

## Tehillim / Psalms 129 | ספר תהילים קכט

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### Opression as a form of Rebuke and Lovingkindness

In this week's study from *Tehillim / Psalms 129:1-8*, the psalm opens saying, א שִׁיר הַמַּעְלוֹת רַבַּת צָרְרוּנִי, 129:1 'Many times they have persecuted me from my youth up,' Let Israel now say, ב רַבַּת צָרְרוּנִי מִנְעוּרַי גַּם לֹא יָכְלוּ-לִי: 129:2 'Many times they have persecuted me from my youth up; Yet they have not prevailed against me. (NASB) In life, as the children of God, we will see persecution. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2 Timothy 3:12) The psalmist continues saying, ג עַל-גִּבִּי חָרְשׁוּ חֲרָשִׁים הֶאֱרִיכוּ לְמַעְנוֹתַם [לְמַעְנֵיתֶם]: 129:3 'The plowers plowed upon my back; They lengthened their furrows.' 129:4 The Lord is righteous; He has cut in two the cords of the wicked. (NASB) Yeshua the Messiah said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:10). Yeshua defines "persecution" as being reviled and having false things uttered against us. This is similar to what the psalmist is saying, but the Lord God turns the persecution into a future expectation of a blessing. One caveat regarding this blessing is that it is for persecution for "righteousness' sake." This is connected to our taking the Word of God into the world and living righteously before men and God. The psalm concludes saying, ה יִבְשׁוּ וַיִּסְגּוּ אַחֲרָיו כָּל שֹׂנְאֵי צִיּוֹן: ו יִהְיוּ כַּחֲצִיר גִּגּוֹת שֶׁקָּדְמָת שָׁלַף יָבֵשׁ: ז שְׁלֹא מְלֵא, 129:5 May all who hate Zion Be put to shame and turned backward; 129:6 Let them be like grass upon the housetops, Which withers before it grows up; 129:7 With which the reaper does not fill his hand, Or the binder of sheaves his bosom; 129:8 Nor do those who pass by say, 'The blessing of the Lord be upon you; We bless you in the name of the Lord.' (NASB) The idea is God's truth and His blessing comes forth from Zion, and so the one who hates Zion hates the place that bears God's name. This is paralleled to God's people upon whom the Lord has placed His name!

