YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***TEHILLIM* (SERIES II)**

**Rav Elchanan Samet**

**Shiur #14: Psalm 11 - “How Can You Say To My Soul, Flee Like A Bird…”**

**Exegetical Appendix**

### I. Stanza V – "The Lord Chooses [*Yivchan*] the righteous"

 Stanza V consists of an antithetical parallelism between God's attitude toward the righteous, which is described in the first clause of the stanza, and His attitude toward the wicked, which is described in its second clause.[[1]](#footnote-1) The *vav* with which the second clause opens serves as an antithetical *vav*.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| The Lord | the righteous | examines/tries/chooses [*yivchan*] |
|  |  |  |
|  | **But** the wicked and he who loves violence  | His soul hates. |

 The striking exegetical difficulty raised by this presentation of the antithetical parallelism is the meaning of the word *yivchan* in the first clause, and how it stands in contrast to the words "His soul hates" in the second clause.

The verb *bachan* appears in the Bible in several senses:

* He examined and investigated something that was unknown: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; **examine me** [*bechaneini*], and know my thoughts" (*Tehillim* 139:23).
* He clarified the truth: "That your word may be clarified [*ve-yibachanu*], whether there be any truth in you" (*Bereishit* 42:16).
* He tried, put to the test: "When your fathers tried Me, **tested me** [*bechanuni*]" (*Tehillim* 95:9).
* He brought afflictions: "For you, O God, **have afflicted us** [*vechantanu*]… You have brought us into the net; You have laid affliction upon our loins" (*Tehillim* 66:10-11).
* He purified, refined: "And I **will refine them** [*u-vechantim*] as gold is refined" (*Zekharya* 13:9).
* And in Rabbinic Hebrew, in the *hif'il* conjugation: He distinguished: "To **distinguish** [*le-havchin*] between the day and the night" (*Berakhot* 60b).

It should be noted that the verb *bachan* appears in our psalm also in stanza IV, "Whose eyelids **try** [*yivchanu*] the children of men," in the sense of examination, clarification. The *bechina* in that verse applies to all of humanity, whereas here, in stanza V, the verb *yivchan* relates exclusively to the righteous man, in contrast to the expression that relates to the wicked, "His soul hates." It seems, therefore, that the meaning of the word in stanza V is different from the meaning of the word in stanza IV.

This is the explanation of Amos Chakham, who compares the verbs in the two adjacent verses, but distinguishes between them:

"The Lord examines the righteous" – The word *yivchan* here, "examines," has the same meaning as *yivchanu* in the preceding verse. In both verses, it means "to subject to close scrutiny." Here, however, God is studying the good person **to watch over him and to protect him.**

 This explanation fits the antithetical parallelism between the two clauses, because "studying" a person for the sake of watching over him can serve (though in a somewhat forced way) as the opposite of "hate." The problem is that while the verb *bachan* has various different meanings in Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew, nowhere do we find it in the sense of "studying for the sake of watching over."

 Many commentaries propose that the word *yivchan* in our verse means "tests" or "brings affliction" (the third and fourth meanings in the list above). The Radak writes as follows:[[2]](#footnote-2)

"The Lord tests the righteous" – As in: "For the Lord reproves him whom He loves" (*Mishlei* 3:12),[[3]](#footnote-3) and brings troubles upon him, and He tests him before the world to demonstrate his righteousness to people, that his heart will not fall because of the troubles. But "the wicked and he who loves violence His soul hates" to reprove, as he will not accept His reproof…

 The contrast between the two clauses according to this explanation is: God tests and afflicts the righteous [out of His love for him], but the wicked and he who loves violence, since His soul hates him, he does not bring afflictions upon him, and so he lives in peace.

 This explanation raises a serious difficulty: In the very next verse it is stated that God punishes the wicked! The commentators propose that the punishment mentioned in the next verse will come upon the wicked only at some later stage, but at this time the wicked live in peace, as suggested by the Radak in his commentary:

But the wicked… will not accept reproof until his time comes and He removes him from the world, as it is stated: "Upon the wicked He shall rain coals."

 This explanation requires surprising mutual completions of both clauses:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| The Lord the righteous | tests | [because He loves him] |
|  |  |  |
| But the wicked and him who loves violence | [He leaves in peace because] | His soul hates him. |

Moreover, we must fill in the gap in time between stanza V (which deals with the present) and the stanzas that follow (which deal with the somewhat distant future). Without these completions, one cannot understand the second half of the verse according to this explanation.

