YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***TEHILLIM* (SERIES II)**

**Rav Elchanan Samet**

**Shiur #21: Psalm 22 -**

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

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

### III. The Third third – Thanksgiving

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| XI 23 I will declare Your name to my brethren:  In the midst of the congregation I will praise You.  24 You who fear the Lord, praise him:  **All you the seed of Yaakov,** glorify Him;  And fear Him, **all the seed of Israel.** | XIV 28 **All the ends of the world** shall remember and turn to the Lord:  **And all the families of the nations** shall worship before You. |
| XII 25 **For** He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted;  Nor has He hid His face from him;  But when he cried to Him, He heard. | 29 **For** the kingdom is the Lord's:  And He is ruler over the nations. |
| XIII 26 My praise shall be of You in the great congregation:  I will pay my vows before those who fear Him.  27 The meek **shall eat** and be satisfied;  Those who seek Him shall praise the Lord.  May your heart forever **revive**! | 30 All the fat ones of the earth **shall eat** and worship:  All they that go down to the dust shall bow before Him,  And he that **cannot keep alive** his own soul. |
| XV 31 Their seed shall serve Him;  It shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation.  32 They shall come, and shall declare His salvation to a people that shall be born, that He has done this. | |

### 1. Introduction: two separate psalms?

In the critical literature concerning our psalm, there is a prevalent argument that verse 23 opens what is essentially an independent psalm of thanksgiving. This psalm was joined to the psalm that preceded it (verses 1-22) by way of an editorial step, but in truth there is no original connection between these two literary units. Here are the remarks of one of the representatives of the critical school, Tz. P. Chajes:

I agree with those who say that before us are two separate psalms which over time were united into one. For the truth is that what is stated in verse 23 and on does not relate at all to what came before: There – a voice of weakness, a voice of weeping and crying, and here – a voice of victory; there – the prayer of an individual in trouble, and here – thanksgiving for God's salvation that arrived in the Temple before the eyes of Israel and the foreigners who had assembled in the Temple courtyard. [These psalms] were joined together by some later copyist and compiler, because in his opinion the second psalm is sort of an answer to the request in the first psalm, [but] stylistically there is no similarity or equality whatsoever.

The fundamental possibility of dividing a psalm into two, or joining together two adjacent psalms, does not necessarily contradict the Masoretic version in our hands. The division of the psalms in the book of *Tehillim* is generally based on the headings of the psalms, but a significant number of psalms lack headings, and this allows us to occasionally consider joining together two palms or to divide a single psalm into two.[[1]](#footnote-1)

However, with regard to the critical approach in our psalm (and in other places in the book of *Tehillim*), the concern arises that in his haste to divide a psalm into two, the critical commentator is liable to miss the hidden connections, and even the manifest connections, between the two parts of the psalm, and the literary and conceptual unity of the psalm will be overlooked.

As for our psalm, Psalm 22 – in all of the manuscripts and text witnesses available to us – is one psalm. The critical approach that divides the psalm into two is based solely on exegetical-literary considerations, which by nature are speculative, varying from commentator to commentator and from generation to generation.

The presumptive authenticity of the received tradition, which views Psalm 22 as a single unit, obligates the commentator to work hard to locate connections between the two parts of the psalm. If and when such a real connection is found, the damage caused by the critical approach becomes apparent.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Chajes raises two arguments in favor of dividing our psalm into two. His first argument, formulated at relative length, relates to the extreme disparity in the contents of the two parts of the psalm; his second argument is brought in brief at the end of his words: "Stylistically, there is no similarity or equality whatsoever."

In the next section, we will discuss the substantive relationship between the first two thirds of our psalm and its third third, and we will examine Chajes' first argument and the solution that he proposes – to detach the two parts of the psalm from each other.

In the sections that follow, we will discuss the various connections between the third third and the two preceding thirds, both stylistic connections and thematic connections, and through them we will examine Chajes' assertion that "what is stated in verse 23 and on [that is, the third third] does not relate **at** **all** to what came before [in the first two thirds]… stylistically, there is no similarity or equality **whatsoever**.

### 2. Psychological upheaval – a characteristic feature of the psalms of supplication in the book of *TehiLlim*

The phenomenon that Chajes questions – the shift from "a voice of weakness, a voice of weeping and crying" to "a voice of victory," and from "the prayer of an individual in trouble" to "thanksgiving for God's salvation" – is not at all surprising, for this phenomenon is the norm in the book of *Tehillim*!

The commentator who is accustomed to classical and European literature expects that a poem will belong to a single genre and express throughout a more or less uniform mood, and that it will not "suffer" extreme psychological shifts that are incomprehensible to the reader. This expectation, however, stems from alienation from the character of Biblical poetry and from the religious experience shaped through it. The emotional world of the psalmists of the book of *Tehillim*, and their way of thinking, differ from the psychological and cultural background of the modern commentator. The commentator must take this gap into account before he cuts up words of poetry that are not to his taste.

