



Psalms, Perek 90: The Eternity of Hashem

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Avishai David

Chapter 90 in Tehillim is a familiar psalm that we recite every Shabbat morning and on Yom Tov in the context of the *Pesukei D'zimra*. We find a striking similarity between this psalm and the piyut of *U'Netaneh Tokef*. The fundamental idea expressed is the transience of man and the eternal nature of the Almighty. "The days of our years are perhaps 70 and if a person merits strength perhaps 80." We know that Moshe lived 120 years. The Ibn Ezra and Radak explain that in this *mizmor*, Moshe speaks about the Jew in exile, whose average life span is 70 years. The Ibn Ezra notes that Moshe made the statement when he was 80 years old. He didn't expect at that point to live to 120.

The psalm can be divided into two possible *schemata*. The first section serves as an introduction. The second section contrasts Hashem's eternal nature with human transience. Hashem is described as *m'olam ve'ad olam* (everlasting) while humanity is depicted as *kilinu shenoteinu k'mo hegah* (Our years are spent like a murmur.) A melancholic despondency seems to pervade. However, in section three there is a noticeable change. We ask Hashem to edify us, help us count our days, guide us to fill them with constructive deeds, and lead us to *teshuva*. No longer do we talk about mortal man but rather about *gadlut h'adam* (the greatness of man). There's a sense of sweetness and pleasantness, of the Divine Presence resting among us.

We can divide the *mizmor* a second way. Verses one through six contrast the eternal nature of Hashem and the transience of man. Verse seven speaks about our failings. Hashem places our sins, both overt and covert, in front of Him. We ask for assistance to do *teshuva*, to use our time wisely, to come closer to Hashem.

The dialectic of this psalm also appears in the piyut of *Unetaneh Tokef*, which serves as the introduction to *kedusha*. The piyut begins with a description of the holiness of the day. Klal Yisrael acknowledge Hashem's awesome kingship. The mood is frightening as the specter of judgment looms. A panoply of horrific punishments are laid out before us. We are but fleeting mortals, like shards of pottery, like brittle grass and dry blossoms that wither and fade. Yet a ray of light shines through. Hashem, filled with compassion, awaits our *teshuva*.

At the end we exclaim, "You Hashem are eternal."

For Hashem, time is infinite. He transcends the past, present, and future. Our repentance coupled with Hashem's compassion can undo our deeds. The Rambam in Parshat Emor tells us that this is the essence of Rosh Hashana. It is a *yom din v'rachamim*, a day of judgment tempered with mercy.

In the *Neilah* prayer we speak of, "*U'motar ha'adam min habeheima*." We speak of the nothingness of man, the notion that man transgresses and falls. But then we note that, out of His love for us, Hashem gave us the gift of a day of atonement. Man can rise to incredible heights of *deveikut Hashem*. Through *teshuva*, we can come back to Hashem.

We see the same dialectic in this psalm. In the first section we speak about Hashem's transcendence. A thousand years is like a day in His eyes. But to us small minded people, "*Zeramtem sheina yehiyu*." In the morning we were ready to sprout, but in the evening we were cut down. Hashem's wrath was upon us. "What is the life of man, but 70 or 80 years of toil." Life ends too quickly. Similarly in

Unetaneh Tokef we say, "*Adam yesodo m'afar v'sofo l'afar*." Man's beginning and end is that of earth.

But there is a second side to him, "*V'tachasreihu me'at m'Elokim*. He was fashioned a just little lower than angels." This is expressed beautifully in the closing segments of the psalm. "*Limnot yameinu ken hoda. Shuva Hashem ad matai*." We no longer speak about the futility of man but of the Jew who serves Hashem and fill his days with Torah and *mitzvot*.

The very beginning of the *mizmor* speaks about *teshuva*, "*Tashev enosh ad daka v'tomar shuvu b'nei adam*." We are called *enosh*. We have no persona. Yet in the second segment we the children of Hashem. We ask Hashem, "*Limnot yameinu kein hodah*." Let us count our days the way You count them. Let us feel a sense of *nitzchiyut* (eternity) as we follow the path You laid out for us.

Many Rishonim understand that the finite nature of man as depicted in this *mizmor* refers to exile. *Galut* is the manifestation of the transience and nothingness of man. *Geulah* is the shift from *afer v'afar* to *gadlut ha'adam*. Therefore in the later sections of this psalm, we find that Moshe speaks of the redemption, namely the idea of eternity, both in terms of the rebuilding of the *Beit Hamikdash* and the Divine Presence resting among us. May we merit that the temporal be transformed to eternity, *katnut hadam* to *gadlut hadam*, and exile to redemption.



