Midrash Tehillim / Psalms 121

Midrash Tehillim

Midrash Tehillim Part 1

1. A son to ascents. I will lift up my eyes unto the mountains, from whence will my help come? My help comes from the Lord (Tehillim / Psalms 121:1). David said, A son to ascents. After You have taken us up the last ascent, we will not be brought down. That is to say, after God saves us from the kingdom of Esau, we will not again be degraded in servitude to the kingdoms, as is said, And saviors will come up on Mount Zion to judge the Mount of Esau; and the kingdom will be the Lord’s (Obadiah 1:14). The children of Israel said to the Holy One blessed be He, To You we will sing a song of the last ascent whereto You will raise us from among the kingdoms. Hence, it is said, A song to ascents. I will lift up my eyes unto the mountains, etc. What is meant by unto the mountains? It means that on the day when the Holy One blessed be He, comes to judge mankind, the children of Israel will look unto the fathers to plead for them, but no father will be able to save his son and no man will be able to save his brother. In their time of distress, on the day of judgment, the children of Israel will lift up their eyes to their Father in heaven, and say For You are our Father; for Abraham knows us not, and Israel does not acknowledge us. You, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from everlasting is Your name (Isaiah 63:16). My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth (Tehillim / Psalms 121:2). The Holy One blessed be He, said this to Israel, Do you know who will help you? He who made heaven and earth.

Midrash Tehillim Part 2

2. He will not suffer your foot to slip (Tehillim / Psalms 121:3). What is meant by He will not suffer your foot to slip? When all men are in danger of slipping into Gehenna, you will not slip. Similarly, the verse, To Me belongs vengeance, and recompense, their foot will slide in due time (Devarim / Deuteronomy 32:35) means that when the foot of the wicked slides, you will not slide, for it is said, He will keep the feet of His holy ones (1 Samuel 2:9). Hence, it is written, O bless our
God, you people (Tehillim / Psalms 66:8). For what reason are you to bless God? Because, as the next verse says, He has set our soul in life, and suffered not our foot to slip.