Extreme psychological upheavals take place over the course of many psalms. In our studies, we have frequently dealt with a psychological shift that occurs in one psalm from a supplication offered with "a voice of weakness" to praise and thanksgiving proclaimed with the sound of joy. In fact, the great majority of psalms of supplication in the book of *Tehillim*, which express the great distress of the petitioner, close with confidence that the prayer has been heard and will lead to the petitioner's salvation, and with the petitioner's commitment to thank God for His deliverance.[[3]](#footnote-3) In several psalms, the upheaval does not take place only at the end of the psalm, but rather develops over the course of the psalm, and this upheaval is the theme of the psalm.[[4]](#footnote-4)

It may be argued that a psychological upheaval over the course of the psalm is one of the clearest characteristics of the psalms of *Tehillim*, and that a uniform mood throughout the psalm is not common in the psalms of *Tehillim*.

Let us now examine the possibility of dividing our psalm into two independent psalms, each one standing on its own, as was proposed by Chajes, in the wake of critics that preceded him.

Can verses 1-21 serve as a whole and independent psalm? The answer to this questions seem to be negative. Psalms of supplication in the book of *Tehillim* do not end with a plea for rescue (as in verses 1-21), but rather with some kind of description of the thanksgiving that will be sounded afterwards. Therefore, ending the psalm with verse 21 is a clearly cut-off ending; anyone familiar with the psalms of supplication in the book of *Tehillim* expects a continuation. The continuation is, of course, found in verse 23, which accords with what we are accustomed to find at the end of supplications in the book of *Tehillim*: "I will declare Your name to my brethren."

Can verses 22-32 serve as an independent psalm? If so, this is certainly a psalm of thanksgiving (as noted by Chajes himself). In our study of Psalm 30 (section III, p. 84), we listed the characteristic features of a psalm of thanksgiving in the book of *Tehillim*. Such psalms are comprised of four substantive components (which, of course, are not presented in chronological order):

1. A description of the person's trouble, which brought him to the gates of death.

2. A description of his turning to God that He should save him.

3. A description of God's answer – the petitioner's rescue.

4. An expression of thanksgiving to God for having heard his prayer and rescuing him from his trouble.

Numbers 1 and 3 do not appear at all in the verses under discussion. Is it possible for a person to come and thank God for having rescued him, and not utter a single word about what brought him to this thanksgiving? From what trouble was he saved and how did God save him from it? Can we offer an example of such a psalm of thanksgiving in the book of *Tehillim*?

This is only because the missing elements in the third third, with respect to the background of the thanksgiving, appear in the two thirds that precede it.

It turns out that the two parts of Psalm 22 – verses 1-22 and verses 23-32 – need each other and cannot be separated from one another. Those who attempt to separate them will receive two defective psalms. They also miss the unity of the psalm as a whole and its purpose: to describe the **psychological process** of a person who finds himself in a deep pit, and with the power of his prayer raises himself to the highest heights.

### 3. the substantive continuity between the first two thirds and the third third

We have seen that our psalm, like many other psalms, contains a psychological upheaval, and that this does not negate its unity. Our psalm is, however, unique in that the thanksgiving that it contains is not only a short conclusion, but rather comprises a significant part of the psalm. A third of the psalm is devoted to thanksgiving, just like a third of the psalm was dedicated to complaint and a third to supplication. Without a doubt, this is intended to give equal weight to the complaint, the supplication, and the thanksgiving. (Since this third of thanksgiving is evenly slightly longer than the other two, this might allude to the exceptional importance of the thanksgiving). The petitioner obligates himself to this thanksgiving, and he describes it in brilliant colors.

The length of the thanksgiving in our psalm stems from the fact that it does not remain in the intimate realm between the petitioner and God, but rather spreads out to other circles in which God's name will become known. Later in this section, we will clarify this point: How will the salvation of the individual petitioner, who stood alone in his complaint and in his supplication in the first two thirds of the psalm, impact upon "all the seed of Israel," "all the ends of the earth," and even "the coming generation," and "the nation that shall be born"?

Our psalm does not move all at once from "a voice of weakness, a voice of crying and weeping" to "a voice of victory" (as argued by Chajes), but rather in a gradual religious process that is reasonable from a psychological perspective.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The psalm opens with a most bitter complaint. The petitioner feels that God has abandoned him in his trouble and that his prayers for rescue have not been answered (section I). He supports his complaint, "Why have You forsaken me," with precedents from the past, how God answered "our fathers" and saved them from their troubles, and how in his personal past, God treated him with compassion from the time he was born.

