Midrash Tehillim

Midrash Tehillim / Psalms 120 | מדרש תהילים קכ

Midrash Tehillim 120, Part 1

1. A song of the goings up. When I was in trouble I called upon the Lord, and He answered me. Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue (Tehillim / Psalms 120:1). Jeremiah said, Wing unto the Lord, praise you the Lord (Jeremiah 20:13). Why? On what occasion? Because, as the verse concludes, He has delivered the soul of the needy from the nad of evil doers. And when the Holy One blessed be He, delivers the children of Israel, not only will they praise Him, but all men will praise Him. Thus long ago, when God delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Egyptians, all men praised God, as is said, And Jethro rejoiced, and Jethro said, Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods (Shemot / Exodus 18:9-11). When God delivered Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah out of the fiery furnace, all men praised God, as is said Nebuchadnezzar spoke and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego who has sent His angel, and delivered His servants that trusted in Him (Daniel 3:28). These are instances out of the past, but in the future as well, when the children of Israel get free of their troubles and go up out of the exile, men of all nations will sing His praise, for it is said, A song of the goings up. Another comment, Note that the verse does not read, A song of a going up, but A song of the goings up, that is to say, when the children of Israel go up, they will go up not one height at a time, but will go up many heights at once. As Scripture says, Going, we will go up, and possess it (Bamidbar / Numbers 13:30). Scripture says also, Who is this that keeps ascending out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke? (Song 3:6) that is, Who is this that is helped to ascend steadily out of the wilderness? So, too, when the children of Israel come down, they do not make one descent at a time, for it was said to them, You will come down lower and lower (Devarim / Deuteronomy 28:43), and also How has the Lord cast down from heaven unto the earth, the beauty of Israel (Lamentations

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2:1). On the other hand, when the children of Israel go up, they will go up many heights at once. Hence, it is said, A song of the goings up.

**Midrash Tehillim 120, Part 2**

2. In my distress I called unto the Lord Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue (Tehillim / Psalms 120:1-2). The children of Israel said to the Holy One blessed be He, Even as You have delivered us from all kinds of distress, deliver us from this one, and we will have no other distress, for lying lips in them is our distress. Hence, it is said, Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, etc. Of all the organs of a man's body, some are fixed in place and some have freedom of movement; his feet make him free to come and go, his hands make it possible for him to give and take. Only the tongue is neither fixed nor free. Being set inside it is isolated and hemmed in. And yet the tongue can smite the great and the small, the near and the far. IT came smite all the more fatally, if it were outside a man's body, or if like some other parts it could give and take, or if like the feet it were free to come and go.

**Midrash Tehillim 120, Part 3**

3. What will it profit you, or what will be added unto you, you false tongue? (Tehillim / Psalms 120:3) What will your falseness profit you, or what good can it do you? The tongue sins, but not for its own advantage. The Holy One blessed be He, says to the tongue, When a thief steals, he steals to eat. Though it is written, You will not steal (Shemot / Exodus 20:13), a thief will steal for the need of the moment, as it is said Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry (Mishley / Proverbs 6:30). And though it is written You will not commit adultery (Shemot / Exodus 20:13), a man will commit adultery and for the moment satisfy his appetite, as is said, He that commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; he that does it destroys his own soul (Mishley / Proverbs 6:32). Though the adulterer destroys his own soul, yet for the moment he satisfies his lust. But you, O tongue, what good have you done yourself by your slaying? I will tell you, O evil tongue, how I am going to act towards you. Even as you have acted towards the world from the beginning, as a serpent you spoke evil to Adam, so will I act towards you. You were also the serpent tongue of the wilderness, when, as it is written, The people spoke against God and against Moshe (Bamidbar / Numbers 21:5). And how did the Lord act towards them? The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people. Why serpents? Because it was a serpent that spoke evil, as is said, They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; vipers' venom is under their lips (Tehillim / Psalms 140:4). And so I made those evil tongues children of Israel into the dust that I had decreed for the serpent, Dušt will you eat (Bereshit / Genesis 3:14).
Midrash Tehillim 120, Part 4

