YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***TEHILLIM* (SERIES II)**

**Rav Elchanan Samet**

**Shiur #15: Psalm 121 - "I Will Lift Up My Eyes To The Mountains"**

**A Traveler's Blessing**

1 A *Ma'alot* poem.

I I will lift up my eyes to the mountains.

From where will my help come?

II 2 My help comes from the Lord,

Who made heaven and earth.

III 3 He will not suffer your foot to stumble;

He who keeps you will not slumber.

IV 4 Behold, He shall neither slumber nor sleep,

He who keeps Israel.

V 5 The Lord is your keeper:

The Lord is your shade upon your right hand.

VI 6 The sun shall not smite you by day,

Nor the moon by night.

VII 7 The Lord shall preserve you from all evil:

He shall preserve your soul.

VIII 8 The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in

From this time forth, and for evermore.

### Introduction

Psalm 121, the second of the *Ma'alot* poems, is recited on various occasions, and it is one of the best known psalms.[[1]](#footnote-1) Its words are easily understood and do not give rise to exceptional exegetical difficulties.

Nevertheless, there is a certain lack of clarity regarding the background that constitutes the foundation of the entire psalm. What is the situation out of which our psalm grew? What is the distress for reason of which the speaker seeks help? The medieval and modern commentaries struggled with this question, each with his own proposal, so that studying their words leads to some confusion.

It is not always necessary to define the nature of the distress of the speaker in a psalm; his distress may intentionally have been left vague, and it may not be a necessary condition for understanding the psalm.[[2]](#footnote-2) There are, however, no small number of psalms that are based on a typical but distinctive human situation, which is reflected in the psalm's manner of expression. The distress stemming from enemies in pursuit of the speaker is not the same as distress owing to illness, and the torment of a repentant sinner is not the same as fear of war, and so on. In such cases, it falls upon the commentator to identify the **type** of distress constituting the background of the psalm in order to clarify the psalm's meaning and objective. We are, of course, not referring to a historical identification of some specific incident in the psalmist's life.[[3]](#footnote-3)

It is possible that with respect to our psalm as well, identifying the situation that underlies its composition is important for understanding it. We will therefore open our study with a clarification of the background of the psalm.

It is true that in order to formulate a well-based position on the question of the background of the psalm as a whole, one should first explain all of its words and verses, and also engage in its literary analysis, for often a psalm's background becomes clarified only in the course of such an analysis. But in the case of our psalm, what is important for this matter is the interpretation of the first stanza, which serves as the point of departure for the rest of the psalm.

We will therefore devote section I of this study to an analysis of the opening stanza of our psalm and to a clarification of the background of the psalm as a whole, as it reveals itself in this stanza. We will then continue to explain the psalm based on the conclusion that we reached with respect to the background of the psalm, while constantly testing the validity of that conclusion in the other stanzas of the psalm.

### Stanza I

I will lift up my eyes to the mountains.

From where will my help come?

The question, "From where will my help come," without a doubt expresses the distress of the person who is speaking in this stanza in first person singular. He is need of help, and wonders from where it will come.

What is the background of the speaker's distress? Why is he in need of help? Many suggestions have been proposed to answer this question. Some of the commentators provided an answer that is not based on the content of our psalm, but rather stems from a certain assumption regarding the content of the *Ma'alot* songs as a whole.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The Radak, for example, at the beginning of Psalm 120, the first of the *Ma'alot* songs, explains the word *ma'alot* as follows:

Going up from exile, for Israel will in the future go up from the lands of exile to *Eretz Yisrael*. These songs were formulated as if stated by all of the exiles. And mention is made in them of **the distress of the exile,** and mention is made in them of **the hope for deliverance** and the promise that it will come in any event.

In accordance with this understanding, he explains that our psalm as well was authored by those suffering the distress of the exile, who take comfort in the protection that was promised to Israel in the lands of their exile. He explains the last verse in our psalm as follows:

"The Lord shall preserve your going out" – from the exile, "and your coming in" – to *Eretz Yisrael* in peace.

Other medieval commentators followed the same or a similar path.[[5]](#footnote-5) These commentators searched the psalms of *Tehillim*, as well as other places in the Bible, for consolation for the people of Israel from the distress of exile that hovered over them, and for an expression of the hope for redemption from the exile.