This explanation is indeed sharp and clever, but this is its deficiency. It veers from the simple reading of the verse. According to this explanation, we are not dealing here with the usual principle of reward and punishment, but rather with the problem of "bad things happening to good people, and good things happening to bad people," and its resolution.

A third explanation is brought by Amos Chakham in note 9 to his commentary on our psalm:

1. Some render this clause, "The Lord chooses the righteous," suggesting that *yivchan* is a variant of *yivchar*, the letters *nun* and *resh* being sometimes interchanged[[4]](#footnote-4) (see, for example, *Nevuchadnetzar* and *Nevuchadretzar*; *Akhan* and *Akhar*; and others.[[5]](#footnote-5)
2. Moreover, the verbs *bachan* and *bachar* are close and interchangeable.[[6]](#footnote-6)
3. Likewise, according to some commentators (*Yeshayahu* 48:10): "Behold I have refined you, but not in the manner of silver; I have tried you [*bechartikha*, meaning *bechantikha*] in the furnace of affliction."[[7]](#footnote-7)

 This is the best explanation proposed for our verse. According to this explanation, there is a clear and manifest contrast between God's "choosing" of the righteous and "His soul's hating" the wicked, and no additional element has to be inserted for the contrast between the two clauses to be complete and evident. The transition from stanza V to stanzas VI-VII is also natural according to this explanation.

 Note the verse that Amos Chakham cites from *Yeshayahu* 48:10:

Behold I have refined you, but not in the manner of silver; I have tried you in the furnace [*bechartikha* = *bechantikha*] of affliction.

 On what basis did the commentators (mentioned in note 7) conclude that the root *bet-chet-resh* means *bet-chet-nun*?

 The answer lies in the other verb in the verse that parallels the verb *bechartikha*, namely the verb *tzeraftikha*. The root *tzadi-resh-peh* appears in several Biblical verses in parallelism to the root *bet-chet-nun*, and both roots denote the act of refinement, purifying silver or gold of impurities. *Tzerifa* or *bechina* involves heating a nugget of silver or gold in an exceedingly hot furnace, and thereby melting the metals and leaving in the end silver or gold that is clean of impurities. The most detailed descriptions of the process of refining silver in a furnace are found in *Yechezkel* 22:17-22 and *Yirmeyahu* 6:26-30, which include the nouns ***bachon***and ***tzarof***as the names of the craftsmen who refine silver.

 The root *bet-chet-nun* is used in this sense even when it stands alone, without the parallel root of *tzadi-resh-peh*: "When He has tried me [*bechanani*], I shall come forth like gold" (*Iyov* 23:10).

 Since ***bet-chet-nun*** and ***tzadi-resh-peh*** constitute a fixed pair of parallel roots in Biblical descriptions of silver refinement,[[8]](#footnote-8) and since they always serve in a borrowed sense or as a metaphor for something that God does to man, many have explained the verb *bechartikha* in *Yeshayahu*, which describes the process of refinement, in the sense of *bechantikha*.

 The root *bet-chet-resh* appears several times in the book of *Mishlei* in the sense of *bet-chet-nun*, and there too in the context of refining metals: *kesef nivchar* or *zahav nivchar*.[[9]](#footnote-9)It would appear that in all those verses the reference is to "refined silver" or "refined gold" – in other words, *kesef* ***nivchan*** or *zahav* ***nivchan*** – noble metals that underwent a process of purification in a refiner's furnace.

We see, then, that the roots *bet-chet-nun* and *bet-chet-resh* can interchange, and that is the case in our verse as well.

 One might ask: Why does this interchange take place specifically in our verse? The answer is that this interchange creates an intentional connection between stanza IV, "Whose eyelids try [*yivchanu*] the children of men," and our verse, "The Lord chooses [*yivchan*] the righteous." However, in stanza IV the meaning is that God's eyelids try and examine (*yivchanu = yechakru*)the actions of men, as the root *bet-chet-nun* means in various verses. It is as a result of this examination that the Lord chooses (*yivchan = yivchar)* the righteous.