The return to the positive past, as much as it comes to intensify his complaint about God's attitude toward him in the present, gives the petitioner new hope that God will hear his prayer now as well, and he therefore ends the first third – the third of complaint – with a short plea, offered in a tone of intense supplication.

In the second third, the petitioner expands upon his supplication. First he describes at length his difficult and desperate situation, and then he turns to God with another prayer that He should quickly save him from his enemies. The very offering of this prayer to God reveals the buds of his faith in the possibility that God will save him. He is no longer as desperate as he was at the beginning of the psalm. His address of God at the beginning of his prayer, "But You O Lord" – and even more than that, his later turning to God by the designation "my strength" – reveal his fierce hope that God will answer his prayer and save him with His might.

When he spells out the plan for his rescue in the opposite order of the account of his enemies, from which he seeks to be saved, he expresses his faith in changing his situation for the better. He sees his troubles disappearing one after the other, from the last to the first, and he fills with confidence that his prayer was in fact heard and that his rescue is certain! This is the meaning of the last word in his prayer – *anitani.* God has already answered him.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The word *anitani* reflects a critical turn in the petitioner's mood, a turn that ripened over the course of the entire psalm up until now. This turn serves as a bridge to the third third of our psalm, in which the psalmist will obligate himself to thank God for having answered his prayer, and even describe this thanksgiving as having already taken place (just as God's answering him at the end of the second third is formulated in past tense, as something that has already actually occurred).

The third third in our psalm does not then open a new matter; it relates to the end of the previous third, the dramatic declaration – *anitani*, "You have answered me." And since this word is the product of previous psychological development, the third third is thus connected to the entire course of the psalm.

Now that we have clarified the continuity between the third third in our psalm and the two previous thirds, let us point to additional connections of various kinds between this third and the previous ones. This will answer Chajes'second argument in favor of his assertion about the various parts of the psalm, that "stylistically, there is no similarity or equality whatsoever."

As if to refute Chajes' argument, already the first word in the third third, **"I will declare** (*asapera*) Your name to my brethren," alludes to a stylistic connection to the previous third: In his description of his distress in section IX (v 18), he says: "I can count (*asaper*) all my bones."[[7]](#footnote-7)

In verse 18, the petitioner uses the verb *asaper* to express his great distress, his fear of his enemies who desire his death, and his body's "falling apart" because of this fear, to the point that he counts all of his bones to ascertain whether his body is still whole. In verse 23, the petitioner uses the same verb, *asapera*, to express his great relief that God has answered him and saved him from his enemies, and he commits himself to make this known among his brethren and to praise God "in the midst of the congregation." The very same word (*asaper* – *asapera*) marks the reversal from bad to good through the change in its meaning and its context.[[8]](#footnote-8)

### IV. The structure of the third third

Before we consider other stylistic and substantive connections between the third third of our psalm and the two previous ones, let us try to understand the structure of this third. This will expose additional connections between the three parts of the psalm.

### 1. Sections XI-XII-XIII

The first three sections of the third third (XI-XII-XIII) comprise the majority of this third.

XI 23 I will declare Your name to my brethren:

In the midst of the congregation I will praise You.

24 You who fear the Lord, praise him:

All you the seed of Yaakov, glorify Him;

And fear Him, all the seed of Israel.

XII 25 For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted;

Nor has He hid His face from him;

But when he cried to Him, He heard.

XIII 26 My praise shall be of You in the great congregation:

I will pay my vows before those who fear Him.

27 The meek shall eat and be satisfied;

Those who seek Him shall praise the Lord.

May your heart forever revive!

In the first stanza in section XI (verse 23), the petitioner obligates himself before God to declare His name (His salvation) to his brethren, his relatives, and to praise Him in the midst of the congregation. In the second stanza in this section (verse 24), he sounds the substance of his words to this audience. Between verse 23 and verse 24, we must mentally fill in the words: "And thus I will say to them":

24 **You who fear the Lord,** praise him:

**All you the seed of Yaakov**, glorify Him;

And fear Him, **all the seed of Israel**.

"Those who fear the Lord" – this phrase might refer to that same "congregation" in the midst of which the petitioner will praise God for His salvation, and to whom he turns with a request that they join him in praising God. But what is the meaning of turning to "all the seed of Yaakov" and to "all the seed of Israel." Does the "congregation," in the midst of which the petitioner obligates himself to praise God, include the entire people of Israel?

It seems that the petitioner's turning to all of Israel is merely a literary device. After his actual call addressed to the congregation of God-fearing people that surround him to praise God for having delivered him, he adds another, broader call to the entire people of Israel, and he calls upon them to draw religious conclusions from the personal event that happened to him. His call to "all of the seed of Israel" is "glorify Him" and "fear Him" – that is, let my being rescued from my enemies be the basis for establishing the proper relationship to God, for that is the way He governs His world.