Some commentators understood the *Ma'alot* songs as psalms recited by those who went up to Jerusalem for the pilgrimage festivals, and they explained our psalm accordingly. Tz. P. Chajes writes in the introduction to his commentary on our psalm:

According to many, this is a song of those going up [to Jerusalem] for the pilgrimage festivals, and "the mountains" in verse 1 are the mountains of Zion to which [the speaker's] eyes are lifted up.

It is difficult, however, to see in these explanations the simple meaning of our psalm. There is no hint whatsoever in our psalm to the exile or to *Eretz Yisrael*. It is also difficult to explain it as a communal psalm recited by Israel's exiles or by pilgrims arriving in Jerusalem.

Rather, the plain sense of our psalm indicates that it is dealing with **a private matter.** It begins with an account of the speaker's distress, "I will lift up **my eyes** to the mountains; from where will **my help** come**,"** and in the continuation it discusses how God watches over him.

The first exegetical question that any commentator must answer in accordance with his position on the background of the psalm concerns the meaning of the words that open the psalm: "I lift my eyes to the mountains." For what purpose does the speaker lift his eyes to the mountains? And what is the connection between lifting up one eyes to the mountains and the search for help that is immediately expressed in the continuation of this stanza: "From where will my help come"?

S. D. Goitein, in his commentary to our psalm, answers this question:[[6]](#footnote-6)

Why "to the mountains"? They are the horizon, upon which is supposed to appear he who will come to help, to rescue, or at least to herald the imminent salvation. Therefore, we find in *Yeshayahu* 52:7: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger of good tidings, who announces peace, the harbinger of good tidings, who announces salvation." But our psalmist did not see the feet of messenger on the mountains. "From where will my help come…” From the mountains, from the disappointing horizon, he lifts his eyes **to heaven:** "My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." The chain – "my help" at the end of stanza I; "my help" at the beginning of stanza II comes to highlight the contrast.[[7]](#footnote-7)

According to this explanation, our psalm was authored by someone suffering some personal distress and hoping for help. The nature of the distress is not defined, and such definition is not necessary. This explanation does not answer, nor does it try to answer, the question that we formulated in the introduction to this study: What is the nature of the situation out of which our psalm grew? What type of distress finds expression in our psalm?

The next explanation that we wish to propose for the opening words of our psalm, "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains," ties the distress to a particular situation.

The speaker in stanza I is about to set off on a long journey. He will have to climb the high mountains that rise up on the far horizon, and his heart is filled with concerns about the dangers that might present themselves on the road. The sight of the distant mountains to which he lifts up his eyes threaten him!

This explanation of the opening line of the psalm is the very opposite of the previous explanation. The lifting of eyes to the mountains is not meant to find help and a good messenger, but rather it causes the psalmist distress and fear. The two lines in stanza I must be connected as follows: "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains" – in anticipation of my imminent taking of leave – and I will think, "From where comes my help," when I will have to climb them?[[8]](#footnote-8)

The distress of the speaker in stanza I is the familiar human distress of a person about to set off on a long journey, filled with the unknown. Our psalm is then sort of "Traveler's Prayer" (*Tefillat Ha-Derekh*), or more precisely, a "Traveler's Blessing" (*Birkat Ha-Derekh*), for a person who is about to set off on a long journey.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Modern man is generally unaware of the distress experienced by a person setting out on a distant journey in ancient times. This is because of the relative safety of today's travel, and because of the sophistication of modern modes of transportation; if he sets out on a journey on foot, he does so for his pleasure. One who set out on a journey in the distant past did not do so for the sake of fun and entertainment. A person would leave his house out of economic, familial, or personal necessity. Usually he would set out on foot, often alone, and he would cover great distances in unfamiliar places. Serious concern would accompany him on his travels. How will he save himself from the dangers lying in wait along the roads, which were always presumed to be perilous?[[10]](#footnote-10) Will he arrive safely at his destination? Will he merit returning home in peace?