 Ben Yehuda writes in his dictionary, s.v. *bachan* (vol. I, p. 505):

*Bachan* in connection with silver or gold means that **he saw and tested** whether it was pure, that it contained no impurities… and **by extension,** he examined man, his heart, or the matter; he examined it to understand its essence, or whether it really is as it looks to the eye.

 According to Ben Yehuda, the primary meaning of the root *bet-chet-nun* is physical examination, connected to the craft of gold and silver refinement, and from there by extension the examination of people.[[10]](#footnote-10)

 We, however, wish to offer a definition of the root *bet-chet-nun* that is slightly different from that of Ben Yehuda. This root is synonymous with the root *tzadi-resh-peh*, and it relates to the physical act of refining gold or silver and removing the impurities therefrom, by melting the metals in a fiery furnace.[[11]](#footnote-11) This act involves a complex process, and it is possible that the various meanings of the root *bet-chet-nun* are connected to the different stages of the refinement process.

 If so, we can explain the act of God's testing His creatures in light of the act that the gold refiner performs on his gold, as these two roots are synonymous. The process which the *tzoref-bochen* performs on his metals parallels the process that God performs on people.

The refiner first takes the silver or gold nugget, the purity of which is unknown. The act of refinement then involves examining the state of the nugget – and by extension man, examining his heart and conscience.

This act of examination may lead to the conclusion that the gold is free of impurities, and from here, by extension, to the test by which God tests a person in order to establish his righteousness.

The act of refinement requires passing the nugget through exceedingly hot fire. This parallels bringing afflictions upon a person for the purpose of purifying him of his sins.

The objective of refining the gold or silver is to separate the precious metal from the base metals mixed in with it, and from here the implication of "distinction" in Rabbinic Hebrew, separating one thing from another.

We see, then, that all the meanings of the root *bet-chet-nun* are included in the actions performed by the craftsman, the *bochen* or *tzoref* of gold and silver. Our psalm alludes to this process, and the psalmist uses it to characterize God's relationship with all of mankind, and afterwards His relationship with the righteous.

### II. Stanza VI – "Upon the wicked He shall rain coals [*Pachim*], fire and brimstone"

 The Bible speaks about the fire and brimstone that God rains down from heaven. In *Bereishit* 19:24, it is stated: "Then the Lord **rained** upon Sedom and upon Amora **brimstone and fire** from the Lord out of heaven." *Yechezkel* 38:22 states, in a prophecy concerning Gog: "And I will **rain** down upon him … a torrential rain, and great hailstones, **fire, and brimstone**." But what are the *pachim* that God rains down upon the wicked?

 The word *pach* in the Bible refers to a "snare" that a hunter sets for his prey. In most instances, the word *pach* serves as a metaphor or in a borrowed sense with respect to man, but even in this use it retains the character of a real snare that a hunter sets and conceals in the ground and that catches the prey suddenly:

For man also knows not his time:

Like the fishes that are taken in an evil net,

And like the bird that are caught in the snare [*pach*];

So are the sons of men snared in an evil time,

When it falls suddenly upon them. (*Kohelet* 9:12)

 The *pach* is set in the ground,[[12]](#footnote-12) and it "springs up" from it, as stated by the prophet Amos:

Can a bird fall in **a snare [*pach*] upon the earth**, where there is no lure for it?

Does **a snare [*pach*] spring up from the earth,** and have taken nothing at all? (*Amos* 3:5)

 In our psalm, however, it is stated: "Upon the wicked He shall rain *pachim*." The source of these *pachim* is in heaven!

 This notwithstanding, the Radak, R. Yeshaya of Trani, and the Meiri all explain the word *pachim* according to its usual sense in the Bible. The Radak, in his attempt to answer the difficulty with this explanation, writes:

*Pachim* – from "from the snare [*pach*] of the fowler" (*Tehillim* 91:3), and it says *yamter* ("He will rain"), because the decrees come from heaven.

Accordingly, what is rained down from heaven are not the *pachim* themselves (not even in the borrowed sense), but rather the decrees issued against the wicked that they will be ensnared by them. The Radak apparently understands our verse as being defective: "He will rain down upon the wicked [a decree] of snares."

This explanation is forced, but it seems that the punctuation of the words according to the cantillation notes can accord with this explanation or something like it. According to the cantillation notes, there is no connection between the *pachim* and the fire and brimstone. Rather the fire and brimstone join with the scorching wind, the three of them being the lot of the wicked:

Upon the wicked He shall rain *pachim*,

Fire and brimstone and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.