The next section – section XII (verse 25) – offers a rationale for this call:

25 **For** He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted;

Nor has He hid His face from him;

But when he cried to Him, He heard.

The "afflicted one" about whom he speaks is none other than the petitioner himself. Why does he speak about himself in third person? (Earlier in his words, in verse 23, he spoke of himself in first person: **"I** **will** **declare** Your name…) It seems that he wants to give general validity to the story of his rescue. In other words: It is fitting to praise God and to glorify Him, because He hears the cry of the afflicted **whoever He is.[[9]](#footnote-9)**

Sections XI-XII are built with a **"praise framework"** that is typical of psalms of praise. This framework opens with a call to those who are present to praise God, and continues with a rationale for this call that begins with the word *ki*, "because."[[10]](#footnote-10)

In section XIII, the petitioner repeats the obligation that he took upon himself in section XI to praise God in the midst of a great congregation, but now he adds an obligation to pay his vows – in other words, not only to praise God with words, but to perform an action in the framework of his public thanksgiving. He pledges to pay the vows that he took – to offer thanksgiving-offerings in the Temple.[[11]](#footnote-11)

26 My praise[[12]](#footnote-12) shall be of You in the great congregation:

I will pay my vows before those who fear Him.[[13]](#footnote-13)

As in section XI, between verse 26 and verse 27 we must mentally fill in the words: "And thus I will say to them":

27 The meek shall eat and be satisfied;

Those who seek Him shall praise the Lord.

May your heart forever revive!

There is a striking parallelism between section XI and section XIII, not only with respect to their common contents, but also with regard to their structure (acceptance of an obligation to offer praise, followed by a citation of a call to praise) and style (two terms appear in both sections: "congregation" and "those who fear Him"; words derived from the root *heh-lamed-lamed* appear four times, twice in each section). Setting the two sections one against the other highlights the similarity between them:

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Section XI | Section XIII |
| The obligation | 23 I will declare Your name to my brethren:  **In the midst of the congregation I will praise You.** | 26 **My praise shall be** of You in the great **congregation**:  I will pay my vows before **those who fear Him.** |
| Mentally fill in the words: "And thus I will say to them": | | |
| The text of the appeal | 24 **You who fear the Lord, praise him:**  All you the seed of Yaakov, glorify Him;  And fear Him, all the seed of Israel. | 27 The meek shall eat and be satisfied;  Those who seek Him **shall praise** the Lord.  May your heart forever revive! |

Between these two sections, both of which contain an obligation to offer thanksgiving and fulfill a vow and a description of the future fulfillment of this obligation, stands the explanation in section XII, which serves as a central axis: "**For** He has not despised… but when he cried to Him, He heard.”

Can we point to connections between sections XI-XII-XIII and the two previous thirds of the psalm?[[14]](#footnote-14)

The most significant connection is the total contrast between the rationale for the appeal to praise God in section XII and the complaint with which the psalm opens. The rationale describes God's response to the petitioner's cry, and thus it repairs the complaint about the absence of a response:

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| --- | --- |
| I 2 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  Why are You far from my salvation, from the words of my cry?  3 O my God, I cry in the daytime, but You answer not;  And in the night season, and I have no repose. | XII 25 For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted;  Nor has He hid His face from him;  But when he cried to Him, He heard. |

The contrast between these two sections does not express itself in words, but rather in content:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| You have forsaken me | **Nor** has He hid His face |
| You are far… from the words of my cry | He has **not** despised… the affliction of the afflicted[[15]](#footnote-15) |
| I cry… but You answer not | But when he cried to Him, He **heard** |

Stylistically, section XII is connected specifically to section III in the first third:

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| --- | --- |
| III 7 But I am a worm, and no man;  A reproach of men, and **despised** of the people. | XII 25 For He has not **despised** nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted. |

That is to say, my enemies despise me and abhor me like a worm, but God does not despise or abhor my afflictions.

The rationale in section XII, "But when he cried to Him, He heard," is of course also connected to the words, "And answer me," that close the petitioner's supplication in the second third. The word, *anitani*, and the phrase, *enut ani*, constitute a play on words. But the primary connection is substantive. The same certainty that is succinctly expressed at the end of the second third is expressed at length in the words of the rationale in section XII. The petitioner is certain that God hears his supplications and will save him from his enemies.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Sections XI and XII, which surround the rationale, are also connected to the first third.

