YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***TEHILLIM* (SERIES II)**

**Rav Elchanan Samet**

**Shiur #20: Psalm 22 -**

**"My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me"**

**Complaint, Supplication, and Thanksgiving (Continuation)**

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| **VI** 13 Many bulls **have compassed me:**Strong bulls of Bashan **have beset me round.** 14 They gape upon me with their mouths,Like a ravening and a roaring lion. | **VIII** 17 For dogs **have compassed me:**The assembly of the wicked **have enclosed me:**They seize my hands and my feet like a lion. |
| **VII** 15 I am poured out like water,And **all my bones** are out of joint:My heart is become like wax; It is melted in the midst of my bowels. 16 My strength is dried up like a potsherd;And my tongue cleaves to my jaws;And You lay me down in the dust of death. | **IX** 18 I can count **all my bones:**They look and stare upon me.19 They part my garments among them,And cast lots upon my vesture. |
| **X** 20 But, You, O Lord, be not far from me.O my strength, haste You to help me.21 Deliver my life from the sword;My only one from the power of the dog.22 Save me from the lion's mouth:And answer me from the horns of the wild oxen. |

### 1. Introduction: The structure of the second third

 The second third in our psalm is divided, like the first third, into five sections. In the first four sections, the petitioner describes his trouble with vivid and emotional pictures, whereas in the fifth section he offers a supplication before God that He should save him from the danger in which he is found, and incidental to this plea he repeats and spells out various components of that danger.

 What, then, is the trouble in which the psalmist finds himself?

 In his description of his trouble, the petitioner gives expression to the trouble befalling him **from the outside,** from external factors that are threatening him, and to his difficult **internal** distress, both physical and psychological, stemming from those external threats. The petitioner's physical-psychological reaction is so difficult that its description can also be included in the description of his trouble, this in addition to the primary purpose of its description – to intensify the severity of the external trouble that is causing that reaction.

 Section VI and section VIII describe the external trouble, whereas section VII and section IX describe the petitioner's various reactions to this trouble. It turns out that these four sections are divided into two parts that stand in direct parallelism, as presented at the beginning of this section. Section X closes this third with a supplication to God that He should save the petitioner from the danger described in the previous sections.

 The structure of the second third raises several questions, which we will answer over the course of the discussion of each section by itself:

1. Why are two "rounds" necessary to describe the petitioner's trouble (the first round: sections VI-VII; the second round: sections VIII-IX)? Is there any clearly evident parallelism between section VI and section VIII, and between section VII and section IX? Is there any development between the first round and the second round?

2. How is section X, the supplication, connected to the four previous sections? Is there a special connection between that section and any of the previous sections that describe the trouble?

3. A description of the trouble is found already in the first third, in section III. Can a connection be drawn between that description and any of the sections in the second third (or more than one)?

### 2. Section VI

13 Many bulls have compassed me:

Strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round.

14 They gape upon me with their mouths,

Like a ravening and a roaring lion.

 At the beginning of the second third, the petitioner describes his trouble in clear manner: His enemies are encompassing[[1]](#footnote-1) him and laying siege around him. He likens them to many bulls,[[2]](#footnote-2) and as we know, in certain situations these creatures are liable to kill with their strong horns. We have here a combination of siege, isolation, and close and imminent danger.

 However, the metaphor in verse 13 suffers a certain "deficiency." Bulls are quiet animals, even when they are violent and dangerous. Therefore, in verse 14, the psalmist adds a vocal dimension to the account of his trouble – his enemies gape upon him with their mouths and raise their voices at him to frighten him. The subject of the first clause in verse 14 is not the bulls, which served as a metaphor in the previous stanza, but rather his human enemies themselves, whereas in the second clause the enemies are likened to "a ravening and a roaring lion" – "the word *aryeh* (lion) is missing the letter *kof* (like)" (Ibn Ezra).[[3]](#footnote-3) By likening his enemies to a ravening and a roaring lion, the psalmist "gains" not only the frightening vocal dimension of the lion's roar, but also the savagery of a ravenous beast falling upon its prey in order to eat him (neither of which trait is found in bulls).