The clearest case in the Bible of a person setting out on a distant journey while filled with apprehensions is that of Yaakov, who sets out with his staff from Be'er-Sheva to go to Charan (*Bereishit* 28):

10 And Yaakov went out from Be'er Sheva, and went toward Charan.

11 And he lighted on a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them under his head, and lay down in that place to sleep.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The promises that God makes to Yaakov in his dream reflect the concerns that nested in his heart as he set out on his journey:

15 And, behold, I am with you, **and will keep you** in all places to which you go,

**And will bring you back** to this land; **for I will not leave you.**

Yaakov's concerns are reflected even more strongly in the oath that he takes in the continuation of the story:

20 If God will be with me, **and will keep me** in this way that I go,

And will give me bread to eat, and clothing to wear,

21 **So that I come back** to my father's house **in peace**…

In the *midrash* (*Bereishit Rabba* 68), several Sages offer various different opening expositions (*petichot*) at the beginning of *Parashat Vayetzei*, on the verse, "And Yaakov went out from Be'er Sheva."[[12]](#footnote-12) R. Shemuel bar Nachman opens with, “A *Ma'alot* song. I will lift up my eyes to the mountains…"He expounds our entire psalm in reference to Yaakov's situation at that time. His choice of our psalm as an "opening exposition" for that event teaches us that he understood the background of our psalm as we have proposed here.[[13]](#footnote-13)

In our determination of the background of our psalm and its interpretation, we follow two modern Jewish commentators, Aharon Pollack and Amos Chakham. In his commentary to *Tehillim*, *Al Ha-Setumot Be-Mizmor*, Pollack writes in reference to our psalm:[[14]](#footnote-14)

The content of the song gives the impression of a farewell party held in the house of someone planning to set out on a journey… It is well known that from ancient times the roads in the East posed a danger to travelers in general, and to merchants in particular… It has been suggested, therefore, that anyone planning to set out on a journey would invite guests to his house… so that they should escort him with their blessings and wish him a successful trip… The poet describes such a party.

Pollack, who was familiar with the Arab lifestyle in *Eretz Yisrael* and used this familiarity to explain various verses in the Bible, adds to what he said above:

Know that even today such parties are common among the Arabs… The party usually ends in this fashion: The host proclaims: “May it be God's will that I see your faces in peace” (that is to say: O, that when I return, I should find you well and healthy.) The guests respond: “May God take you out in peace, and bring you back in peace!”

In his commentary to the last verse of our psalm, "The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in," Pollack writes:

This expression testifies like a hundred witnesses that we are dealing here with one who is setting out on a life-threatening journey.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Amos Chakham, in his *Da'at Mikra* commentary to our psalm, explains the beginning of the psalm (stanza I) in this way:

"I lift up my eyes to the mountains" – I raise my eyes and gaze upon the mountains, and I ask myself, "From where will my help come?" From where can I possibly receive help? This verse expresses the sentiments of a man going on a journey through the mountains. He lifts up his eyes toward the mountains through which he will pass, and he asks himself: Is there anyone among these mountains who will come to my assistance and will protect me from the dangers that lie in store for travelers? It is also possible that the questioner is going on his journey alone, and he looks at the mountains to see whether there is someone there who will accompany him on his journey.

In the conclusion to his commentary on the psalm, Chakham writes:

From the expressions of blessing used, it seems probable that the psalm is basically a farewell blessing given to someone about to set out on a long journey that passes through mountains… The traveler lifts up his eyes to the mountains through which he intends to pass and asks himself in language that hints at trepidation in the face of dangers that are liable to beset travelers: "From where will my help come?"

We will adopt this conclusion, that our psalm was stated against the background of the speaker's imminent setting out on a journey. Over the course of our study, we will, as promised, test whether the interpretation of the next stanzas of our psalm accords with this conclusion, and whether the analysis of the psalm as a whole supports it.

### II. Stanza II

My help comes from the Lord,

Who made heaven and earth.

The questioner who asked in stanza I in first person singular, "From where will my help come," and expressed thereby his fear of the future, answers his own question in stanza II, "My help comes from the Lord…" With these words, he attempts to allay his fears: The Lord, who made heaven and earth, will come to my help wherever I go and wherever I will be in need of aid and assistance.

Here a question arises: If the speaker knew the answer, why was there room for a question, and if he did not know it, where did he suddenly find the answer?

It would seem that the answer that the speaker gives himself in stanza II is taken from the treasury of wise adages and sayings that he had learned from his childhood. When he was overcome by distress and concern "from where will my help come," the well-known formulation of trust, "My help will come from the Lord, who made heaven and earth," rose up from the depths of his memory and entered his consciousness, restoring his calm.

Support for this suggestion can be brought from a verse that is similar to our verse at the end of another *Ma'alot* song, psalm 124 (v. 8): **"Our help is in the name of the Lord,[[16]](#footnote-16) who made heaven and earth."** In psalm 124, this call of encouragement and trust is formulated in the plural and in all-embracing style: The Lord, who made heaven and earth, whose power and might fill the universe, will come to our assistance should that be necessary. The speaker in our psalm turned this formula into the singular, so that his cry of trust would accord with his mood at that time and with the question that he raised previously in the singular, "from where will **my help** come."