Among the congregations upon whom the petitioner calls to praise God are "all the seed of Yaakov" and "all the seed of Israel." In sub-section 3 above, we raised a question about the inclusion of these groups among the addressees of the petitioner's appeals. We suggested that the appeal to all of Israel is a literary appeal, rather than a real appeal. But even a literary appeal requires an explanation. Why does the petitioner expand the audience to whom he appeals beyond "his brethren" and the congregation of those who fear the Lord in the Temple? How will the deliverance of the individual petitioner, who stood alone before God with his complaint and supplication in the first two thirds of the psalm, impact upon "all the seed of Israel" in the future?

The answer to this question seems to be found in the first third of the psalm, in section II:

4 But You are holy,

O You that are enthroned **upon the praises of Israel.**

5 **Our fathers** trusted in You:

They trusted, and You did deliver them.

Already in his complaint, the petitioner mentioned the people of Israel and "our fathers," in contrast to God's attitude toward him in the present. Now, at the stage of thanksgiving and praise, it becomes clear that God's attitude toward the petitioner in the present is no different from His attitude toward the people of Israel in earlier times. Just as our fathers "cried and were delivered" (verse 6), so too now "when he cried to Him, He answered" (verse 25). The psalmist wished to create an equation also with respect to the praise to be offered for God's salvation. Just as our fathers, when "they cried and were delivered," praised God, and God was "enthroned **upon the praises of Israel,"** so too now, "**My praise** shall be of You in the great congregation." In this praise, "all of the seed of **Israel**" will take part.

### 2. Section XIV

28 All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord:

And all the families of the nations shall worship before You.

29 For the kingdom is the Lord's:

And He is ruler over the nations.

30 All the fat ones of the earth shall eat and worship:

All they that go down to the dust shall bow before Him,

And he that cannot keep alive his own soul.

Section XIV is divided into three stanzas, which parallel sections XI-XII-XIII, each stanza corresponding to a section,[[17]](#footnote-17) as we transcribed the third third at the beginning of this section.

In section XIV, the psalmist widens his perspective in relation to the previous sections, to include all of humanity: "all the ends of the world… all the families of the nations" (v. 28), "the nations" (v. 29), "all the fat ones of the earth… all they that go down to the dust" (v. 30).

These, however, are not the petitioner's target audience with respect to his appeal to praise God and pay a vow. They are not present in the Temple, and do not stand at all opposite the petitioner. For this reason, no obligation is accepted by the psalmist in section XIV to praise God in the congregation of the nations. In other words, there is no parallelism to the openings of stanza XI and XIII); there is merely **an expression of hope** that they will act in this manner.

The parallelism between section XIV and the previous sections is between the **appeal** that the petitioner directs to the various congregations to praise God, to honor Him, and to fear Him, and the **hope** that he expresses that the nations as well will act in this manner:

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| --- | --- |
| Section XI | Section XI1 |
| 24: **All you the seed of Yaakov,** glorify Him;  And fear Him, **all the seed of Israel.** | 28: **All the ends of the world** shall remember[[18]](#footnote-18) and turn to the Lord:  **And all the families of the nations** shall worship before You. |
| Section XIII | Section XIV3 |
| 27 The meek **shall eat** and be satisfied;  Those who seek Him shall praise the Lord.  May your heart forever **revive**! | 30 All the fat ones of the earth **shall eat** and worship:[[19]](#footnote-19)  All they that go down to the dust shall bow before Him,  And he that **cannot keep alive** his own soul.[[20]](#footnote-20) |

Between these two stanzas of section XIV, we find a rationale that opens with the word "for," similar to the rationale in the parallel section, section XII. Thus, section XIV as well has a "praise framework," but the rationale in it does not come to explain an **appeal** to the nations to prostrate themselves before God, but rather the **hope** that this is what they will do. The content of this rationale is not at all similar to the parallel rationale in section XII – not God's attitude toward the petitioner ("When he cried to Him, He heard"), which does not apply at all to the nations, but rather God's being the king and "ruler over the nations."

How does this universal section fit in with the account of the thanksgiving that the petitioner will in the future offer to God for his salvation?[[21]](#footnote-21)

The structure of section XIV, which is sort of a limited reflection of sections XI-XII-XIII, necessitates seeing this section as a continuation of the earlier ones. When the petitioner expands the praise for his rescue to "all the seed of Yaakov," and turns a private event relating to him alone to an event that relates to "all the seed of Israel," he senses that it is not enough that he calls out to the members of his own people. Rather, he must express hope that also "all the ends of the earth" and "all the families of the nations" will believe in God.

Perhaps it is possible to connect this section as well to some of the previous sections of the psalm, and to explain the connection between it and the previous sections XI-XII in a different manner. There is room to ask: Who are the petitioner's enemies, whom he describes with a set of similes and metaphors in the second third of the psalm? Who are the "assembly of the wicked" who encircle the person who is engaged in prayer and direct their swords at him, and see in his imminent death a done deal? It would appear that we would not veer from the plain sense of the psalm if we assume that these enemies are not members of the petitioner's people, but rather gentiles from the nations of the world.

