TEHILIM # 13: Turning despair into optimism

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13: 2 How long, O HaShem, will you forget me? How long will You hide Your face from me?

David HaMelekh, King David, begins this Psalm with what appears to be a complaint to HaShem… There are different opinions as to the circumstances in which this Mizmor was composed. Some rabbis, based on references in this Mizmor to the enemies of David, say that this Mizmor was composed when he was behind enemy lines, surrounded by Gentile adversaries and escaping from the Jews who wanted to kill him in Jerusalem. His situation was desperate, and he did not see any possible solution

13: 3. How long will I struggle with my thoughts [to convince myself that you have not abandoned me], and [for how long] will I suffer this pain in my heart? For how long will my enemies triumph over me?

Beyond its material problems, David HaMelekh suffered from a mental anguish, because perhaps for the first time in his life, he felt that HaShem had abandoned him. David’s feeling can be best understood when we think about something similar that happened to our forefather Yaaqob. When Yaaqob faced Esav

he said that he was afraid (□□□□ □□□□ □□□ □□). Our sages wondered, how could it be that Yaaqob felt afraid of being abandoned by God, since God had promised to protect Yaaqob? The response of our rabbis was that Yaaqob feared that he may no longer deserve the protection of HaShem, because his merits might have been exhausted □□□□ □□□□□ □□□ … Following this line of thought, perhaps King David did not doubt the goodness of HaShem, rather, he doubted if still deserved the help of HaShem.

13: 4. Pay attention to me, and answer me, Hashem, my God. Give light to my eyes, lest I sleep unto death.

According to other opinions, and based on this pasuq (verse), King David was very ill, thinking that his end was near and that he will fall "asleep into death". It is noteworthy that David never doubted the existence of God. And that's why he prayed and pleaded God to pay attention to him.

13: 5. Do not let my enemies declare: "We have won", and rejoice when I collapse.

The commentaries explain that in this psalm King David's problems are described from more to less important. From David HaMelekh's perspective, the most pressing problem was the feeling that HaShem was not listening to him (13, 2). Second, that same thought, conceiving that HaShem had abandoned him, made him feel guilty. He had to fight to overcome those negative thoughts of abandonment (13: 3). And finally, his situation with his enemies. He knew that they would take advantage of these moments of weakness to try to destroy

David.

13: 6. But I trust Your goodness [God]; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation! I will sing to HaShem [praising] by [all] the kindness that he will grant me.

Now comes the final message of this Psalm. The fundamental lesson that David wanted us to learn. David HaMelekh realizes that HaShem has not abandoned him. He perceives that he was driven by a sense of powerlessness, an emotional and spiritual slump. David HaMelekh regains his confidence in God (Emuna) and states his conviction that, in the end, HaShem will save him. He realizes that HaShem's goodness is infinite. Therefore, although our merits may seem insufficient, we can still pray and ask for His intervention.

What caused this change in the attitude of David HaMelekh, this powerful transition between despair and optimism? How could one go from a state of despair to a situation of Emuna in HaShem?

What gave David a renewed spiritual strength were his own words, his Tefila (prayer). By approaching God, even with words that originated in anguish and despair, he reestablished the connection with God. And then King David realized that HaShem had never abandoned him, rather, it was David own despair what did not allow him to feel the presence of God.

That is the great power of Tefila. What makes us feel that HaShem is far from us, what make us think that He is not listening to us, is our own pessimism (□□□□) and inaction. But

when we turn to God, even out of feelings of anguish and despair, we reestablish contact with Him, which allows us to perceive that He is there, and that He can help us. In this sense, the Tefilla (prayer), should not be seen just as words that express our faith and hope in HaShem. Rather, prayer *feeds* our faith and hope in HaShem.