This is not the only place in Scripture where the speaker makes use of a well-known adage or saying in order to fortify himself in a time of stress.[[17]](#footnote-17)

### III. Stanza III

He will not suffer your foot to stumble;

He who keeps you will not slumber.

In this stanza, there is a switch in speakers. It is no longer the person who is about to set out on a distant journey who had spoken in stanzas I-II in first person. Stanza III is spoken by a different person, who turns to the first speaker in second person and blesses him that God will protect him on his trip.

Not only in stanza III does he speak to the person embarking on a journey; he continues to bless him in stanzas V-VIII. In all four of these stanzas (which constitute the second half of the psalm), the speaker turns to his colleague in second person and bestows blessings upon him, which are a continuation of his words in stanza III.[[18]](#footnote-18)

"He will not suffer" and "He will not slumber" are two blessings that the person pronouncing the blessing in stanza III bestows upon the traveler. His blessings are connected to the words of his colleague in stanza II, so that he is saying to him as follows: May it be the will of God, whom you mentioned in your previous words ("My help will come from the Lord"), that He not allow your feet to stumble.[[19]](#footnote-19) And may it be His will that "He who keeps you" will not slumber, but rather that He diligently protect you without interruption.

Do these two blessings accord with the background of our psalm as we have explained it? These blessings are certainly fit to be bestowed upon one who is setting out on a distant journey, his heart filled with concerns.

One of the most common and serious dangers facing one setting out on a foot journey is the possibility of suffering an injury to his feet. A fractured leg, or a sprain, or even a dislocation, can compel the traveler to stop, and leave him stuck in the field, helpless and suffering with pain. To counter this, our psalm includes the blessing: "He will not suffer your foot to stumble." A similar promise is given to one who puts his trust in God in psalm 91:

11 For He shall give His angels charge over you, **to keep you in all your ways.**

12 They shall bear you up in their hands, **lest you dash your foot against a stone.**

Another common problem facing one who has embarked on a journey is the necessity of spending nights out in an open field, exposed to various dangers against which he cannot protect himself.[[20]](#footnote-20) To counter this danger, the person bestowing the blessing blesses him: "He who keeps you will not slumber" – God will watch over you while you sleep, as He does not sleep or slumber.

We see, then, that stanza III greatly reinforces our understanding that the background of our psalm is the imminent departure of the first speaker in the psalm, who sets his eyes on the mountains on the far horizon. Explaining stanza III in connection with some other general and undefined distress, as other commentators have suggested, would be forced.

It should be noted that these two blessings to the traveler describe God's protection in two complementary dimensions: the dimension of place – "He will not suffer your foot to stumble," wherever you go – and the dimension of time – "He who keeps you will not slumber," at any hour of the day.

From the switch in speakers in our psalm, it turns out that stanzas I-II and stanza III constitute sort of a dialogue between the person about to set out on a journey and the person giving him his blessing. A clear switch in speakers in the psalms of *Tehillim* is a relatively rare phenomenon, which gives the psalm a dramatic nature. We discussed this at length in our study of psalm 91, which we analyzed as a drama.

Every "dramatic psalm" gives rise to several questions:[[21]](#footnote-21)

1. What is the relationship between the various speakers? And what is the relationship between the things that they say to each other?
2. How does the design of the psalm as a dialogue contribute to the exposure of its structure and to the understanding of the internal development of its principal idea?
3. Why was a dramatic design chosen to express the idea of the psalm? Would it not have been possible to express that idea in "one voice," as is the case with the great majority of the psalms of *Tehillim*?

We will begin our discussion of these questions by examining the relationship between stanza II and stanza III. What is the meaning of this dialogue? What is the relationship between stanza II, the words of the person about to set off on his journey, "My help will come from God," and the words of the person blessing him in stanza III, "He will not suffer… He who keeps you will not slumber"?

It seems that the person pronouncing the blessing continues the words of trust expressed by the traveler, while specifying two areas in which the traveler will find help from God. Can we point to some fundamental novelty or change in the words of the person bestowing the blessing, as opposed to the previous words of trust in the mouth of the traveler himself?

