TEHILIM # 144: A Psalm from the battlefiled

Today, I want to write about a very special Psalm, which I think is very appropriate for a time when our sons and brothers, the soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces, are risking their lives to protect Israel and create a better future for all of us.
I dedicate this *limmud* to them.

The commentators, particularly Radaq, explain that King David composed this Psalm when he was fighting with the Philistines. I think that David probably composed this Psalm *while* in the battlefield. In the midst of the combat. Why? Because the words, the imagery, the prayers, the wishes expressed in this Mizmor are those of a soldier that feels the closeness of the enemy and the possibility of death.
The words of this Psalm do not describe the memories of a battle, but the battle itself: David's feelings, vulnerability, wishes and longings. King David is not a common man. Besides being a King and a soldier, he is also a poet. HaShem granted him the ability to put in words the turbulent flowing of thoughts and emotions traversing his heart and mind in those difficult moments.
But the most important thing that David haMelekh teaches us in this Psalm, what every Jewish solider needs to remember, is that HaShem, our God*"goes to battle with us"*. He is on our side, in the battlefield. Next to every young Israeli soldier. As He was with David. It is this idea, the closeness of HaShem with those who fight to defend Am Israel, what give us strength and hope that Am Israel will emerge victorious from this and every war he will need to fight

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PASUQ 1: *[A Psalm] by King David. Bless is HaShem,my rock. He Who guides my hands in battle, my fingers in combat"*
First, King David blesses God. In other words, he sees God's presence in the battlefield. True, **we** have to fight our wars and we cannot relay on miracles. But , as the Tora said, in times of war **(Deut. 20:4) *"HaShem your God will go with you to fight with you against your enemies, to give you victory."*** HaShem is with His people. Fighting with them against their enemies. David sees Him and he says to HaShem *"You are my rock"*.
The "rock" is essential in battle. The soldier stands behind a rock or a wall to protect himself from the eyes and the arrows of the enemies. HaShem shields the Jewish soldier, like an invisible rock,

and protects them against the enemies weapons. David also says to HaShem:

“You guide my hands…”

when I fight against my enemy in a face-to-face combat, with bare hands, You are there, moving my hands. And when I stretch the bow and hold it still

“You guide my fingers“

to aim my arrows with precision. When I attack the enemy or when I defend myself from the enemies, I know that You are with me.

PASUQ 2 : Now, David haMelekh, praises HaShem further, acknowledging His overwhelming presence in battle.

חסדי ומצודתי משגבי ומפלטי לי מגיני ובו חסיתי , הרודד עמי תחתי

“You are my loving ally. You are my fortress. You are my tower. You are my refuge when I escape [from the enemy]. You are my shield, in which I rely. You will [grant me victory] and make these [hostile] nations surrender”.

PASUQ 3: The battle is intense, fierce and dangerous. David feels that the enemy is close. Armed, thirst of blood and unpredictable. They might have seen him. David knows that although HaShem is present in the battlefield, he still might die. The possibility of death does not represent for David a theological challenge for his conviction that God exists, or that He is present in the battlefield. For David the reality of God outweighs his own reality. And when he realizes that the end might be close he reflects on the value of human life *from the perspective of God.* And asks himslef

ה’ מה אדם ותדעהו בן אנוש ותחשבהו

“HaShem: what is a human creature to deserve your attention?
What is a son of man, to be considered by You?”

PASUQ 4: When his life is danger, David realizes his fragility and his inescapable mortality. He finds himself thinking that perhaps for HaShem humans are too small and insignificant. Why would you HaShem, Master of the Universe, Creator of billions of galaxies, care about us?

אדם להבל דמה ימיו כצל עובר

“A human being is [ephemeral] as a breath; his life is like a passing shadow”

Our lives are so short. Unsubstantial, like a breath. Fugacious, as a shadow. Not even like a tree’s shadow, which slowly grows and disappears thru the day. Rather, life seems now like a passing shadow of a flying bird, which can hardly be perceived. Feeling the end of his life, David or a Jewish soldier, does not question God. He questions himself, if he is worthy of God’s attention. Mainly, if his ephemeral life was worthily for God.