4. What will it profit you, or what will be added unto you, you false tongue? (Tehillim / Psalms 120:3). The evil tongue is called triple-slaying. Why? Because it slays three, the one who owns it, the one who listens to it, and the one of whom it speaks. And so you find in the story of Doeg that it slew three. It slew Doeg himself, for he has no portion in the world to come; it slew Ahimelech the priest, for it is said, And Nob the city of the priests (Doeg) smote with the edge of the sword (1 Samuel 22:19); it also slew Saul, who listened to it and accepted its words, for it is said, So Saul died, and his three sons. And the wicked kingdom slays with its tongue as does a serpent, for it is said, The voice thereof will go like a serpent (Jeremiah 46:22). The tongue is like an arrow. Why? Because if a man takes his sword in hand to slay his fellow, who thereupon pleads with him and begs for mercy, the would be slayer can repent and return the sword to its sheath. But an arrow once the would be slayer aims and lets it go, he cannot bring it back even if he wants to bring it back. Hence, it is said, Sharp are the arrows of the mighty, like coals of broom (Tehillim / Psalms 120:4), for a broom shrub once set on fire makes coals that cannot be extinguished. Once it happened that two men going through the wilderness sat down under a broom shrub, gathered some fallen twigs of the broom, broiled them themselves what they wanted to eat, and ate their victuals. A year later when they came back into the wilderness to the place of the broom shrub and found the ashes of the fire which they had kindled, they said, It is now twelve months since we came through here and ate in this place. Thereupon, they raked up the ashes, and as they walked over them, their feet were burnt by the coals under the ashes, for they were still unextinguished. Hence, the evil tongue is said to be like coals of broom, as in the verse Sharp are the arrows of the mighty, like coals of broom (Tehillim / Psalms 120:4). A wicked man can slay other men with his tongue. Like an arrow which a man is unaware of until it reaches him, so is the evil tongue. A man is unaware of it until its arrows from the kingdom of Esau come suddenly upon him. A man remains unaware of it until suddenly a sentence of death or imprisonment is released against him. For while the man is given over to his own affairs, the scribes libel him wherever he may be and so slay him. Hence it is said, Sharp are the arrows of the mighty. Thus, Moshe said to Israel, You will not be afraid of the terror by night (Tehillim / Psalms 91:5) that is, of the terror of the kingdom of Esau; and he went on to say, Nor of the arrow that flies by day, that is, the arrow of the scribes of Esau. Hence it is said, Sharp are the arrows of the mighty.

Midrash Tehillim 120, Part 5

5. Woe is me, that I sojourn in Meshech (Tehillim / Psalms 120:5). What is meant by Meshech in Woe is me, that I sojourn in Meshech?
It means that I have been led away from Babylon into Media, from Media into Greece, and from Greece into Edom, for Scripture speaks of me as A people carried off (memushshach) and despoiled (Isaiah 18:7). What, then, can Meshech mean except memushshach, carried off that is, I have been carried off into these lands. And I dwell beside the tents of Kedar (Tehillim / Psalms 120:5). What is meant by Kedar? It means that the faces of the people I dwell beside are black as the bottom of a pot (kederah). What else can be meant by Woe is me, that I sojourn in Meshech? It means that I sojourn in the midst of a people that will be led away (nimshachin) to Gehenna. And I dwell beside the tents of Kedar, that is, beside those who have no one place to sit in or stand in, but pitch their tents one day here, and the next day there, one day in one place and the next day in another place, and the day after in still another place. So the wicked, They are like the tents of Kedar, for one day they dwell here, and the next day they are off to another place.

Midrash Tehillim 120, Part 6
6. My soul has long dwelt with him that hates peace (Tehillim / Psalms 120:6). Is there any man who hates peace? Esau hates peace. Scripture says, I will give you peace in the land (Vayikra / Leviticus 26:6). When will there be peace? The verse goes on to answer, After I will cause evil beasts to cease out of the land. Evil beasts can refer only to the boar, for it is said, The wild boar out of the wood does root it up, and the wild beasts of the field devour it (Tehillim / Psalms 80:14), and the boar is none other than wicked Esau.

Midrash Tehillim 120, Part 7
7. I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war (Tehillim / Psalms 120:7). What is meant by I am for peace? That the Holy One blessed be He, said to the Messiah, You will break them, the nations, with a rod of iron; you will dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel (Tehillim / Psalms 2:9), and that the Messiah replied, No, O Master of the Universe. When I speak to the nations, I will begin by speaking of peace. Hence, it is said I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war. Isaiah said, Peace, peace, to him that is far off and to him that is near, says the Lord, and I will heal him (Isaiah 57:19) that is, the Holy One blessed be He, said I, My hands reach out to the penitent. I turn back no man who gives me his heart in repentance. Hence, Peace, peace, to him that is far off and to him that is near. If any man comes towards Me, I will go towards him, and I will heal him, as is said, I will heal him. But the wicked are like the troubled sea (Isaiah 57:20). Like the troubled sea, the wicked do not seek peace; but they devise deceitful matters against them that are quiet in the land (Tehillim / Psalms 35:20). Wherefore? Because the wicked do not seek peace. Hence it is said I am for peace; but when I speak they are for war.