### 3. Section VII

 15 I am poured out like water,

And all my bones are out of joint:

My heart is become like wax;

It is melted in the midst of my bowels.

16 My strength is dried up like a potsherd;

And my tongue cleaves to my jaws;

And You lay me down in the dust of death.

 In this section, the psalmist describes the intense fear that has taken hold of him owing to his perilous situation, which he had described in the previous section. As is common in the Bible, he does not describe his fear in abstract terms, but rather by way of a description of his bodily or quasi-bodily reactions.

 The first two stanzas use metaphoric language and powerful similes to describe how the petitioner's body has melted out of fear:

I am poured out like water,

And all my bones are out of joint:

My heart is become like wax;

It is melted in the midst of my bowels.

 His solid body loses its "solidity" and melts and falls apart: he pours out like water; his bones separate from each other and cease to stabilize his body; his heart melts like wax and is scattered throughout his body.

 The second half of the section, verse 16, describes a bodily reaction that is the opposite of the previous one – the parts of his body, the proper functioning of which require moisture, are drying up, and his entire body is falling apart because of dryness:

My strength is dried up like a potsherd;[[4]](#footnote-4)

And my tongue cleaves to my jaws;[[5]](#footnote-5)

And You lay me down in the dust of death.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The dryness of his mouth in the present context results from his intense dread of the enemies encompassing him and wishing to kill him. In the third clause, the psalmist expands upon the account of his dryness and describes how his whole body is turning into dry dust that has no moisture whatsoever – "the dust of death."

Section VII as a whole is rich with descriptions of organs that have ceased to function: bones, heart, bowels, tongue and jaws. But it opens and closes with two opposite images that relate to the entire body: "I am poured out like **water**" – "And you lay me down in the **dust** of death."

### 4. Section VIII

17 For (*ki*) dogs have compassed me:

The assembly of the wicked have enclosed me:

They seize my hands and my feet like a lion.

 In section VIII, the petitioner once again describes the trouble in which he finds himself. The word *ki* at the beginning of the section might be used here in its usual sense, to explain what was stated in the previous section: My extreme reactions are **because** "dogs have compassed me…."

 Between the two clauses that open section VI and the two that open section VIII, there is striking linguistic, substantive and structural similarity:

13 They **have compassed me**, many bulls:

Strong bulls of Bashan have **beset me round**.

17 For they **have compassed me**, dogs:

The assembly of the wicked **have enclosed me:**

 In these two verses, the psalmist describes his dangerous enemies, who encompass him as with a siege. There are, however, two clear differences in the second description. First of all, section VI uses the metaphors "bulls" and "strong bulls of Bashan" to describe the enemies; whereas section VIII uses the metaphor "dogs." Second, in section VIII the "dogs" in the first clause parallel "the assembly of the wicked"[[7]](#footnote-7) in the second clause – that is to say, the psalmist abandons use of metaphor in the second clause and speaks of the humans that the metaphor symbolizes.[[8]](#footnote-8)

 These two differences express a worsening of the situation. Section VIII describes a more advanced and serious stage of the petitioner's situation. How so?

 Dogs are in fact less dangerous creatures than bulls and a lion, but they join together to form a circle that closes their victim in when they "smell blood," when they think that soon they will be able to enjoy what is left of the victim's flesh and blood.[[9]](#footnote-9) It is possible that it is precisely the paralyzing fear that took hold of the petitioner, as described in section VII, that attracted the dogs, who sensed his weakness and imminent end.

The transition itself in the second clause to the humans that the metaphor symbolizes – "the assembly of the wicked (*merei'im*)" – could have closed the series of metaphors and similes in stanzas VI and VIII and brought us to its meaning in reality: those who encompass the psalmist are his **human** enemies, and they are *merei'im*, wicked people who wish evil to befall him (see note 7).

In the third clause, which closes section 8, we find another comparison to a lion: "[They seize] my hands and my feet like a lion." With this there is yet another parallelism between sections VI and VIII: Both end with a comparison to a lion. If we explain based on this parallelism to section VI that here too the psalmist is likening his enemies to a lion (so Rashi, Radak, R. Yeshaya), we have to insert some verb to express the damage that the enemies will do to the psalmists hands and feet (Rashi, R. Yeshaya: "they broke").