Midrash Tehillim 121, Part 3

3. Behold, He that keeps Israel does neither slumber nor sleep (Tehillim / Psalms 121:4). But is there such a thing as sleep in heaven? Surely not. In heaven there is no sleep, nor is there sitting. As Scripture says, I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and beheld a wakeful one and a holy one came down from heaven (Daniel 4:10), and says also, The matter is by the decree of the wakeful ones (Daniel 4:14). In these verses, the word wakeful proves that there is no sleep in heaven. Why, then, does the Psalmist make a point of saying that He that keeps you does not slumber? Because it would appear from the troubles which come upon the children of Israel in this world that the Holy One blessed be He, was asleep, if one dare speak thus. Indeed, Asaph did say, Awak, why do You sleep, O Lord? (Tehillim / Psalms 44:24). But from the prophets it can be shown that He that keeps you does not slumber. When the Prophets prophesied and wept, saying, If I forgot you, O Jerusalem (Tehillim / Psalms 137:5), should they not have spoken in the plural? It must be concluded that the Holy One blessed be He, was saying to the Prophets, You weep, and was saying through them, I weep with you. Thus the I in If I forget you, O Jerusalem is the Holy One blessed be He, saying, I will not forget you. It may be concluded that the Holy One blessed be He, was saying, I will not forget you. Likewise, He said through Isaiah, Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, these may forget, yet will I not forget you (Isaiah 49:15). In the light of this verse is If I forget you, O Jerusalem to be understood. The Prophets wept not because of Zion, when they said, There we sat down, yes, we wept, when we remembered Zion (Tehillim / Psalms 137:1), but because of Him who had once dwelt in Zion. The Psalm says further on, Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I remember you not (Tehillim / Psalms 137:6). When ought a man not remember Zion? He ought to remember Zion when he is standing in the prayer of the Eighteen Benedictions, and says, To Jerusalem, Your city, return in mercy, and when he is reciting Grace after a meal, and says, The Lord who will comfort Zion and rebuild Jerusalem. He ought to remember Zion at the Shabbat service when he is reading the lesson from the Prophets, and says Have mercy upon Zion because it is the house of our life. Hence it is said, If I remember you not; if I set not Jerusalem upon my chiefest joy (Tehillim / Psalms 137:6). By upon, etc., the Psalmist alludes to the ashes which are put upon the bridegroom’s head and upon the bride’s head during the wedding. Hence, it is said, If I set not Jerusalem upon my chiefest joy. Remember O Lord, against the children of Edom the day of Jerusalem (Tehillim / Psalms 137:7). Why does the Psalmist single out Edom? Was Edom the first to destroy Jerusalem? Was not rather Babylon the first to destroy it? Why then does the Psalmist say, Remember, O Lord, against the children of Edom
the day of Jerusalem? Because the Psalmist prophesied that the Temple would be rebuilt and that Edom would destroy it. Therefore, it is said, Remember, O Lord, against the children of Edom the day of Jerusalem. The Holy One blessed be He, asked, And what particular thing will I remember? The Psalmist replied, remember O Lord, the day when the nephew of Titus came into the Temple, his drawn sword in his hand, and slashed back and forth until the blade was all bloody, and then came forth boasting, saying that he had slain God Himself. Will You refrain Yourself for these things, O Lord? Will You hold Your peace? (Isaiah 64:11). If not for our sake, then remember for Your sake. Remember that knave’s vilification of You. Hence, Remember, O Lord, against the children of Edom the day of Jerusalem. The Holy One blessed be He, replied, Are you telling Me Remember? I will not forget. You too, remember. Remember what Amalek did unto you by the way as you came forth out of Egypt (Devarim / Deuteronomy 25:17). A man who forgets to take care of himself ought not ask another to remember for him. A parable of a king, When he himself ruled, his kingdom was steady; but when he became ill, his kingdom became unsteady. Thus the Holy One blessed be He said, When Israel are king, they are as one who is ill, if one dare speak thus, and My kingdom becomes unsteady. When will I be king? When the exile and not light )Amos 5:18(. Accordingly, God said, I will bring all these days as days of trouble upon Edom. The children of Edom said, Raise it, raise it, even to the foundation thereof (Tehillim / Psalms 137:7). God said to Esau, Woe to you, O fool, who would demand such a thing. Would a thief coming in to steal or a soldier entering a city search it out to its very foundations? Would he not seize what is right in front of him and go away? But you were not content to do this, instead you would raise it, even to the foundation thereof. Therefore, this very thing I will do to you, as is said, How are the things of Esau searched out. How are his things sought up. (Obadiah 1:6), and as is said I have made Esau bare, I have uncovered his secret places (Jeremiah 49:10). And the Holy One blessed be He, also said to the children of Esau, O you great fools. A man comes into a vineyard and eats until he is satisfied; does he say, I will gather from the vine even unto the gleaning grapes? Yet you did gather the grapes even unto the gleaning grapes. Therefore I will repay you in kind. Scripture says, If thieves came to you, if robbers by night, Would they not have stolen till they had enough? If the grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave some gleaning for our sake, then remember for Your sake. Remember that knave’s vilification of You. Hence, Remember, O Lord, against the children of Edom the day of Jerusalem. The Holy One blessed be He, asked, And what particular thing will I remember? The Psalmist replied, remember O Lord, the day when the nephew of Titus came into the Temple, his drawn sword in his hand, and slashed back and forth until the blade was all bloody, and then came forth boasting, saying that he had slain God Himself. Will You refrain Yourself for these things, O Lord? Will You hold Your peace? (Isaiah 64:11). If not for our sake, then remember for Your sake. Remember that knave’s vilification of You. Hence, Remember, O Lord, against the children of Edom the day of Jerusalem. The Holy One blessed be He, replied, Are you telling Me Remember? I will not forget. You too, remember. Remember what Amalek did unto you by the way as you came forth out of Egypt (Devarim / Deuteronomy 25:17). A man who forgets to take care of himself ought not ask another to remember for him. A parable of a king, When he himself ruled, his kingdom was steady; but when he became ill, his kingdom became unsteady. Thus the Holy One blessed be He said, When Israel are king, they are as one who is ill, if one dare speak thus, and My kingdom becomes unsteady. When will I be king? When the exile and not light )Amos 5:18(. Accordingly, God said, I will bring all these days as days of trouble upon Edom. The children of Edom said, Raise it, raise it, even to the foundation