This is not the way the verse was understood by the commentators that will be mentioned below.

The word *pachim* has another, rarer meaning, found only twice in the Bible:

And they did beat the **gold into thin plates** [*pachei zahav*], and cut into wires… (*Shemot* 39:3)

As for the censers of these sinners… let them make them into **beaten plates** [*riku'ei pachim*]for a covering of the altar… (*Bamidbar* 17:3)

 Onkelos translates the word *pachim* as *tasim*, thin metal plates. In the production of the *efod*, the "thin plates of gold" served as preparation for fashioning gold wires, which would be integrated into the threads of blue and crimson of the *efod*. In *Parashat Korach*, the thin copper plates (formed from the censers of Korach's company) served as a covering for the burnt-offering altar. Most of the commentators follow Onkelos. This meaning does not fit in at all with the *pachim* in our psalm.

 However, R. Yona Ibn Genach writes (*Sefer Ha-Shoreshim*, s.v. *pach*, p. 399):

*Riku'ei pachim*, *pachei ha-zahav* – nuggets of gold. "He will rain down upon them *pachim*" – stones of fire, which are being compared to metals.

According to this view, *pachim* are not thin plates of metal, but rather lumps of metal, and *pachim eish* are fiery lumps of metal.

 The Ibn Ezra seems to follow Ibn Genach in his explanation of the word *pachim* in our psalm:

"He will rain down" – He compares the evil that will suddenly come upon the wicked to *pachim*, like *riku'ei pachim*. They are like fiery stones that fall down together with the rain.

These *pachim*, which are "stones of **fire**," "like the **burning** stones that fall down with the rain" (as explained by Ibn Genach and the Ibn Ezra), are connected to the fire and brimstone later in the verse, which are also rained down by God from heaven. According to this explanation, the verse is divided in the way that we transcribed it at the beginning of our study:

Upon the wicked He shall rain stones of fire and brimstone,

And a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.

 Rashi also divides the verse in this manner, but he explains the word *pachim* in a different sense:

*Pachim* – like *pechamim*, coals.

The word *pecham* appears three more times in the Bible,[[13]](#footnote-13) and it is generally understood (as it means in Rabbinic Hebrew) in the sense of wood that underwent special processing for the purpose of being used as kindling material for coals.[[14]](#footnote-14) Rashi's source is apparently *Midrash Tehillim* on our psalm (ed. Buber, p. 100):

"He will rain down upon the wicked *pachim*, fire and brimstone" – coals of fire, as it is stated: "As coals [*pecham*]are to burning coals, and wood to fire" (*Mishlei* 26:21).[[15]](#footnote-15)

 The Midrash (and Rashi in its wake) appears to read the words in our verse as a construct: "*pachim-eish*" – a coal in which a fire burns. This construct, in opposite order, is found in *Yeshayahu* 54:16: "The smith that blows the fire of the coals [*be-eish pecham*]." Similarly, the Aramaic translation of our verse sees a construct: "*mafchim de-ishta*" (*mafchin* is apparently a translation of *pechamim* with a transmutation of the letters). The construct created by these two words stems from the fact that the *pecham*, coal, in itself is cold kindling material, and only when it is lit with fire does it serve its role as a *gachelet*, burning coal.

 The casting of a burning coal from heaven appears also in *Yechezkel* 10:2, in the instruction given in his vision to the man clothed in linen: "Fill your hands with **coals of fire** from between the *keruvim*, and **cast** them over the city [Jerusalem]."

### VI. Stanza VI – "And a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup"

 What is left for us to do is to explain the second line of stanza VI:

And a scorching [*zil'afot*] wind shall be the portion of their cup.

 The word *zil'afa* appears in two other places in the Bible:

Trembling [*zil'afa*] has taken hold of me because of the wicked who forsake Your Torah. (*Tehillim* 119:53)

Our skin is hot like an oven because of the burning [*zil'afot*] famine. (*Eikha* 5:10)

 It is difficult to isolate a common denominator between these three verses. The Aramaic translation of *Tehillim* renders the word *zil'afot* in our verse with the word *za'afa* – anger, whereas in *Tehillim* 119:53, the word is rendered as *retita* – trembling. The Ibn Ezra explains our verse based on the verse in *Tehillim* 119: "*Zil'afot* – like: 'Trembling has taken hold of me,' like: 'Fear took hold of them' (*Tehillim* 48:7)." He appears to understand that the letter *vav* must be inserted between the words *ru'ach* and *zil'afot*, as they are two separate things.