According to this, the third clause as well points to a worsening of the description of the trouble in section VIII in comparison to the description in section VI. Not only do the petitioner's enemies encompass him, and not only do they gape their mouths and roar at him, but they act violently toward him.

Other explanations have been suggested for this clause.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Already here it is clear why the petitioner presents his trouble in two rounds. In this way he expresses a worsening process. This is not static trouble, but rather a developing situation. As time passes, more enemies gather around him, the ring that is encircling him tightens. From moment to moment he loses more and more of his ability to stand up to them. The danger continues to grow and the need for rescue become ever more urgent.

### 5. Section IX

18 I can count all my bones:

 They look and stare upon me.

19 They part my garments among them,

 And cast lots upon my vesture.

 Following the description of the danger that worsened in section VIII, the petitioner goes back once again in section IX to describe his physical-psychological reaction to the danger he just described. In this way, he continues the parallel account in section VII and intensifies it:

15 … And **all my bones** are out of joint

18 I can count **all my bones**

 What we have here is not only a repetition of the phrase, "all my bones," but also continuity and development. In section VII, the petitioner felt that his bones were coming apart one from the other; in section IX, he feels himself broken, and he counts his bones to see whether or not his body is still whole.[[11]](#footnote-11)

 In our introduction to the second third, we said that section IX, like its parallel section VII, deals with a description of the petitioner's reaction to the danger, and this indeed is what appears from the first clause in this section, "I count all my bones." But the rest of the section is dedicated to a description of the enemies and their attitude toward the petitioner:

…They look and stare upon me.

19 They part my garments among them,

And cast lots upon my vesture.

 This looking of the enemies who look at the petitioner as he stands powerless before them is a stare of scorn and disdain.[[12]](#footnote-12) The casting of lots and dividing up of his clothes between them are an expression of their certainty regarding his imminent death.[[13]](#footnote-13)

This being the case, would it not be appropriate to assign this section to sections VI and VIII, which are dedicated to an account of the trouble itself, the description of the enemies' threat against the petitioner?

The description of the enemies in sections VI and VIII is meant to describe the **danger** that they pose to the psalmist's life. The enemies in these sections are described as those who encompass the petitioner, who lay siege around him in order to subjugate him and put him to death. But section IX describes the enemies' **mental attitude** toward the petitioner – their certainty regarding his imminent demise and the scorn with which they relate to him ("They look and stare upon me"). Even the description of the action that they take ("They part my garments among them") expresses their attitude toward him as one who has already departed from the land of the living. This attitude, of course, impacts upon the petitioner's consciousness. The more they are confident in their victory, the more he feels despised and desperate, and so he counts his bones and his final minutes. If so, this section was not meant to describe the danger that the enemies pose to the petitioner, but rather it comes to illustrate his inner psychological–moral situation, which is the mirror image of the moral state of his enemies.

Just as section VII describes the psychological state of the petitioner by way of describing his physical state, section IX expresses the petitioner's psychological state by describing the attitude of the enemies toward him and its impact upon him. Their haughty and humiliating attitude toward him and his imminent demise is what causes his distress and brings him to a state of despair.

In the previous section of this study, we demonstrated that in the center of the first third stands section III, which we defined as the central axis of the entire first third. In that section, the petitioner describes his trouble briefly, and only from the inner, psychological perspective, as background for his complaint. There too the petitioner expresses the feeling of humiliation that he experiences from the scorn of his enemies. This section stands in a clear relationship to section IX, the subject of our present discussion:

**Section III in the first third**

7 But I am a worm, and no man;

A reproach of men, and despised of the people.

8 **All that see me,** laugh me to scorn:

They shout out the lip, they shake the head.

**Section IX in the second third:**

18 I can count all my bones:

They look and **stare upon me.**

19 They part my garments among them,

And cast lots upon my vesture.