thereof (Tehillim / Psalms 137:7). God said to Esau, Woe to you, O fool, who would demand such a thing. Would a thief coming in to steal or a soldier entering a city search it out to its very foundations? Would he not seize what is right in front of him and go away? But you were not content to do this, instead you would raise it, even to the foundation thereof. Therefore, this very thing I will do to you, as is said, How are the things of Esau searched out. How are his things sought up. (Obadiah 1:6), and as is said I have made Esau bare, I have uncovered his secret places (Jeremiah 49:10). And the Holy One blessed be He, also said to the children of Esau, O you great fools. A man comes into a vineyard and eats until he is satisfied; does he say, I will gather from the vine even unto the gleaning grapes? Yet you did gather the grapes even unto the gleaning grapes. Therefore I will repay you in kind. Scripture says, If thieves came to you, if robbers by night, Would they not have stolen till they had enough? If the grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave some gleaning for our sake, then remember for Your sake. Remember that knave’s vilification of You. Hence, Remember, O Lord, against the children of Edom the day of Jerusalem. The Holy One blessed be He, asked, And what particular thing will I remember? The Psalmist replied, remember O Lord, the day when the nephew of Titus came into the Temple, his drawn sword in his hand, and slashed back and forth until the blade was all bloody, and then came forth boasting, saying that he had slain God Himself. Will You refrain Yourself for these things, O Lord? Will You hold Your peace? (Isaiah 64:11). If not for our sake, then remember for Your sake. Remember that knave’s vilification of You. Hence, Remember, O Lord, against the children of Edom the day of Jerusalem. The Holy One blessed be He, replied, Are you telling Me Remember? I will not forget. You too, remember. Remember what Amalek did unto you by the way as you came forth out of Egypt (Devarim / Deuteronomy 25:17). A man who forgets to take care of himself ought not ask another to remember for him. A parable of a king, When he himself ruled, his kingdom was steady; but when he became ill, his kingdom became unsteady. Thus the Holy One blessed be He said, When Israel are king, they are as one who is ill, if one dare speak thus, and My kingdom becomes unsteady. When will I be king? When the exile and not light )Amos 5:18(. Accordingly, God said, I will bring all these days as days of trouble upon Edom. The children of Edom said, Raise it, raise it, even to the foundation thereof (Tehillim / Psalms 137:7). God said to Esau, Woe to you, O fool, who would demand such a thing. Would a thief coming in to steal or a soldier entering a city search it out to its very foundations? Would he not seize what is right in front of him and go away? But you were not content to do this, instead you would raise it, even to the foundation thereof. Therefore, this very thing I will do to you, as is said, How are the things of Esau searched out. How are his things sought up. (Obadiah 1:6), and as is said I have made Esau bare, I have uncovered his secret places (Jeremiah 49:10). And the Holy One blessed be He, also said to the children of Esau, O you great fools. A man comes into a vineyard and eats until he is satisfied; does he say, I will gather from the vine even unto the gleaning grapes? Yet you did gather the grapes even unto the gleaning grapes. Therefore I will repay you in kind. Scripture says, If thieves came to you, if robbers by night, Would they not have stolen till they had enough? If the grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave some gleaning
grapes? (Obadiah 1:5), but declares of you, The children of Edom said, Raise it, Raise it, even to the foundation thereof (Tehillim / Psalms 137:7). Oh daughter of Babylon, that are to be destroyed (Tehillim / Psalms 137:8). Why does the Psalmist call Edom the daughter of Babylon? Because Babylon was to destroy the Temple even as Edom was to destroy the Temple. What the one was to do, the other was to do. Therefore, the psalmist called Edom daughter of Babylon. The Holy One blessed be He, said to Edom, Happy will he be, that repays you as you have served us (Tehillim / Psalms 137:8). Why does the Psalmist say us? To show that the Holy One blessed be He said to Edom, At one and the same time, you have ill served both Israel and Me. It is not only Israel whom you did serve all kinds of evil. But Me, and them you did so serve. Hence, it is said Happy will he be, that takes and dashes your little ones against the rock, even as you did dash down your little ones in this world. But we have never heard that Edom, at the destruction of the Temple, dashed the little ones of Israel against the rock. We did hear that Edom led Israel out in chains, that Edom burn the Temple, and that Edom ravished the women, but we have never heard that Edom dashed down the little ones of Israel. But the Holy One blessed be He, spoke thus, As Edom has done to others, so I will do to Edom. As Nineveh is laid waste, carried away in to captivity; her young children dashed in pieces at the head of all the streets (Nahum 3:7, 10), so Happy will he be that takes and dashes your little ones. The Holy One blessed be He, said further, You did dash to pieces the work of My little ones who were the first to make Me king over them, for they said The Lord will reign for ever and ever (Shemot / Exodus 15:18), and for their saying this, therefore, Out of the mouth of the little ones and sucklings did You ordain strength (Tehillim / Psalms 8:2). Hence the Psalmist goes on to say, Happy will he be that repays you as you have served us repays you no less and no more. It is the way of the world that if a man do no more than strike the son of an eparch, or the son of a king, the man's head will be cut off, or he will be burnt alive, or he will be crucified. But the Holy One blessed be He, does not repay thus, for it is said According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay, fury to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies (Isaiah 59:18). Hence, Happy will he be that repays you as you have served us. So, too, in the writings of Jeremiah occurs the verse You will render unto them a recompense, O Lord, according to the work of their hands (Lamentations 3:64). It is also written, Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavors; give them after the work of their hands, render to them their desert (Tehillim / Psalms 28:4). And it is also written, Let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined (Tehillim / Psalms 10:2). What devices did they imagine? They said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more said, And so will I cut them off, as is said, And there will not be any remaining of the house of Esau, for the Lord has spoken it (Obadiah 1:18). When it was asked of God, behold, You did
punish Edom, and will You not punish Babylon? God replied, Very soon I will punish her also, as is said, And I will render unto Babylon and to all the inhabitants of Chaldea all their evil that they have done in Zion (Jeremiah 51:24).