 Rashi explains our verse: "'*Zil'afot*' – a term of burning," apparently under the influence of the verse in *Eikha*, where *zil'afot ra'av* are the cause that "our skin is hot like an oven" – that is to say, that our skin is heated up like an oven. (Rashi there repeats his comment regarding our verse, that *ru'ach zil'afot* is a term of burning.) *Ru'ach zil'afot* thus means a burning, scorching wind.

 It is difficult to decide between the various explanations based on the word *zil'afot* alone, as the facts that are available to us are meager.[[16]](#footnote-16) It should, however, be noted that Rashi's explanations of the two clauses comprising stanza VI highlight the parallelism between them:

Upon the wicked he shall rain fiery coals and brimstone

And a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup.

 The punishment that God brings upon the wicked is fierce and burning heat, which He casts down upon them from heaven in two ways: He rains down upon them fiery coals and brimstone, and He pours for them a cup of scorching wind, which also comes from heaven.

### IV. Stanza VII – "The upright shall behold His face"

 We already saw in section V above that stanzas VI-VII implement that which was stated in the two clauses of stanza V regarding God's attitude toward the righteous and the wicked, and this is done in chiastic order. According to this, stanza VII is meant to expand upon, explain, and realize that which was stated in the first half of stanza V: "The Lord chooses the righteous."

For the Lord is righteous,

He loves righteousness,

The upright shall behold His face.

 The Radak and the Meiri understand the clause, "He loves righteousness," as incomplete, as it is missing the word *ish*, "man." The clause thus means: "He loves a man of righteousness." According to them, this clause parallels the third clause in this stanza, "The upright shall behold His face," "man of righteousness," paralleling "the upright."

 This is the way verse 7 in our psalm was expounded in *Midrash Tehillim* (ed. Buber, p. 51):

"For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness" – R. Yehuda bar Simon said: Every craftsman hates his fellow craftsmen, but the Holy One, blessed be He, is not like that. Rather the righteous one loves righteousness [His fellow craftsman, a man of righteousness].

The word *ki* at the beginning of stanza VII comes to explain that the Lord chooses the righteous (as stated in stanza V) **because** He Himself is righteous. Even those commentators who do not highlight the connection between the two stanzas explain the word *ki* as an explanation for what follows: "Since the Lord is righteous, He loves the one who performs righteousness" (Ibn Yachya).

God's **love** for the man who performs righteousness stands in contrast to what was stated in stanza V concerning God's attitude toward the wicked: "His soul **hates.**"[[17]](#footnote-17) But God's loving attitude toward the righteous does not suffice. Just as stanza VI describes the punishment that God will bring upon the wicked owing to His hatred for them, so we would expect stanza VII to describe the reward for the righteous owing to God's love for them. This seems to be the role of the third clause in this stanza, “The upright shall behold His face.”

 The interpretation of this clause depends on two things:

**Explanation of the words:**

The word *yashar*, upright – does it refer to God, to the righteous man, or perhaps to the upright act?

The word *paneimo –* does it mean "their faces," or is it equivalent to *panav*, "his face"? According to the latter interpretation, *paneimo* is "an archaic poetic form, usually used as a plural, but occasionally employed instead of the singular," as suggested by Amos Chakham in his explanation of the verse.[[18]](#footnote-18)

 **Grammatical parsing:** Is *yashar* the subject of the sentence – in which case it means *yesharim*, the upright in plural, so that it accords with the plural verb that follows it, *yechezu*, "shall behold"? According to this reading, the reference is to the righteous people who shall behold the face of God. Or is *yashar* perhaps the object of the sentence: "His face shall see the upright"?

 Many different explanations have been offered for this ambiguous verse, starting with *Midrash Tehillim* on our psalm and down to the latest commentaries. In this framework, we cannot cite all the possible explanations, as they are too numerous. Instead, we will present what appears to us to be the correct understanding based on the context.