 The phrase, **"all that see me,"** parallels the phrase, "they look and **stare at me,"** and this parallelism verifies the interpretation that this "seeing" of the enemies in section IX is a stare of scorn and disdain. The petitioner's sense that his enemies are looking at him as "a worm, and no man," parallels his description of his enemies' attitude toward him in section IX, when they are dividing up his clothes from the outset, as if he was no longer among the living.

 If so, section III and section IX are like two sides of a coin. Both of them express the petitioner's humiliation; section III of the first third expresses this directly, whereas section IX of the second third does this by way of a description of his enemies' arrogance.

 Just as in the description of the trouble itself a worsening takes place between section VI and section VIII, the description of the petitioner's reaction there is a certain worsening between section VII and section IX. The paralyzing fear that finds expression in section VI rises to another level in section IX, and turns into bitter despair, to clear knowledge that the end is near.

 The worsening in the trouble itself and the worsening in the petitioner's psychological distress, which find expression in the two rounds, express the petitioner's urgent need for an answer and a speedy rescue.

### 6. section X

20 But, You,[[14]](#footnote-14) O Lord, be not far from me.

O my strength,[[15]](#footnote-15) haste You to help me.

21 Deliver my life from the sword;

My only one[[16]](#footnote-16) from the power of the dog.

22 Save me from the lion's mouth:

And answer me from the horns of the wild oxen.

 The petitioner's description of the trouble, which extends over sections VI-IX and spells out the petitioner's trouble from an external perspective and from an internal perspective, serves as but an introduction to his words in the closing section: his supplication before God that He should quickly save him from the trouble that is closing in upon him. Section X is thus the climax of the second third.

 We shall see below that there are various connections between section X and the other parts of the psalm – first, to the sections that precede it in the second third, for which it serves as a conclusion; second, to the first third; and lastly, to the third third.

### A. Section X as the conclusion of the second Third

 The concluding supplication in section X is built of a series of cries for help to God that He should save the petitioner from the dangers that he described earlier. The dangers mentioned in the supplication (in verses 21-22) are brought in reverse order in comparison to the order in which they were brought when the petitioner described them in sections VI and VIII.[[17]](#footnote-17)

1. "Deliver my life **from the sword**" – the sword is not a metaphor, but rather a real sword in the hands of his enemies that surround him. A direct description of his human enemies, not in the form of a simile or metaphor, is found in the second half of section VIII: "The assembly of the wicked have enclosed me" (17).

2. "My only one from the power of **the dog"** – parallels the description "For dogs have compassed me" (17) in the opening clause of section VIII.

3. "Save me **from the lion's mouth**" – parallels the description "They gape upon me with **their mouths,** like a ravening and a roaring **lion**" (14), at the end of section VI.

4. "And answer me from the horns of **the wild oxen**" – parallels the description "Many **bulls** have compassed me" (13) in the opening of section VI, for wild oxen are bulls.[[18]](#footnote-18)

 The last two parallels (3-4) between section X, which concludes the second third, and section VI, with which this third begins, create a framework for this third, which is similar to the framework that we pointed to in the first third: at the end of each third we find a supplication to cancel the situation described at the beginning of that third:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | The framework of the first third | The framework of the second third |
| The beginning | **My God, my God,** why have you forsaken me?Why are You **far** from my salvation | Many **bulls** have compassed me…They gape upon me with **their mouths,**Like a ravening and a roaring **lion.** |
| The conclusion | You are **my God** from my mother's belly.**Be not far** from me. | Save me from **the lion's mouth:**And answer me from the horns of the **wild oxen.** |

### B. The connection between Section X and the first third

 Just as the first third is primarily a complaint, but it heads toward its objective with the short supplication at its end in section V, the second third of the psalm is primarily an account of the petitioner's trouble, but it heads toward the broad supplication with which it closes in section X.