PASUQ 5: Now David prays. A very unusual prayer. A vision of a desperate soldier who sees no escape but a miracle.

ה’ הט שמיך ותרד גע בהרים ויעשנו

“Hashem, open the skies and come down, touch the mountains [where the

enemies are hiding] so they will burn”
More than a prayer David expresses the wishful imagery of a soldier outnumbered by the enemy. Who believes that only “HaShem coming down from heaven” can save his life.
PASUQ: David is vulnerable. And has more prayers/mirages of hope. He wishes that HaShem will fight for him. Using His celestial arrows against his enemies, to spare David’s life.
ברוק ברק , ותפיצם שלח חיציך , ותהומם.
“Crack a lightening and scatter them, send those celestial arrows and panic them”.
שלח ידיך , ממרום פצני והצילני , ממים רבים מיד בני נכר.
PASUQ 7: And if You don’t destroy my enemies, David prays, at least save me. Pick me up from the battlefield, with Your hand. Rescue me from my place and take me to safety.
“Send Your hand from heaven, pick me up and rescue me. Save me from this great danger (=mayim rabbim), from the hand of these foreign [enemies]”
PASUQ 8: Now David haMelekh expresses to HaShem why he deserves a miraculous victory, and the enemy a Celestial defeat. The enemy speaks with arrogance against the Jews and against You, their God. And they also lie shamelessly. They, the Philistines, swore with their right hand that they will live in peace with us, and now the betrayed their word and attacked us.
אשר פיהם , דיבר -שוא וימינם , ימין שקר.
[Save me from the hands of those foreigners] “whose mouths speak with arrogance, and whose right hand is a right hand full of lies”.
PASUQ 9: If You save me, HaShem (or “when” you will save me), I will not be silent. I will dedicate my life to You. I will compose for you a new poem, to sing Your praises:
א-לוהים שיר חדש אשירה לך בנבל עשור אזמרה -לך.
“I will sing a new song to You, that i will sing with the ten strings harp”
PASUQ 10: In that song I will declare the truth: that it was not me who won the battle, but You. You are the One who decides the fortunes of war. The One Who grants victory to the Kings and defeat the enemy
הנותן תשועה למלכים הפוצה את -דויד עבדו מחרב רעה.
“To the One who gives victory to kings, to the One who delivers his servant David, from the deadly sword”
PASUQ 11: David prays to God again. “Spare my life…”
פצני והצילני מיד בני -נכר אשר פיהם , דיבר -שוא וימינם ימין שקר.
“Save me from the hand of those foreigners who speak falsehood in their mouths, and whose right hand is the right hand of lies”.
PASUQ 12: Now comes a very special Pasuq. Still, in the midst of the battle, surrounded by the cruel and violent enemy, David brings to mind his sweetest memories. His thoughts are the daydreams of every Jewish soldier in the most challenging moments of combat, or in the long nights of watch: Home. My family. My children. My peaceful

neighborhood.

אשר בנינו , כנטיעים מגודלים בנעוריהם בנותינו כזוויות מחוטבות , תבנית היכל
מזווינו מלאים מפיקים מזן אל זן צאננו מאליפות מרובבות בחוצותינו

PASUQ 13: While facing killers and assassins in the battlefield, David remembers the refined young Jewish boys of his city. For whom battle is not their pride, but an unwanted necessity. These young boys are polite, refined and educated. Because their parents take good care of them from their early childhood. The Jewish parents raised these boys like “saplings”, young trees that need to be planted upright and carefully trimmed. To grow upward, unbending and strong. David remembers the girls, the young Jewish maidens. They are humble but walk with class and dignity. They are royalty. Raised to be the pillars of a palace (=hekhal). This “palace” is “the Jewish home” in which God is crowned by the parents as the King. Finally, David also remembers the material blessing that HaShem so generously has granted to them.