Indeed, in the third third, in sections XI-XII, the petitioner describes how he will thank and praise God for having rescued him from those enemies. But just as he describes himself and his actions after that rescue ("I will declare Your name to my brethren… I will pay my vows…"), one might have expected an account that would answer the question of what will happen to his enemies after he will be saved from them. Section XIV comes to answer this question. It expresses the hope that "all the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord."[[22]](#footnote-22)

### 3. Section XV

31 Their seed shall serve Him;

It shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation.

32 They shall declare His salvation to a people that shall be born, that He has done this.

This section closes the third third and the psalm as a whole, returning us to the congregation of Israel, referred to in sections XI-XII-XIII. Why does section XIV separate between those sections and this one? The answer is that section XV differs from all the sections that preceded it (including section XIV) with regard to the **dimension of time.** It deals with the generations of the future, who will declare God's righteousness, while all the previous sections dealt with the present generation among whom the petitioner lives. Because of this drastic novelty, this section was singled out and positioned at the end of our psalm as the conclusion of the third of thanksgiving.

The structure of the third third is somewhat similar to that of the second third. Two parts of this third stand in direct parallelism to each other (sections XI-XII-XII, and section XIV), and one section stands on its own and concludes the third. Just as in the second third, and even as in the first third, the closing section of the third third is linguistically and substantively connected to the opening section, and together they create a frame for the entire third:

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| --- | --- |
| Section XI | Section XV |
| 23. **I will declare Your name** to my brethren….  All you the **seed** of Yaakov… all the **seed** of Israel. | 31. Their **seed** shall serve Him;  **It shall be told of the Lord** to the coming generation. |

These two characteristics of the third third – its structure and the parallelism between its opening and its conclusion – connect the third third to what came before it.

Let us briefly explain this section: "Their seed shall serve Him," the seed that serves God (i.e., "the seed of Yaakov"), will relate **about** God,[[23]](#footnote-23) that is, they will relate about His act of deliverance (just as we explained: "I will declare Your name" – I will declare Your act of deliverance). To whom will this story be related? "To the coming generation." The word "*yavo'u*," which according to the cantillation notes opens a new verse, seems to belong to the previous verse.[[24]](#footnote-24) According to this explanation, the end of verse 31 parallels the beginning of verse 32:

31: Their seed shall serve Him;

It shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation.

32: They shall declare His salvation[[25]](#footnote-25) to a people that shall be born,

that He has done this.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Why did the petitioner decide to describe how the story of how God delivered him from his enemies will pass "to the coming generation," "to a people that shall be born" – from generation to generation? As great as the danger that he had faced (as described at length in the second third) and as great as his happiness for having been saved from that danger – so great is the praise in his mouth, and he goes and expands it: from "my brethren" to "the great congregation," to "all the seed of Israel," and "to the coming generation" and "to the people that shall be born." He wants the story of his deliverance by God to be told even in future generations.[[27]](#footnote-27)

It seems that this section as well connects us to an earlier section of the psalm. In his complaint in the first third, the petitioner mentioned in section II the situation of previous generations in contrast to his own situation:

5 **Our fathers** trusted in You:

They trusted, and You did deliver them.

6 They cried to You, and were delivered;

They trusted in You, and were not confounded.[[28]](#footnote-28)

The psalmist complains that our fathers, the members of previous generations, merited God's kindness and deliverance. They related the story of their deliverance to their children, and that story was passed down from generation to generation, until it reached the petitioner in the present generation, and he relates it now to reinforce his complaint about the present. Why does He not hear me, asks the petitioner, as He had heard my fathers? Why has He abandoned me? Why was the chain of the generations severed?

However, at the end of the psalm, after the petitioner is certain that God will save Him from his distress, his feeling that he was denied the fate of his fathers changes. God heard his cry just as He had heard the cries of his fathers and saved them, and he includes himself among the people of Israel. Therefore, the petitioner commits himself to pass down the story of his own deliverance, just as the story of his fathers' deliverance had reached him.

In this way, the petitioner in our psalm becomes yet another link in the chain of generations, an heir to his fathers, who had turned to God in their troubles and prayed to him, and God saved them. Our psalmist as well joins the circle of the delivered who praise God for his deliverance, and he relates this to their children after them, so that they too will turn to God in their troubles, and God will save them, and "they shall declare His salvation to a people that shall be born, that He has done this."