 Between these two supplications that close each of the two thirds there is linguistic and substantive parallelism:[[19]](#footnote-19)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| The conclusion of the first third | The conclusion of the second third |
| 11-12: **You are my God** from my mother's belly.**Be not far** from me;For trouble is **near;**For there is none to **help.** | **But, You, O Lord,** **be not far** from me.O my strength,**haste** You to **help** me. |

In both supplications, the petitioner turns directly to God, **"You,"** and both of them include the cry, **"Be not far."** In the supplication that closes the first third, a double rationale is offered for the cry, "be not far": **"For** trouble is near, **for** there is none to help," and corresponding to these characteristics of the trouble, the cry in the conclusion of the second third is: "Haste you to help me." Since there is **none to help,** be you, O Lord, “**to help me";** and since "trouble is **near," "haste** You."[[20]](#footnote-20)

Just as the cries in section X, "be not far," and "haste You to my help," have parallels in the first third, the rest of the cries to God in the continuation of the supplication in section X are connected to similar formulations in the first third:

21: **deliver** (*hatzila*) – 9: let Him **save** him (*yatzileihu*)

22: **save** me (*hoshi'eini*)- 2: my **salvation** (*mi-yeshu'ati*)

 **answer** me - 3: You **answer** not

 The use of words from the complaints in the first third in the supplication that closes the second third illustrates the distance that the petitioner has traversed from his bitter complaint filled with disappointment and despair, to his supplication that includes a fierce hope for change.

### c. The connection between section X and the third third

 The parallelism between the two clauses in verse 21 is direct and defective:

21 Deliver from the sword my life;

[Deliver] from the power of the dog my only one.

 However, the parallelism between the two clauses in verse 22 is chiastic, and it is with this reversal of the order of the clauses that expression is given to the conclusion of the supplication – the conclusion of the series of cries that the petitioner directs to God that He should save him from his trouble:

22 Save me from the lion's mouth:

And from the horns of the wild oxen answer me.

 But the word that closes this third of the psalm is strange. The petitioner does not cry out to God, *aneini*, "answer me," parallel to his previous cry, *hoshi'eini*, "save me" (and similarly parallel to his other cries to God in this section, *chusha*, "haste You," and *hatzila*, "deliver"), but rather he uses the past tense: *anitani*, "You have already answered me"!

 Has there been a dramatic change between the first clause of verse 22 and the second clause, the petitioner already having been saved from his trouble? Has God already answered his cries, and delivered him from the wild oxen that were about to gore him?

 It is difficult to accept such an assumption, to which there is no hint in the body of the psalm. Moreover, the parallelism between the two clauses of verse 22, and the continuity between the clauses in section X as a whole, from which the last clause does not deviate, indicate that the petitioner is still in danger from the sword of his enemies, and that the "dog," the "lion," and the "oxen" are still threatening him.

 How, then, are we to understand the sudden change that the petitioner introduces into his last cry, from his consistent imperative to the past tense – "You have answered me"?

It is only the petitioner's internal feeling that has changed. He feels certain that his prayer has been received, that his God has not abandoned him, and that he is no longer far from being saved. Corresponding to his complaint in verse 3, "O my God, I cry in the daytime, **but You answer not,"** his heart is now filled with trust that God will answer his prayer and save him from the danger in which he is in, to the point that he sees himself as having already been answered: "And from the horns of the wild oxen **You have answered me."**

This psychological upheaval is expressed in a single word – the word that closes this third of our psalm. This upheaval serves as a bridge to the third third of the psalm, in which the petitioner will describe at length how in the future he will thank God for his deliverance in ever widening circles:

23 I will declare Your name to my brethren:

In the midst of the congregation I will praise You.

 We have seen that the two structural principles that characterized the first third are found also in the second third: the first principle – the principle of a framework (the parallelism between the section that closes the third and the section with which it opens, in a way that creates a framework for the third) – and the second principle – the principle of linkage (in the section that closes the third – in this case, the last word of that section – there is an allusion that foreshadows or serves as a bridge to the content of the next third as a whole.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Regarding the root *kof-tof-resh* in the Bible, and the verb *le-kater*, in the sense of "to encompass" in three other verses, see our study of Psalm 142, section VI, and notes there. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The phrase *parim rabim* can mean "many bulls" or it can mean "great bulls," as the word *rav* means in several verses in the Bible (e.g., "And the elder [*ve-rav*] shall serve the younger"; *Bereishit* 25:23). The chiastic parallelism in verse 13 supports the second explanation, as *abirei ha-bashan* are the strong bulls that are raised in the Bashan, a place of rich pasture, which gives rise to fat cattle (see *Amos* 4:1). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. a. The comparitive *kof* is missing also in other Biblical similes. The Ibn Ezra mentions the verse in *Devarim* 4:24: "He is a consuming fire," and in his commentary to *Tehillim* 11:1 he cites the verse in *Yeshaya* 21:8: "*Vayikra aryeh*," which means "And he cried like a lion," as in our verse.