 It seems that the last two clauses of stanza VII stand in synonymous parallelism:

[A man of] righteousness He loves,

The upright His face shall behold

According to this parallelism, "the upright" is another term for "a man of righteousness;" just as God loves a man of righteousness, so too God's face shall behold the upright.

This "seeing of the face" brings to mind the imperative: "Three times a year shall all your males be seen [*yeira'e*] by the face of [*penei*] the Lord your God" (*Devarim* 16:16) this being a command that every man appear before God so that God's face will see him. The wording of our psalm also bring to mind the priestly blessing: "The Lord make His face [*panav*] shine [*ya'er*] upon you" (*Bamidbar* 6:25), although *ya'er* is, of course, derived from the root *alef-vav-resh*.

This explanation accords with what we would have expected to find in stanza VII – it describes the righteous man's **reward** from God, which constitutes an actualization of God's love for him. However, in contrast to the punishment meted out to the wicked, which is described in concrete terms (a rain of fire and brimstones, and scorching wind), the righteous man's reward is not concrete: He merits God's illuminated face, an attitude of love, concern, and closeness, which includes all of the good in the world.

Two words in stanza VII connect it also to other stanzas in the psalm:

1) *Yashar* – "the upright": This word appears (in the plural) in the first half of the psalm, in stanza II: "For, lo, the wicked… that they may shoot in darkness at **the upright [*yishrei*] in heart."** This connection proves that "the upright" refers to the righteous **man** (rather than to God or an upright deed). What is alluded to by this connection between the two places is that God's beholding of the upright will protect him from the arrows of the wicked that are shot at him.

2) *Yechezu* – "shall behold": This word appears also in the central axis, in stanza IV: "Whose eyes **behold [*yechezu*]."**

 According to the explanation that we have adopted, the subject of the verb "behold" in each of the stanzas is the same: the eyes or the face of **God.** But the object of God's beholding in these two stanzas is different. In stanza IV, "His eyes behold" **the children of men** (as filled in based on the parallel clause), and this beholding denotes overseeing and examining their actions, as in the parallel clause: "Whose eyelids try the children of men."

 In stanza VII, the object of God's beholding is the upright – the righteous man, and the purpose of God's beholding the righteous man is not to examine his deeds, but rather to shine His face upon him in reward for his righteousness.

 It should be noted that a similar relationship exists between the last line in stanza IV (which parallels the line, "Whose eyes behold," which was just discussed) and the first line in stanza V (on which stanza VII is based):

Stanza IV: Whose eyelids **try [*yivchanu*]** the children of men.

Stanza V: The Lord **chooses [*yivchan*]** the righteous.

Here too, the verb *bachan* appears in each of these two stanzas in reference to an action of God, but not in connection with the same object or in the same sense. In stanza IV, the object is mankind as a whole, and God's *bechina* involves an examination of their actions, whereas in stanza V the object is the righteous man, and God's *bechina* involves His choosing of him.

To summarize, the explanation that we have adopted for the last line in our psalm, *yashar yechezu paneimo* is the only explanation that accords with the context of that line at three levels. It fits in with the parallelism between that line and the previous line in stanza VII itself; with the substantive connection between stanza VII and stanza V; and with the linguistic connection between the line in question and stanzas II, IV, and V.

Translated by David Strauss

1. There is another contrast between the two parts of the second clause of this stanza: "He who **loves** violence/ His soul **hates."** [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Rashi, Ibn Ezra (in part), Meiri, Ibn Yachya, *Metzudot*, and Malblim fundamentally follow this approach. There are more significant and less significant differences between these commentaries, but the common denominator between them is what we have written above. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Radak brings the verse from *Mishlei*, which states that God reproves a person out of **His love** for him, in order to create antithetical parallelism with what is stated in our verse regarding the wicked man: "His soul hates." The idea that God causes afflictions out of love appears in several places in the Bible: *Devarim* 8:3-5; *Iyov* 5:17-18. See also the verse in *Mishlei* in its context (verses 11-12). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The letters *lamed*, *mem*, *nun*, and *resh* enjoy phonetic similarity, and therefore they tend to become interchanged in speech, and thus also in writing. See our comments in *Pirkei Eliyahu*, pp. 460-463 ("*Chilufei LMN"R Ba-Mikra*"), and in the reference cited there in note 20. The interchange of *nun* and *resh* is found primarily between Hebrew and Aramaic: *ben = bar*; *shenayim* = *trein*; and many others. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Nevuchadnetzar with a *nun* appears 58 times in the Bible, whereas Nevuchadretzar with a *resh* appears 33 times. The name Akhan (the son of Carmi) appears 6 times in the book of *Yehoshua*, whereas in I *Divrei Ha-Yamim* 2:7, his name appears as "Akhar, the troubler (*okher*) of Israel," and it is possible that the change in name there reflects a homiletic exposition.