Let us point to three such novelties:

1. The request for help on the part of the traveler related exclusively to the dimension of place: "the mountains," "from where," "who made heaven and earth." In contrast, the person bestowing the blessing mentions two dimensions of protection, the dimension of place and the dimension of time – total protection.
2. The traveler twice uses the term *ezer*, "help," whereas the person blessing him uses the root *shin-mem-resh*, referring to God as *shomrekha*, "He who keeps you." From here on, the root *ayin-zayin-resh* does not appear again in the psalm, whereas the root *shin-mem-resh* appears as a guide word the entire length of the psalm five more times.

What is the difference between "help" and "keeping"? "Help" denotes assistance regarding a specific problem ("You did push me hard that I might fall; but the Lord helped me" [*Tehillim* 118:13]; "For the God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh" [*Shemot* 18:4]; and in our psalm the person setting out on a journey asks for "help" on the journey before him). "Keeping" means constant protection of a person so that no evil should befall him, so that from the outset he is protected from problems that will necessitate "help."

1. The traveler uses a general saying, taken from the treasury of adages regarding trust in God – God who made heaven and earth, who is the help of Israel (*Tehillim* 124:8), He will help me. The person blessing him, on the other hand, blesses him that God should offer him **personal protection** – "He will not suffer your foot to stumble," and for this he refers to God as **"He who keeps you."**

These novelties allude to a certain difference in understanding between the two speakers in the psalm, which justifies its design as a drama. The dramatic element that is alluded to here will continue to develop and become clarified in the coming sections.

(To be continued.)

Translated by David Strauss

1. Psalm 121 is not included in the parts of the liturgy that are common to all Jewish communities, and its recitation depends on the different customs. Nevertheless, it is difficult not to come across it in one of the situations in which it is recited:

   a. The Sefardim and most Ashkenazim who follow the "Sefardic" rite recite our psalm after the evening *Shemoneh Esrei* on weekdays.

   b. The Sefardim and those who follow the "Sefardic" rite recite our psalm and the next three *Ma'alot* songs (122-124) among the additions to the Shabbat *Pesukei De-Zimra*, before *Baruch She-Amar*.

   c. Some are accustomed to include our psalm in the *Seder Keriat Shema* recited before retiring to bed.

   d. Some are accustomed to recite it as part of *Seder Tefillat Ha-Derekh.*

   e. Some are accustomed to include it in *Seder Kiddush Levana*.

   f. Some are accustomed to recite Psalm 104 and the 15 *Ma'alot* songs after the Shabbat afternoon service during the winter.

   The reason for customs a, c, and d is the motif of protection that is prominent in our psalm. The reason for reciting our psalm during *Kiddush Levana* would appear to be the verse: "The sun shall not smite you by day, nor **the moon by night**." [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. We discussed this in our studies of psalms 6, 30, 142, and elsewhere. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In certain cases, knowledge of the specific historical background of a psalm is likely to contribute to its understanding. See, for example, the study of psalm 80 in our book, pp. 181-184. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. We do not know with certainty the meaning of the heading, "A *Ma'alot* song" (*Shir Ha-Ma'alot*, and in our psalm, *Shir La-Ma'alot*), common to the group of fifteen psalms of *Tehillim* (120-134). True to our approach, we explain each psalm in the book of *Tehillim* independently; our understanding depends neither on its heading, nor on its proximity to other psalms. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibn Ezra writes at the beginning of his commentary to our psalm (second explanation): "This is stated about Israel… members of the exile"; R. Yeshaya of Trani: "'I will lift up my eyes to the mountains' – so you will say in the future in your exile"; Seforno: "'I will lift up my eyes to the mountains' – in the exile I would lift up my eyes." [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Iyyunim Ba-Mikra*, "*Ha-Chumash Ha-Acharon shel Sefer Tehillim*" (Tel-Aviv 5727), p. 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Radak explains the verse in a manner similar to that of Gotein, but with a slight difference, and other commentaries continued in his path. He writes as follows: "‘I will lift up my eyes to the mountains" – Like one who awaits help from afar, who climbs **mountains** and lifts his eyes this way and that, to see whether people are coming to help him. ‘*El he-harim*’ is like ‘*al he-harim*’… But this does not help him in any way, because help is only ‘from God,’ and to Him I will lift up my eyes.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The connection between these two lines according to the previous explanation is: “I will lift up my eyes on the hills to see whether my help will come from them.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Thus, it is no wonder that our psalm is included in the *Seder Tefillat Ha-Derekh* according to several rites; see note 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. "All roads are presumed to be dangerous" (*Yerushalmi*, *Berakhot* 4:4). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See our comments at the beginning of our study of *Parashat Vayetzei* (3rd series), p. 135, and see note 20 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. A *peticha* (or in Aramaic, *petichta*) to a section discussed by the *midrash* usually involves the citation of a distant Biblical verse (if the *peticha* is for a *parasha* in the Torah, the citation is from one of the books of the Writings). The *darshan* demonstrates that the verse cited from afar relates to the *parasha* under discussion, and by expounding the cited verse, he teaches us an important point about the *parasha* under discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Midrash Ha-Gadol*, at the beginning of *Parashat Vayetzei* (ed. M. Margoliot, Jerusalem 5735, p. 493) combines several midrashic sources regarding our psalm, which connect it to Yaakov's setting out on his journey. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Pollack wrote his book in the middle of the previous century, and his book was published by his daughter only many years after it was written (and after the death of the author), in 1991. The commentary to our psalm is found on pp. 447-449. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See our comments at the end of section VIII, which deals with the meaning of this verse, and in note 15b there. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The phrase, "the name of the Lord," refers to God Himself; thus, "Our help is in the name of the Lord" means "Our help is in the Lord." There is also no difference between "from the Lord" and "in the Lord." In Biblical Hebrew, prepositions are interchanged not infrequently (see our study of psalm 142, second half, note 17b). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The psalmist in psalm 22, who finds himself in a particularly distressful situation, beseeches God that He should answer his cry and deliver him from his troubles. The entire length of his prayer to God, the psalmist speaks of himself in first person and turns to God in the second person, but in verse 9 the speaker changes: The verse refers both to the petitioner and to God in third person:

