

## Tehillim 39: The Silent Cry of the Suffering Mortal

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dr. Esther Shkop

Psalm 39 isn't an expression of joy or a song of praise but rather a contemplative *mizmor* reminiscent of Sefer Iyov. "*Lamanetzeach l'diditun...*" According to Rashi, *l'diditun* can be explained in three ways. It is the name of one of the Leviim who dedicated this *mizmor* to David Hamelech, or it is the name of an instrument, or according to a *Midrash in Kohelet Rabbah* it's a dirge about the religious persecution of the Jews.

"I will guard my mouth so long as the wicked one stands before me." Who is the wicked one? *Metzudas David* says it's the person who persecutes me and I won't give him the satisfaction of expressing my anguish. *Rashi* tells us, so long as the evil ones are in front of me, I don't dare speak my heart or publicly learn Torah or pray.

"*Umidaat yamai mah hi-* And the measure of my days when it is..." This hints to somewhat of a death wish. How long will we be troubled and persecuted? When will this end? If we know it will be only a short time more, we can hold on, but if it seems it will never end, it

becomes unbearable. "Surely all vanity is in every man; this is his condition forever. Man walks but in darkness; all that they stir is but vanity; he gathers yet he knows not who will bring them in. And now, what have I hoped, O Lord? My hope to You... Save me from all my transgressions; do not make me the reproach of an ignoble man." As the body grows older it begins to decline. We are nothing but a breath of hot air, compared to Hashem. Nevertheless, if man believes that he was created in the image of Hashem and that his life has meaning, he can accomplish great things.

There's an internal war going on within us, a sense of mortality and our insignificance and at the same time a consciousness that our minds can create new worlds and leave an imprint that will outlast us. We spend our lives accumulating nonsense and when we're gone, we cannot know where it will go. The psalmist begs- Don't relegate me to the fate of a naval. In *Mishlei* a naval is a fool, but in other places in *Tehillim* it refers to an obscene person. The naval says there's no Almighty or justice, do what you want because there's no accountability.

The naval knows that some things are illegal but denies that there's anything immoral about it. The issue is not what you do but about getting caught.

"*Ne'elamati-* I made myself mute." I won't open my mouth because I recognize that whatever is happening to me, you made it happen, and I have no choice but to accept it. I know it's coming from You and I can only plead to remove my affliction. I recognize that sometimes disease and suffering comes from Hashem as a reproof as Chazal tell us, "If a person sees suffering coming upon him, let him examine his deeds." It's a wakeup call. "You have caused his flesh to decay as if by a moth." We love our bodies and spend too much time taking care of it and giving it pleasure and then it slowly decays as if eaten away by a moth. "Hear my prayer... harken to my cry...for I am stranger with You..." Hashem, don't be silent anymore, for I am just a sojourner and perhaps not just a sojourner, but a settler in another world where what seems important here will no longer be there.

## The Counting of the Omer Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com class by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

Picture a person who was born in Egypt and leaves when he is 18 years old. He survives 40 years in the desert and enters Israel at 58. The land is occupied and divided and he receives his portion. He ploughs the land, plants the seeds and watches his crops grow and then finally reaps his harvest. If after reaching this point he exclaims, "Mission accomplished," says Rav Hirsh, he's missed the point. It's only a start. We finally have the physical means necessary to accomplish our ultimate spiritual mission, but the physical means was never meant to be the goal. That is why the *Torah* connects *Matan Torah* to *sefirat ha'omer*.

The *Akeidat Yitzchak* asks, normally we recite the blessing of *Shechiyanu* on a *mitzvah* performed once a year. Why do we not recite it for *sefirat ha'omer*? These days of waiting are challenging. The road to perfection is not easy and if there are still bad *middot* that

need to be uprooted, it means there are still blockages in the way to reach complete attachment to Hashem. Similar to the time period between engagement and marriage, the desire to cling to Hashem is so great, that the time of preparation is almost painful. Therefore, we refrain from reciting *Shechiyanu*.