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. We discussed this issue in our study of Psalm 19, which, according to many critical commentators, is divided into two parts (1-7; 8-15). See our book, pp. 42-44, and notes there. In note 3, we mention that *Chazal* divided the book of *Tehillim* into 147 psalms, and that in medieval Hebrew manuscripts we find different divisions of the book into more or less than 150 psalms. Clearly, the division into 150 psalms found in the standard printed editions is not the only possible way of dividing the book. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. We illustrated this at length in our study of Psalm 19, pp. 58-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See, for example, *Tehillim* 142:8 and our study of that psalm at the end of section V and the beginning of section VI, and note 10 there. A slightly different example was discussed in our study of Psalm 6 in our book (pp. 34-36, and note 220). See additional examples in *Tehillim* 3, 7, 13, 22, 26, 28, 31, 35, 40, 62 and 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. We dedicated our studies of Psalm 142 and Psalm 13 to this issue. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. At the end of our study of Psalm 13, we described the **gradual transition** from complaint to supplication and from supplication to thanksgiving in similar fashion. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Already here, at the end of the petitioner's supplication, Chajes sees the beginning of his psychological upheavel, in which the petitioner passes from a "voice of weakness" to a "voice of victory" (not his own, of course, but that of God over his enemies). Therefore, it is fitting to go back to his commentary and see how he contends with the word *anitani*, which blurs the sharp boundary that this commentator sees between "the first psalm" and "the second psalm":

   *Anitani* – This is a bit strange… Some explain *anitani* in the sense of *aneini*, “answer me,” and he uses the past tense because of his strong confidence – it is as if I were already saved, I trust in Your goodness that you will answer me. **This is a bit forced, for throughtout the psalm we heard a weak voice, a prayer from a downtrodden heart, and not a strong voice of hope.** Because of this some read explicitly: *te'aneini*, "answer me." And so in the Vulgate.

   He later proposes another emendation of the word *anitani*, so that the word does not veer from the "voice of weakness" that is sounded throughout the psalm. We see then that this commentator's preconceived literary assumption regarding how a "well-trained" psalmist should arrange his words without emotional "leaps" brought him to emend the text, just as earlier it brought him to unravel the unity of the psalm and divide it into two. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In both verses, the verb *le-saper* appears in an uncharacteristic sense or context:

   1. In verse 18, it would have been fitting to use this verb in the *kal* conjugation – *espor*, "I will count." The usual meaning of the word in the *pi'el* conjugation is "I will relate." See the section dedicated to the second third, note 11a. The rare use of the verb in the *pi'el* conjugation in the sense of counting is found in four more places in Scripture.

   2. In verse 23, the phrase *asapera shimkha* is unusual. The usual terms used in connection with God's name are *hoda'a* and *kri'a*; the term *sippur* is appropriate for God's actions: "And I will **declare** (*va-asapera*) what He has **done** (*asa*) for my soul" (*Tehillim* 66:16). It is possible that here too that is the intention. The phrase "*le-saper shem*" appears in one other place (*Shemot* 9:16): "And that My name be proclaimed (*saper shemi*) throughout all the earth," but there the meaning is to publicize God's name among those who do not recognize Him, and the phrase is suited for that purpose, but that is not the case in our psalm.

   It is not impossible then that the unique and uncharacteristic use of this verb in two verses in our psalm is intentional, and it comes to allude to the connection described below. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. A reversal of this sort, wherein the same words are used to describe both a pessimistic situation and an optimistic situation, is found in our psalm in the relationship between the complaint that opens the first third and the supplication that closes the second third:

   |  |  |
   | --- | --- |
   | 2) Why are You far from my salvation | 20-22) Be not far from me … save me |
   | 3)… but You answer not; | 22) And answer me |