Judging Judiciously

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

In our *viduy* confessions on Yom Kippur, one of the sins that we confess is the sin of judgment. While one might think that this sin only applies to judges, it really applies to each of us, for we all tend to make judgments about others. On a deeper level, when we are faced with challenges we must also give “the benefit of the doubt” to Hashem and ascribe good motives to Him.

The Keter Meluchah gives us some guidelines how we can work on judging others favorably. First, we must understand that much of our sinful behavior comes from deeply rooted negative characteristics, such as arrogance and jealousy. The first step must be to understand ourselves, to know which trait is our obstacle and work on eradicating it. The Ramchal writes: “The basis of man’s service to God is that he clarify what his obligation is in his world.” Rav Dessler explains this idea using a metaphor of a symphony. The beauty of a symphony lies in each instrument playing its assigned part in unison with the others and not in usurping the notes of others. Similarly, each of us should identify our role and the characteristic we must work on so our role becomes harmonious with the music of the world.

Rabbi Schapira quotes from Pirkei Avot, “Do not judge your fellow until you have reached his place.” The Sefat Emet adds, “You never

will reach his place,” you’ll never have his background, his challenges, his strengths and his weaknesses. Therefore, always give him the benefit of the doubt. Rebbetzin Felbrand in Grow! notes that we tend to judge ourselves by our intentions, perhaps recognizing unusual circumstances that changed the outcome. But do we do the same for others? Do we ascribe good intentions to others, and find extenuating circumstances for their behavior? We should. We can significantly work on building the attribute of humility by practicing judging others favorably. This involves stepping out of oneself and seeing other possibilities and points of view. Rebbetzin Felbrand uses an interesting analogy to explain this. We each have a pair of binoculars. Depending on which end we look through, objects will look either enlarged or minimized. When we look at our positive characteristics, we look through the lens that will enlarge the objects, and when we look at our faults, we look through the minimizing lens. On the other hand, we tend to do the reverse when looking at others. Turn the binoculars around. Maximize the good in others and minimize their faults.

To be happy, writes Rabbi Reiss, we must learn to reframe every situation so that it has a positive spin. Sometimes we are like the child looking through the keyhole seeing someone cutting up beautiful cloth. “Oh no, he’s ruining the cloth,” moans the child. But if the person

cutting is a master tailor, he might be cutting the cloth to make a beautiful new suit for the king. When Hashem “cuts” us, it may be the first step in creating a beautiful and important part of our lives. Therefore, we ask Hashem to let us see the good in everything.

Rav Aaron Soloveichik discusses the dual personalities within each of us. We each have our pure, beautiful essence that strives for nobility and holiness. But we also have conflicting, animal-like instincts that push us toward sin. The way to bring a person to *teshuvah* is to let him see that his core is pure and sacred while his sins were only influenced by the animal invading his body. Show a sinner his inner spiritual strength and he will return. The Tallelei Chaim notes that one day a year on Yom Kippur, the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies where he, as the representative of the people, came in closest contact with absolute purity and sanctity. On this holy day, each of us can enter into our innermost, deep, pure core and recognize our own sanctity, and that any sins attached to us are completely superficial. With this recognition, it becomes easier to reframe our actions and do *teshuvah*. Further, writes Rebbetzin Felbrand, Hashem mirrors our behavior. If we judge others favorably, Hashem will in turn look for ways to judge us favorably.

Rebbetzin’s Perspective Q&A Class #3

Based on a Naaleh.com Q&A by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Question:

We hear so much about spending more time focusing on greater goals and finding one’s true purpose in life. Is this purpose predetermined by G-d or do we create it? Is there a way to know if a person is fulfilling his or her mission?

Answer:

Hashem gives you your talents, abilities, gender, family, and the time and place in which you find yourself. All of these things both limit and broaden the direction you have to take. If you have specific talents you are meant to develop them. If you live in a specific

place in which the needs of your society require something, that may be your calling. If you grew up in a family or an environment where you learned certain positive or negative lessons, you are meant to share them. Hashem gives you the potential, time, place, and surroundings and you are expected to choose how and whether to use them. Your mission is specific. Limiting yourself to improving your *middot* is not where it’s at. *Middot* are universal. You need to critically examine what you can contribute using the gifts you were given.

This is why the first chapter of Shema is in

singular form. Hashem addresses us individually because everyone’s resources, both inner and outer, are unique. This is where you are meant to discover your mission. Hashem will help you along the way. He’ll give you opportunities. You have to keep your eyes open and be willing to say yes. Begin with whatever Hashem puts in front of you. Sometimes you might notice a deficiency, but you may not want to fill it thinking it just isn’t ‘you.’ In such situations Hashem is telling you, “This is the potential you. Stretch beyond your comfort zone, dig deep inside yourself, you might discover this is your unique mission.”