The *Torah* commands us to begin counting, *Mi'macharat haShabbat*, when the omer was offered until *Shavuot*. The omer was barley, animal fodder and the offering brought on *Shavuot* was wheat, human food. This indicates that this period of time is meant to be a process of growth and preparation to receive the *Torah* where we elevate our animalistic drives and become transformed into a divine like being. *Sefirat ha'omer* is divided in seven weeks. Each week is dedicated to work on one aspect of our character traits corresponding to the seven *sefirot*. Following the concept of, "*Derech erez kadma l'Torah*," there's a need

to perfect ourselves in order to receive the *Torah*. Why is this a prerequisite to connecting to Hashem? The soul naturally clings to Him, but the body can be either a tool or an obstacle to connect to Hashem depending on how we use it. Every *middah* that isn't perfected creates a barrier. As we work on each trait, the soul becomes transparent enabling Hashem's light to come through and creating divine connection. We count 49 days, the numerical value of *lev tov*, a heart that is pure and can cleave to Hashem.

The Shem MiShmuel asks, how can we be asked to become perfect in seven weeks? The *Beis Yisrael* explains that the Jews experienced the awesome greatness of Hashem with the Exodus, the splitting of the Sea, and the revelation of the *Shechina* on *Har Sinai*. As they advanced into the 49 days, they were exposed to the greatness of Hashem in an intense powerful way that created a desire to

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subjugate themselves to Him. The revelation was beyond nature, a gift of clarity from above, that had them searching how they could continue to preserve this intense connection to Hashem; where His presence would guide them in every way and where they could become true servants to Him. This is what the Jewish nation experienced in these weeks and this is what we are supposed to strive for, to accept Hashem as

our king, to make a commitment that He will be our guiding light in every way.

Hashem created us with free choice but he wants us to give that independence back to Him, to subjugate ourselves to His will so that we can connect to Him. This process of elevation is pivotal and a key component to *Kabalat HaTorah*. We offer the omer hatenufa by raising it in four directions much like the

*kavanot* we have in mind when we recite *Shema*, as we accept the yoke of Hashem, acknowledging Him as King of the four corners of the earth. By overcoming our physicality, we become one with Him. The essence of these days is to work on *yirat shamayim*, to be a true servant of Hashem by refining our *middot* and in this way we will merit to accept the *Torah* and become one with Hashem.

## The Weightiest Mitzvah of Them All: Part 5E

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Justin Treger

The Shulchan Aruch defines how much a person may give to *tzedakah*. If your means enable you to give openhandedly, you can give according to the needs of the poor. This means the obligation of *tzedakah* only ends when poverty is eliminated. You must help the poor person as much as it takes to get him financially solvent. And if you don't have the means, then the choicest way is to give 20% or 1/5 of one's earnings to *tzedakah*. Ten percent is average, less than that is termed a bad eye and ungrateful. Why ungrateful? Wouldn't stingy or unkind be a better description? If a person is tight in the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*, it shows a lack of appreciation for how his finances were earned. He's still in the mode of thinking it's the work of his own hands and hard effort, when in fact it's Hashem's *bracha* and this will increase as a byproduct of the *tzedakah* he gives.

The Shulchan Aruch gives us a cap on how much we may give and the Rema adds, that one shouldn't give more than 20% percent so as not to become dependent on other people. A Jew who truly believes in Hashem's promise of *bracha* as a result of giving *tzedakah* needs to be restrained lest he give too much. In fact, this *mitzvah* is the telling factor of where one is holding in *emunah*. Our mindset should always be how we can give more not less.

Who should one give to? Think to yourself, if Hashem gave me this money it must mean it's destined to go to someone only I know needs it or to someone only I can give to. The *Shulchan Aruch* says, look around you. Are your parents, married children, siblings, or other relatives in need? The dignity afforded to them by receiving money from close family where it remains an intimate secret, where they need not degrade themselves to ask help

from a public service organization, is something you can give them. So family is priority. If that's taken care of, then think what's important to you, where is there a gap where funds are needed that others aren't giving? Who are the people and causes around you where you can make a unique difference?

Become a *rodeph tzedakah*, someone who looks out for opportunities to give. The moment you decide to give 20% to *tzedakah* and you have to spend it, this will happen automatically. On the scale of life changes, committing to give 20% is a small decision. Of course, you'll have to get your family's consent, there will be things you'll have to cut back on, but once you've done it the *bracha* will begin to flow into your home and you'll never look back.