    8 All that see **me** laugh **me** to scorn; they shout out the lip, they shake the head, saying,

    9 **He** trusts in the Lord that **He** will deliver **him**! Let **Him** deliver **him**, seeing **He** delights in **him**.

    10 But **You** are He that took **me** out of the womb: **You** did make **me** hope when **I** was upon my mother's breasts.

    Verse 9 interrupts the grammatical continuity of the psalm. It would appear then that this is a well-known saying that the psalmist integrates into his prayer as is, as an additional argument in his prayer to God, that He should answer those who trust in Him at this time and save them from their troubles. The Radak notes this in his commentary to this verse: “That is to say, **we saw and heard this several times,** that one who turns his paths and prayers to God, He will deliver him. If so, why do you not save me?”

    Indeed, we find verses with a similar formulation in two other places in the Bible, as sayings that preach faith and trust in God:

    *Tehillim* 37:5: Commit your way to the Lord; trust also in Him, and He will bring it to pass.

    *Mishlei* 16:3: Commit your works to the Lord, and your plans shall be established.

    In the series of studies, *"Milchemet Ramot Gil'ad U-Mot Ach'av Ba*," study 14, section I, we find another, different use of a well-known saying. [See here](http://www.etzion.org.il/he/%D7%A9%D7%99%D7%A2%D7%95%D7%A8-56-%D7%9E%D7%9C%D7%97%D7%9E%D7%AA-%D7%A8%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%92%D7%9C%D7%A2%D7%93-%D7%95%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%90%D7%97%D7%90%D7%91-%D7%91%D7%94-%D7%9B%D7%93%D7%91%D7%A8-%D7%94-%D7%9B%D7%91-%D7%90-%D7%9C%D7%97-%D7%97%D7%9C%D7%A7-%D7%99%D7%93). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The address in second person in stanza V: "your keeper," "your shade," "your right hand"; in stanza VI: "shall not smite you"; in stanza VII: "shall preserve you"; "your soul"; in stanza VIII: "your going out and your coming in." [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. "*Lamot*, to stumble, is either an abstract noun, or an infinitive filling the role of a noun" – Amos Chakham in his commentary to a similar verse: "And has not given over our foot to stumble" (*Tehillim* 66:9). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. This danger can explain Yaakov's conduct when he set out on his journey (*Bereishit* 28:11): "And he lighted on a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place and put them under his head." It is possible that he put the stones of the place **around** his head for protection. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. We raised similar questions regarding psalm 91 (p. 221), and in that study we answered them at length. In general, the dramatic nature of psalm 91 is much clearer and more striking than that of our psalm, both because it is twice as long as our psalm, and because in psalm 91 there are **three** speakers. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)