“Our young sons are like saplings, tended from their youth. Our daughters like straight pillars, able to sustain a palace. Our granaries are full, dispensing food of every kind. Our flocks are in thousands, tens of thousands, in our fields”.

PASUQ 14: Now, David haMelekh makes what is probably the strongest point in his request to God for victory and peace. A request which so much resonates in our present days. We, Israel, have been blessed by You. We now have, Barukh HaShem, enough food and animals. We have beautiful families. We pride ourselves, not of raising little warriors trained to kill, but in raising children who build “palaces” for You, families who live exemplary lives. We despise fights, quarrels, and conflicts. Our neighborhoods are the epitome of peace. There is no robbery, no violence. There is loyalty, trust and respect. In our cities people do not yield or scream at each other. WE LIVE with PROSPERITY and PEACE.

אלופינו מסובלים אין פרץ ואין יוצאת ואין צווחה ברחובותינו.

“Our oxen are loaded [with food], there is no breaching of walls [=robbery], no going out [= unfaithfulness], no cry of distress in our streets.”

WE DO NOT WANT WAR. WE DO NOT NEED WAR. WE ARE NOT LOOKING FOR WAR. WE HATE WAR. AND UNLIKE OUR ENEMIES, WE HATE KILLING.

PASUQ 15 : We are satisfied with what we *have,*
But we are especially HAPPY with what we *are.*
We are AM ISRAEL.
We are the happiest people on earth, because we are the people of HaShem

אשרי העם שככה לו אשרי העם שה ’ אל-היו

“Joyful are those who live like this! Happy are those whose God is HaShem”.

We just want to live in peace. Fulfilling our highest aspiration, The people of Israel, in the land of Israel, with HaShem, our God, the God of Isra

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Master of the Universe, Creator of billions of galaxies, care about us? אדם להבל דמה ימיו כצל עובר “A human being is ephemeral, like a breath; his life is like a passing shadow.” Our lives are so short, unsubstantial like a breath, fugacious as a shadow. Not even like a tree’s shadow, which slowly grows and disappears through the day. Rather, life seems now like a passing shadow of a flying bird, which can hardly be perceived. Feeling the end of his life, David, or a Jewish soldier, does not question God. He questions himself if he is worthy of God’s attention. Mainly, if his ephemeral life was worthy for God. Psalm 5: Now David prays. A very unusual prayer. A vision of a desperate soldier who sees no escape but a miracle. ה’ הט שמיך ותרד גע בהרים ויעשנו “Hashem, open the skies and come down, touch the mountains [where the enemies are hiding] so they will burn.” More than a prayer, David expresses the wishful imagery of a soldier outnumbered by the enemy. Who believes that only “HaShem coming down from heaven” can save his life. Psalm: David is vulnerable. And has more prayers/mirages of hope. He wishes that HaShem will fight for him. Using His celestial arrows against his enemies, to spare David’s life. ברוק ברק , ותפיצם שלח חיציך , ותהומם. “Crack lightning and scatter them, send those celestial arrows and panic them.” שלח ידיך , ממרום פצני והצילני , ממים רבים מיד בני נכר. Psalm 7: And if You don’t destroy my enemies, David prays, at least save me. Pick me up from the battlefield, with Your hand. Rescue me from my place and take me to safety. “Send Your hand from heaven, pick me up and rescue me. Save me from this great danger (=mayim rabbim), from the hand of these foreign [enemies].” Psalm 8: Now David HaMelech expresses to HaShem why he deserves a miraculous victory, and the enemy a Celestial defeat. The enemy speaks with arrogance against the Jews and against You, their God. And they also lie shamelessly. They, the Philistines, swore with their right hand that they would live in peace with us, and now they have betrayed their word and attacked us. אשר פיהם , דיבר-שוא וימינם , ימין שקר. [Save me from the hands of those foreigners] “whose mouths speak with arrogance, and whose right hand is a

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