

Aseret Yemei Teshuvah

The Addition of Shir Hama'alot Mima'amakim

Mrs. Sara Malka Winter

During these ten Days of Awe, we insert this Chapter 130 of Tehillim (Psalms) into our liturgy after Yishtabach and preceding the blessings of the morning Shema. It is a chapter that deals with the feeling of despair, of being immersed in sin and trouble--literally from the depths, and yet we emerge with hope and faith that ultimately, G-d's love and forgiveness.

Verse One:

A song of ascents. | שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת מִמַּעַמְקִים
Out of the depths I | קְרָאתִיךָ ה':
call You, Hashem.

What are these depths?

Rav Hirsch tells us that it is double depths. We are in so much trouble, and we actually know that we plunged ourselves to the depths we now find ourselves in. Is there anything more depressing than that?

Rav Elya Lopian actually looks at these depths as the beginning of hope. Every Jew has at the depths of his heart, yearnings and strivings to come close to Hashem, to truly call out to Hashem. The problem is, it is often buried under so much dirt of desire for material and temporary pleasure. What Dovid is telling us, is at my depths, I am always crying out to You, I just need to reveal those depths, dig deep into my soul to find it.

Verse: 2

O Hashem, listen to | אֲד-נִי שְׁמָעָה בְּקוֹלִי
my cry; let Your ears | תְּהַיינָה אָזְנֶיךָ קְשׁוּבוֹת
be attentive to my | לְקוֹל תַּחֲנוּנָי:
plea for mercy.

Sometimes, we turn to G-d and say. 'I know I have sinned so much, I know I am in such low depths, מעמקים, let this at least be a merit for me, that I am calling out to You. Do You hear, that I call to You!?'

Verse 3

If You keep account of | אִם-עֲוֹנוֹת תִּשְׁמְרֶנָּה
sins, O Hashem, | אֲדַנִּי מִי יַעֲמֵד
Hashem, who will
survive?

The name of ה' that is *yud* and *hei* and its numerical value 15 represent the perfection Hashem intended for this world. The fact that this world was formed with the laws of cause and effect. If someone will fall off a cliff, they will accelerate at the approximate rate of 9.8 meters per second squared, until they crash. And saying "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to, I wasn't warned!" None of that really matters at that point. Dovid Hamelech says: Hashem, we beg of you not to use this unforgiving law of nature when it comes to our sins. If you will truly count and keep our sins. Oh Hashem who will stand? And now of course, Dovid Hamelech uses the name of ה' which signifies מידת הרחמים, *mercy*.

Verse 4

Yours is the power to | כִּי-עֹמֵךְ הַסְּלִיחָה לְמַעַן
forgive so that You | תִּנְרָא
may be held in awe.

Radak explains this verse to say: with all the powers Hashem has given to His angels, and celestial beings, He will never give over the power to forgive. And thus we do not turn to other beings to achieve forgiveness. עמך הסליחה, *forgiveness remains with You*, so we continue to

develop our relationships only with You, and hold You in awe.

Malbim explains: a human being will decide whether and to what degree he will forgive based on the perpetrator of the crime. If the crime was not too severe, if the sinner is appropriately repentant, he will forgive. Forgiveness thus lies in the hands of the sinner. But in Hashem's world. We say: Hashem forgive us, because of You, because of Your greatness, Your awesome capacity to forgive *כִּי־עֲמֹן הַסְּלִיחָה*.

Verse 5

I look to the L-RD; I look to Him; I await His word.	<i>קִנִּיתִי ה' קִוְיָה נִפְשִׁי וְלִדְבָרְךָ הוֹחֵלְתִי:</i>
--	---

Malbim defines the difference between *תקוה*, *hope* and *יחול*, *expectation*. We can hope again and again, and there is no limit to our hopes, because they are grounded in our knowledge of what Hashem can do. But *חול* - expectations, we only have for promises Hashem explicitly made: our hopes are founded in our souls, and our expectations are founded in the word of Hashem.

Verse 6

I am more eager for the Lord than watchmen for the morning, watchmen for the morning.	<i>נִפְשִׁי לֹאֲדַנִּי מְשֹׁמְרִים לְבִקֵּר שְׁמֹרִים לְבִקֵּר</i>
---	--

In this verse, Dovid Hamelech expresses what it is that gives him hope, even as he knows that he has sinned, and what can give us hope, even as we have sinned, even as we face our imperfections. *נפשי לה*, *my soul* is for G-d. He made me, and He knew when he made me that I am imperfect. And I remain His, from these depths of my lowness, these depths I caused, I know that I wait for Hashem *לבקר משומרים* and can be sure of G-d's love, of G-d's eternal relationship. It is the bedrock of my existence. As sure as those who wait for morning knowing

that it will come is my clear faith in G-ds eternal love for me.

Verse 7

O Israel, wait for the LORD; for with the LORD is steadfast love and great power to redeem.	<i>יְהוָה יִשְׂרָאֵל אֱלֹהֵי כִּי עִמָּהּ הַחֲסֵד וְהַרְבָּה עֲמֹן פְּדוּת</i>
---	--

Verse 8

It is He who will redeem Israel from all their iniquities.	<i>וְהוּא יַפְדֶּה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכָּל עֲוֹנוֹתָיו</i>
--	--

Radak tells us that Dovid concludes this powerful chapter with a call to action to all of us. Dovid Hamelech now turns to Yisrael - to the Jew in all of us, and entreats us: turn to Hashem, for with Hahsem is kindness and so much salvation.

This is the time of year, when we sometimes feel overwhelmed and scared, especially in our imperfections. We want to run and hide from Hashem. Please wake me up when it is all over and we get to Simchat Torah. But Dovid cries out to us. And tells us: The very fact that you know you have sinned, is the key to your salvation. Turn to Hashem. He can save you from all your *aveiros*, sins. Do not waste this opportunity. What a comforting finale to this chapter that began with so much trepidation. Dovid Hamelech reminds us here, that Hashem will not only forgive us, but redeem us from our iniquities. We can emerge from the *teshuvah* process, not only forgiven and escaping punishment, but redeemed, and pure.