   [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The person offering thanks speaks not only of himself in this rationale in third person, but also of God. However, at the beginning, he turned to God in direct address: "I will declare **Your** name… I will praise **You**" (and he will once again address God in second person at the beginning of section XIII: "My praise shall be **of You**"). The reason for this is that these words of explanation relate to the previous addressees: those who fear the Lord and all the seed of Israel. When he spoke to them, he spoke **about** God in third person: "Praise **Him**… glorify **Him**; and fear **Him**… For **He** has not despised…" [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See our study of Psalm 100, section I, note 6, where we describe the characteristics of a "praise framework" within a psalm of thanksgiving (as we find here). What was stated there applies here as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Compare with, for example: "And they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows" (*Yona* 1:16). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ostensibly, he should have said the opposite: "Your praise shall be from me," but what he means is: You are the **reason** for my praise – from You comes salvation, which is the reason that I praise You. Compare with *Tehillim* 71:6: "My praise is continually of You." [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. We divided the verse into two parallel clauses, against the cantillation notes. According to this, "my praise" parallels "my vows," as one who pays his vows, when he offers his thanksgiving offering, also praises God for the good that He bestowed upon him. "In a great congregation" parallels the words "before those who fear Him," which supports our identification (mentioned above) of "in the midst of the **congregation** I will praise You," at the end of verse 23, with "**You who fear the Lord,** praise Him," at the beginning of verse 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. In addition to what we have noted about this word in previous discussions, the opening word *asapera*, "I will declare," repeats the word *asaper* at the beginning of section IX. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This is the only instance of the word *enut* (translated here as "affliction")in the Bible. The commentaries disagree about the root and the meaning of the term. Rashi explains: "*Enut ani* – the cry of the poor. All instances of *aniya* in the Bible mean crying." According to this explanation, the contrast between "the words of my cry," which were not heard, and the "cry of the poor" in verse 12, which was heard, is a clear contrast. However, the Ibn Ezra and the Radak understand that *enut* is derived from *ani*, and that it means "the affliction of the afflicted." [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The rationale offered for the appeal to those who fear God to praise Him is strange – not some great act that God performed for the person who cried out to Him, not salvation, but merely the fact that He heard his prayer and did not hide His face from him. Clearly, the intention of the rationale is also that God answered his supplication. Why, then, is this answer not spelled out? The reason is that the petitioner has not yet actually been saved, and he therefore cannot describe his rescue, but he is certain that God has heard his prayer and will save him. It turns out, then, that the unique content of the rationale for praising God also attests to its belonging to the previous third of the psalm. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Were we to divide the section into three sections, the visual parallelism would be clearer. But the stanzas that comprise this section are short, and so we joined the three stanzas into a single section. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. "Here the word *yashuvu* denotes 'giving attention to,' and not necessarily 'remembering'" – Amos Chakham in his commentary to this verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. "The fat ones of the earth" refers to those who eat and are fat, that is, those who are rich and live in luxury, who must thank God and bow before Him for the good that He has given them. The parallel eating in section XIII is from the thanksgiving offerings in the Temple. This is the eating of “the meek,” which is accompanied by praise of God, as in the continuation of verse 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. "All they that go down to the dust" stands in contrasting parallelism to "all the fat ones of the earth." The reference is to the common people, who, although they do not eat of the cream of the world as do the fat ones of the earth, they too "shall bow before Him."

    The concluding words, "*ve-nafsho lo chiya"* ("and he that cannot keep alive his own soul"), are difficult. Amos Chakham understands that they parallel "all they that go down to the dust": "All who cannot keep their souls alive will kneel before Him. In other words, all creatures who are not in control of their own lives, but whose lives depend upon the will of God, will prostrate themselves before Him." But this seems forced.

    The parallelism between section XIII and verse 30 highlights several contrasts: "the meek" – "the fat ones of the earth"; "may your heart forever revive (*yechi*)" – "and he that cannot keep alive (*chiya*) his own soul." Regarding the latter contrast, the Ibn Ezra writes: "Not one of them can keep alive his own soul. This is an allusion to the fact that their lives will be lost in this world, the opposite of the 'meek,' about whom it is written: 'May your heart forever revive.'" [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Without a doubt, the question regarding this section influenced the critical interpretation that severs verses 23-32 from those that precede them. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. a. According to this, "And they will turn to the Lord," means: "And they will repent for their sins against me, having persecuted me for no reason (and perhaps because I served God).”

    b. If our interpretation is correct, this prayer brings to mind Beruriah's words to her husband R. Meir (*Berakhot* 10a): "‘Ask for mercy for them [the wicked people who distressed R. Meir] that they should repent.’ He asked for mercy for them, and they repented."

    c. The psalmist deals with the other nations because of his having been saved from his enemies from those nations, but when he expresses his hope that they will repent, he expands his concern to include all of the nations: "All the ends of the world." [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The *lamed* is used here in the sense of "about." See also: "Say of me (*li*), He is my brother" (*Bereishit* 20:13); "So that men should not say of me (*li*), A woman slew him" (*Shofetim* 9:54). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. This is the way that the Septuagint read the verse, and the Ibn Ezra similarly explains: "'To a generation' – the coming generation; therefore the word is followed by '*yavo'u*,*'* as in: 'One generation passes away, and another generation comes (*ba*)' (*Kohelet* 1:4)." [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *Tzidkato* is used here in the sense of salvation. Amos Chakham brings an example of this usage from *Tehillim* 98:2: "The Lord has made known His **salvation** (*yeshu'ato*); His **righteousness** (*tzidkato*) He has revealed in the sight of the nations." [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. The parallelism is defective: The words "their seed shall serve Him" should be read also at the beginning of verse 32, and the words "that He has done this" should be read also at the end of the verse 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Over the course of Jewish history, events took place involving individuals, who instructed their descendants to mark those events with days of thanksgiving for all future generations. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. See above, a similar connection between sections XI-XIII and section II. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)