Other examples, besides the verse in *Yeshayahu*, cited by Amos Chakham in the continuation: *rachum = nachum* (*Ezra* 2:2, *Nechemya* 7:7); *yeratek* (*Kohelet* 12:7), which many understand as *yenatek*; *netacheha – retacheha* (*Yechezkel* 24:4-5); and many others; see also our comments later in the body of this study. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This explanation is different from the previous one. According to this approach, we are not dealing with a coincidental phonetic interchange of two sounds that takes place in spoken language, and from there in writing as well, but rather with a semantic affinity between the verbs *bachan* and *bachar*, because of which they can interchange. Nevertheless, there is a connection between this explanation and the previous one. In our book *Pirkei Eliyahu*, p. 463, we wrote: “The interchanges involving the letters *lamed*, *mem*, *nun*, and *resh* took place not only for reasons of pronunciation. At times, several different roots were deliberately created from a single original root, the distinction in meaning between them following from a change in one of the root letters (for example: *lachash*-*nachash*-*rachash*).”

This interchange, *bachan*-*bachar*, is a fixed interchange between Hebrew and Aramaic and Syriac. Targum Onkelos and Targum Yonatan render the verb *bachan* in the Torah and the Prophets with the Aramaic verb *bachar*, which in Aramaic means exactly the same thing. Here is Targum Onkelos on the Torah (based on the precise text recorded in *Chumash Torah Chayyim*): *Bereishit* 42:15-16: "Hereby you shall be proved [*tibacheinu*]… that your words may be proved [*ve-yibacheinu*]…" – "*titbacharun*… *ve-yitbacharun*." See also Targum to *Devarim* 33:8: "Whom you proved [*nisito*] at Masa… and with whom you did strive [*teriveihu*] at the waters of Meriva" – "*denisitahu*… *bechartehi*." And here is Targum Yonatan to the Prophets [ed. Sperber]: *Yirmeyahu* 9:6: "*u-vechantim* – *u*-*vachar lehon*"; *Yirmeyahu* 12:3: "*u-vachanta* – *at bachar*"; *Yirmeyahu* 17:10: "*bochen* – *bachar*"; *Yirmeyahu* 20:12: "*bochen* – *bachar*"; *Zekharya* 13:9: "*u-vechantim* – *ve-avcharinan*." There are a few places where Targum Yonatan translates *bachan* based on the context in the sense of "test." The verb *bachar* is sometimes rendered as is: Targum Onkelos on *Shemot* 17:9: "*bechar* – *bechar*"; *Shemot* 14:7: "*bachur* – *bechiran*." Targum Yonatan: *Yehoshua* 24:22: "*bechartem* – *bechartun*." But most instances of the verb *bachar* are rendered in both of these Targumim with verbs from the root *resh-tzadi*-*heh* (= *resh-ayin-heh*). In any event, it may be concluded that the verb *bachar* and the verb *bachan*, which are distinct from each other in Hebrew, serve in Aramaic as one – *bachar*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. So explains R. Saadya Gaon in his *Tafsir* on *Yeshayahu* (ed. Ratzhavi, Kiryat Ono 5754, p. 108); Ri Ibn Genach, *Sefer Ha-Shorashim*, s.v., *bet-chet-resh* (p. 61); Ibn Ezra and Radak in the name of "some who say" (both propose an alternative explanation, without interchanging the *resh* and *nun*); R. Shimon Berman in his commentary to *Yeshayahu*, *Or Bahir* (Vilna 5704); Shmuel Krauss in his *Peirush Mada'i* (ed. Kahana, Zhitomir 5704); Sh. Paul, in his commentary to *Yeshayahu* in *Mikra Le-Yisrael*; and other modern commentators. In the Isaiah Scroll from Qumran, the reading is indeed “*bechantikha*.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Yirmeyahu* 9:6: "Behold, I will smelt them [*tzorfam*], and try them [*u-vechantim*]"; *Zekharya* 13:9: "And I will refine them [*u-tzeraftim*] as silver is refined, and will try them [*u-vechantim*] as gold is tried"; *Tehillim* 17:3: "You have proved [*bachanta*] my heart… You have tried me [*tzeraftani*]"; *Tehillim* 66:10: "For You, O God, have tested us [*vechantanu*]; You have tried us [*tzeraftanu*], as silver is refined"; *Mishlei* 17:3: "The refining pot [*matzref*] is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the Lord tries [*bochen*] the hearts"; *Tehillim* 26:2: "Examine me [*bechaneini*], O Lord, and prove me; try [*tzarfa*] my reins