b. The transition from the metaphor of "many bulls" to the simile of a single lion stems from the fact that the bulls act as a herd, and when a group of bulls surround a person, he is in great danger; the lion, in contrast, falls upon its prey even when it is all alone. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. "My strength is dried up (*yavesh kochi*) like a potsherd" – R. Saadya Gaon (ed. R. Kapih, p. 89) explains: "I have reversed the letters: *yavesh* ***chiki*** (my palate), in accordance with the context [the next clause], and in accordance with the nation's use of the reversed form…" R. Saadaya cites various pairs of words in the Bible with transmuted letters: *laheket=kohelet*; *milta'ot*=*mitla'ot*; *algomim*=*almogim*. Of course, there are other examples as well. R. Saadya's explanation is mentioned briefly in the Ibn Ezra's commentary on our verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. "And my tongue cleaves to my jaws" – Amos Chakham explains: "The Hebrew original (literally, "and my tongue cleaves my jaws") is slightly abridged, and the preposition "to" should be inserted before the words "my jaws"… The word *melkachayim* refers here to the upper and lower sets of teeth (or else to the two jaws), which are similar to a man-made set of tongs… When the mouth is dry, the tongue cleaves ot the teeth, to the jaws, or to the roof of the mouth. Similarly (*Tehillim* 137:6): "May my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth." [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The root *shin-peh-tof* means "to put, to place" (*Yechezkel* 24:3). What then is the meaning of the word *tishpeteini*? In all four sections (VI-IX, verses 13-19) in which the petitioner describes his trouble, he does not turn to God, and he certainly does not ascribe his difficult position to Him, but only to his enemies. The reading brought in Biblia Hebraica, *shefatuni*, is also difficult, for in this and the previous verses the psalmist describes his bodily responses, and not the actions of his enemies.

Based on the context, this clause describes, in continuation of the previous clauses, **the drying up of the petitioner's body** because of his terrible fear. If so what the verse should be saying is: "And I have reached the dust of death (dust void of the moisture of life)." This is close to the translation and explanation of R. Saadya Gaon: "I explained… 'And I have almost **reached** the dust of death.' For the essence of the word *shefita* is placement… And since it is clear that the speaker is not speaking precisely, but out of great fear, I have replaced placement with reaching." [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The word *merei'im* means "those who cause evil." It appears in Biblical poetry sixteen times, parallel to the words *resha'im* and *po'alei aven*. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Similarly, in section VI, as we have explained it, there is a certain transtion to a human element in the words, "they gape upon me with their mouths," although there it is not unequivocal, and certainly not explicit. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Regarding dogs eating dead animal flesh, see *Shemot* 22:30; I *Melakhim* 14:11;16:4; 21:19 and 23-24; and elsewhere. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Some understand that "like a lion" refers to the petitioner himself, that he is like a hunted lion whose forelegs and hindlegs have been tied up (Ibn Ezra, Amos Chakham).

*Midrash Tehillim* (Buber) expounds the verse as having been uttered by Esther as she goes to Achashverosh: "R. Yehuda says: Perform magic for me that my hands and legs should be ugly (*ke'urot*) before Achashverosh." It would seem that the reading before R. Yehuda was *ka'aru yadai ve-raglai*. This reading is attested to by other sources. This reading also allows for many different explanations of the verse.

