra 2:4); thus the meaning is *I was anointed in fresh oil*. Radak, however, notes that this verb is always transitive and must always act on another - hence he understands the verse to read בלתי ראשי. The Targum renders the word בלתיני - *You have anointed me*; but neither of these additions is found in the text.

Loewenstamm (*Ugarit-Forschungen* 10 pp. 111-113) suggests a different interpretation of the word, one which is not only consistent with the MT but also fits the context of the psalm. Recalling the phrase Sarah used when protesting the possibility of her geriatric pregnancy, she said;

After בלתי (I am grown old) shall I have pleasure...? (B'resheet 18:12)

Loewenstamm understands the בלתי in our verse as a poetic form of the same בלתי - my advanced age. Indeed, the LXX translates the phrase:

μ (and my old age is in fresh oil).

To support this seemingly awkward phrasing, the author comments on the Shemen Ra'anani, citing the translation of Symmachus and the Midrash Shoher Tov, which reads שמן רענן as "a fresh olive tree". In other words, שמן is a cognomen for an olive tree (see Yeshayah 28:1). The psalmist is thanking G-d for his being uplifted and, in his old age, enjoying the youthful prosperity and production of a fresh olive tree. This fits the context of the psalm, as we will see at v. 15.

The שורי in v. 12 is a poetic shortening of שורירי (Rashi, ibn Ezra); i.e. *I will look down (in victory) at those (enemies) who desired to look down at me (in defeat)*. The end of the verse - and the segment - expands G-d's salvation of the psalmist such that he not only will see his enemy's downfall, he will be sufficiently distanced from it to only hear of it.

This segment might be called **Protection of the righteous.**

2. Segment B2: (vv. 13-15)

צדיק כתמר יפרח כארז בלבנון ישגה
שתולים בבית ה' בחצרות אלקינו יפריחו
עוד ינובון בשיבה דשנים ורעננים יהיו

This segment is distinct from the previous one as it doesn't contend with the struggle between the righteous and his enemies; it describes the flourishing of the righteous in and of themselves.

The righteous are compared to the tallest trees of the desert plains (the תמר) and of the mountainous north (ארז) - as opposed to the grass-high "success" of the wicked.

These trees are apparently described in v. 14 as *planted in the house of Hashem* - a difficult image, topographically and geographically speaking. The two trees identified here grow far away from any place that might have been called בית ה' (e.g. Yerushalayim, Shilo, Beit El). Felix (PAAJR #37 pp. 57-58) contends that the central focus in this passage is the olive trees, alluded to in v. 15 - דשנים ורעננים. He points us to T'hillim 52:10:

But I am כזית רענן (like a green olive tree) in the house of G-d..

Not only do we see the association between רענן and olive trees, we also find the comparison between the righteous and an olive tree in the house of Hashem.

We are returned to the difficult phrase in v. 11 and Loewenstamm's solution. Since the psalmist has already praised G-d for giving him youth in his old age, youth which is compared to a fresh olive tree, the expansion to a description of all righteous people fits the idea of the psalm.

Note that the righteous "flower" (יפריחו), corresponding to the "flowering" of the wicked (v. 8).

This segment is surely *The Successful Longevity of the Righteous*.

3. Segment B3: (v. 16)

להגיד כי ישר ה' צורי ולא ע לתה בו

The opening word here להגיד matches the opening word of v. 3 - indeed, we have begun the psalm by praising G-d for the profundity of His actions in this world; we now praise Him for the success of the righteous and the downfall of the wicked.

This final segment might be titled *Declaring G-d's Justice*.

IV

POSTSCRIPT: THE ETERNAL SHABBAT

Now that we have assayed the structure and the text, we are prepared to answer our questions from section I.

It is clear that this psalm is eschatological - speaking of the “final things”, of a proper world where G-d's justice is manifest and where mankind has awareness of that manifestation. The fools are gone and the wicked have perished, while the righteous flourish as “green in their golden years”.

Although there is nothing inherent in the psalm about the weekly Shabbat, the image here is one of the ultimate Shabbat, that never ending day when all of creation has come to perfection. Hence, the doubled title מזמור שיר ליום השבת. We also understand its integration into the (pre-) Shabbat liturgy. Since that time (as we will discuss at greater length in the final installment) is seen as a “window onto redemption” and carries the great potential for universal Ge'ulah, it is an appropriate time to sing the “futuristic” praises of the ultimate Shabbat.

This is also why the Mishnah focused its attention on the title of the psalm - and why it added the commentary. This isn't commentary on the recitation by the Levi'im, rather it is commentary on the text of the psalm and an explanation for the seemingly incongruous superscription.