and my heart." [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Mishlei* 8:10; 8:19; 10:20; and perhaps also 16:16; 22:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. R. Shimon Berman, in his commentary to *Yeshayahu* (*Or Bahir* 48:10) maintains the opposite: "The verb *bachan* in its ordinary sense (test, examine) was extended to the refinement of gold… and also to the examination of gold… whether it is pure." We prefer the position of Ben Yehuda in his dictionary. First of all, it stands to reason that the concrete meaning preceded the more abstract meaning; second, for the reasons listed below in the body of the study. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Just as the root *bet-chet-nun* was extended to people in several senses, as will be discussed below, the root *tzadi-resh-peh* was similarly lent for the same purposes and in the same senses, both in the seven verses where these two verbs appear together (notes 8-9), and where the verb *tzaraf* appears by itself in connection with people or other non-metalic matters. For example: *Tehillim* 105:19; II *Shemuel*  22:31; *Tehillim*  18:31; *Tehillim*  119:140; and elsewhere. Particular note should be taken of *Shofetim* 7:4: "The people are yet too many; bring them down to the water, and I will sift [***ve-etzrefenu***] them for you there," which means *ve-evchenenu*, and the *bechina* is explained in the continuation, in verse 5. *Targum Yonatan* translates the word with: ***ve-evcharnun***. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In about a quarter of the instances of the word *pach* in the Bible (25 appearances), the term is connected to the ground or to the act of concealing it in the ground. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Yeshayahu* 44:12: "The ironsmith makes an axe, and works in the coals [*ba-pecham*]…"; *Yeshayahu* 54:16: "Behold, I have created the smith who blows upon the fire of the coals [*pecham*], and that bring forth an instrument for his work"; *Mishlei* 26:21: "As coals [*pecham*] are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife." [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. This *pecham etz* – charcoal – should nto be confused with *pecham even* – coal – which is mined from the ground. The latter "is not mentioned in ancient [Hebrew] literature" – so writes Tur-Sinai in a note to the entry "*pecham*" in Ben Yehuda's dictionary (vol. X, p. 4883). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. In the continuation, the *midrash* brings another explanation similar to that of the Radak, R. Yeshaya of Trani, and the Meiri: "Another explanation: *Pachim*, snares, as it is stated: 'As a bird hastens to the snare' (*Mishlei* 7:23)." [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ben Yehuda in his dictionary, s.v. *zil'afa* (vol. III, pp. 1347-1348), writes in a note: "The source of this word has not been clarified. Some suggest that it is derived from *za'af*, with the addition of a *lamed*." This is what follows from the Aramaic translation of our verse cited above. In the entry itself he writes: "Scorching heat, like that of an eastern wind," like Rashi, and in the note there he writes: "All the moderns explain it in this sense [like Rashi], and they bring support for this from the Arabic, where we find the phrase 'fire of hunger' (like *zil'afot ra'av* in *Eikha*)." [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. In stanza V itself, the contrast is between God's **choosing** the righteous man and His soul's hate for the wicked. But this contrast is sharpened in stanza VII, where God's choosing of the righteous is justified by His love for him. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ibn Ezra, in the name of R. Moshe Gikatela, as well as other commentators bring an example of this from the verse in *Iyov* 22:2, and it is possible to add several other verses from that book: *Iyov* 20:23, and similarly 27:23: *Yispok aleimo kapeimo*, which means: *Yispok alav* (on the wicked man) *kapav*. See the references to discussions concerning this form in Amos Chakham's commentary to *Iyov* 20:23, note 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)