Because of the great number of possible explanations, the allusion in the third clause should be understood based on the context, without committing to any particular explanation of the word *ka-ari*: The assembly of the wicked have enclosed me, and they have paralyzed my hands and feet in some way that makes them incapable of responding: "my hands" – which he uses to fight; "and my feet" – which he uses to run away" (Ibn Ezra); "And we gather our hands and feet, and stand in fear and dread before them… as if our hands and feet were in chains" (Radak). According to this explanation as well, there is a worsening in the account of the petitioner's trouble in this section. He is prevented from responding to his enemies, and he stands before them paralyzed and powerless. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. a. We explained, following the Ibn Ezra and other commentators, that *asaper* means here *espor*, "I will count." Other commentators (Rashi, Radak, Meiri) explain the word in accordance with the usual meaning of the root *alef-samekh-resh* in the *pi'el* conjugation, "tell, relate." They explain the verse in various different and forced ways. On the literal and semantic connection between the verbs *lispor* and *lesaper* in Hebrew and in other languages, see our study of *Parashot Behar-Bechukotai* (2nd series), p 127, note 9.

b. The words at the beginning of verse 18 are also a continuation of verse 17. There it says that the petitioner's hands and feet were in some way paralyzed, and now he counts his remaining bones. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The phrase, *lir'ot be-* in other places means to behold the downfall of another person. For example: "Therefore I shall gaze upon those who hate me" (*Tehillim* 118:7). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. In several places in the Bible, mention is made of "stripping the slai" (I *Shemuel* 31:8), that is to say, removing their clothing and taking it as plunder (see *Shofetim* 14:19). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The words, "But You, O Lord," at the beginning of this section, like the words, "But You are holy," at the beginning of section II (verse 4), express contrast with what was stated previously. Amos Chakham explains this aptly in our verse: "The word 'You' contrasts with the word 'they' in verse 18: 'They look and stare at me…,' but 'You, O Lord, be not ar off.'" [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. According to the parallelism between the clauses in verse 20, *eyulati*, "my strength," is a designation of God. The word *eyal* seems to mean "strength, vitality," as is stated in *Tehillim* 88:5: "I am like a man who has no strength (*eyal*)." *Eyulati* thus means: my strength, the source of my vitality. Some commentaries connect this word to the obscure phrase in the psalm's heading, “*ayelet ha-shachar.*” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. According to the parallelism between the clauses in verse 21, *yechidati*, "my only one," parallels *nafshi*, "my life." So too in *Tehillim* 35:17: "Rescue my soul (*nafshi*) from their destructions, my only one (*yechidati*) from the lions." The word *yechida* in the sense of life or soul is not found anywhere else in Scripture. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Sections VII and IX describe the petitioner's physical-psychological response to the danger in which he finds himself. For this there is no need to ask for a separate rescue. When God will save him from his enemies that surround him, these responses will disappear on their own. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Ramim* (without an *alef*) is the same as *re'eimim* (with an *alef*). In Arabic, *re'eim* is *rim* (without an *alef*). So writes Prof. Yehuda Felix in his book, *Ha-Chai shel ha-Tanakh* (Tel Aviv, 5715), p. 9, s.v. *re'eim*:

The various verses in the Bible appear to refer to two different animals:

The oryx (called *re'eim* in modern Hebrew). Its black horns are sharp and long (about a meter)… It is not particularly strong… It is a handsome and swift antelope, and it was found in Trans-Jordan until the end of the 19th century.

The wild bull – bos. It became extinct several generations ago. It has short horns, but is enormously strong.

Felix brings verses that match *re'eim* 1, e.g. *Tehilim* 92:11, and verses that match *re'eim* 2, e.g., *Iyov* 39:10.

Our verse seems to refer to *re'eim* 2, the wild bull, both because it can be an aggressive animal and dangerous to humans, and especially because of the parallelism between the beginning of the second third: "Many **bulls** have compassed me," and its conclusion: "The horns of the **wild oxen,"** a correspondence that is part of a larger system of parallels, as we explained above. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. We noted this briefly in the previous section of this study that was dedicated to the first third, in the second half of note 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The supplication that closes the first third mentions the trouble only in general terms, and essentially does not describe it at all. The role of the words, "for trouble is near, for there is none to help," is to serve as a bridge to the second third of the psalm, which will offer a full and detailed account of the trouble. After this description, the psalmist can include in his supplication in section X details of the trouble. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)