| עברית  | Hebrew  | ארמי  | Aramaic  | ελληνικός  | Greek      |
|--|---|---|--|------------|------------|
| ספר תהלים פרק קכט  | ספר תהלים פרק קכט   | ספר טוביה פרק קכט   | ספר טוביה פרק קכט  | ΨΑΛΜΟΙ 129 | ΨΑΛΜΟΙ 129 |
| א שִׁיר הַמַּעְלוֹת רַבַּת צָרְרוּנִי מִנְעוּרַי יִאֲמַר-נָא יִשְׂרָאֵל: ב רַבַּת צָרְרוּנִי מִנְעוּרַי גַּם לֹא יָכְלוּ-לִי: ג עַל-גִּבִּי חָרְשׁוּ חֲרָשִׁים הֶאֱרִיכוּ לְמַעְנוֹתַם [לְמַעְנֵיתֶם]: ד יְהוָה צַדִּיק קָצַץ עֲבוֹת רְשָׁעִים: ה יִבְשׁוּ וַיִּסְגּוּ אַחֲרָיו כָּל שֹׂנְאֵי צִיּוֹן: ו יִהְיוּ כַּחֲצִיר גִּגּוֹת שֶׁקָּדְמָת שָׁלַף יָבֵשׁ: ז שְׁלֹא מְלֵא כָּפוֹ קוֹצֵר וְחֻצְנוֹ מַעְמָר: ח וְלֹא אֲמָרוּ   הֶעֱבְרִים בְּרַכְּתָּהּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ כִּם בְּרַכְּנוּ אֶתְכֶם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה: | א שִׁירָא דַּאֲתַאמַר עַל מַסִּיקֵין מַסּוּקִין דַּתְהוּמָא סְגִיעִין דַּאֲעִיקוּ לִי מִן טְלִיּוֹתֵי יִימַר כְּדוֹן יִשְׂרָאֵל: ב סְגִיעִין דַּאֲעִיקוּ לִי מִן טְלִיּוֹתֵי בְרַם לֹא יִכִּילוּ לַאֲבַאשָׁא לִי: ג עַל גּוּשְׁמֵי רַאדוֹ רַאדִּיא אֹרֵי-כּוֹ לְמֹרְדוֹתֵהוֹן: ד יְהוָה זְכָאָה קִצִּיעַ שׁוֹלְשֵׁי רַשִׁיעִיא: ה יִבְהַתוֹן וַיִּזְרוּ רֹא אַחֲרָא כָּל סְנַאי דְצִיּוֹן: ו יְהוּיִן יְהוֹן כַּחֲצַר אִיגְרִיא דְמִן קַדְמֵ דִצִּיעַ אֲתֵי רוּחַ קְדוּמָא נְתִיב בֵּיהּ וְאֲתִיבֵשׁ: ז דְלֹא מְלֵי אִידִיָּה חֲצַד וְכַתְפִּיָּה מַעְמַר: ח וְלֹא אֲמָרוּ דְעִבְרִין מַתְמֵן בִּירְכַתָּא דִּיהוָה עַלִּיכּוֹן וְלֹא יִתִּיבּוֹן לְהוֹן בְּרִיכָּ-נָא יִתְכוֹן בְּשֵׁמָא דִּיהוָה: | א שִׁירָא דַּאֲתַאמַר עַל מַסִּיקֵין מַסּוּקִין דַּתְהוּמָא סְגִיעִין דַּאֲעִיקוּ לִי מִן טְלִיּוֹתֵי יִימַר כְּדוֹן יִשְׂרָאֵל: ב סְגִיעִין דַּאֲעִיקוּ לִי מִן טְלִיּוֹתֵי בְרַם לֹא יִכִּילוּ לַאֲבַאשָׁא לִי: ג עַל גּוּשְׁמֵי רַאדוֹ רַאדִּיא אֹרֵי-כּוֹ לְמֹרְדוֹתֵהוֹן: ד יְהוָה זְכָאָה קִצִּיעַ שׁוֹלְשֵׁי רַשִׁיעִיא: ה יִבְהַתוֹן וַיִּזְרוּ רֹא אַחֲרָא כָּל סְנַאי דְצִיּוֹן: ו יְהוּיִן יְהוֹן כַּחֲצַר אִיגְרִיא דְמִן קַדְמֵ דִצִּיעַ אֲתֵי רוּחַ קְדוּמָא נְתִיב בֵּיהּ וְאֲתִיבֵשׁ: ז דְלֹא מְלֵי אִידִיָּה חֲצַד וְכַתְפִּיָּה מַעְמַר: ח וְלֹא אֲמָרוּ דְעִבְרִין מַתְמֵן בִּירְכַתָּא דִּיהוָה עַלִּיכּוֹן וְלֹא יִתִּיבּוֹן לְהוֹן בְּרִיכָּ-נָא יִתְכוֹן בְּשֵׁמָא דִּיהוָה: | ΨΑΛΜΟΙ 129<br>Psa 129:1 ὄδη τῶν ἀναβαθμῶν πλεονάκις ἐπολέμησάν με ἐκ νεότητός μου εἰπάτω δὴ Ἰσραὴλ 129:2 πλεονάκις ἐπολέμησάν με ἐκ νεότητός μου καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἠδυνήθησάν μοι 129:3 ἐπὶ τοῦ νότου μου ἐτέκταινον οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ ἐμάκρυναν τὴν ἀνομίαν αὐτῶν 129:4 κύριος δίκαιος συνέκοσμεν αὐχένασ ἁμαρτωλῶν 129:5 αἰσχυνθήτωσαν καὶ ἀποστραφήτωσαν εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω πάντες οἱ μισοῦντες Σιών 129:6 γενηθήτωσαν ὡσ χόρτος δωματων ὃσ πρὸ τοῦ ἐκσπασθῆναι ἐξηράνθη 129:7 οὐ οὐκ ἐπλήρωσεν τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ ὁ θερίζων καὶ τὸν κόλπον αὐτοῦ ὁ τὰ δράγματα συλλέγων 129:8 καὶ οὐκ εἶπαν οἱ παράγοντες εὐλογία κυρίου ἐφ' ὑμᾶσ εὐλογῆκαμεν ὑμᾶσ ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου |            |            |

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| <p><b>Tehillim Psalms 129</b><br/> 129:1 ‘Many times they have persecuted me from my youth up,’ Let Israel now say, 129:2 ‘Many times they have persecuted me from my youth up; Yet they have not prevailed against me. 129:3 ‘The plowers plowed upon my back; They lengthened their furrows.’ 129:4 The Lord is righteous; He has cut in two the cords of the wicked. 129:5 May all who hate Zion Be put to shame and turned backward; 129:6 Let them be like grass upon the housetops, Which withers before it grows up; 129:7 With which the reaper does not fill his hand, Or the binder of sheaves his bosom; 129:8 Nor do those who pass by say, ‘The blessing of the Lord be upon you; We bless you in the name of the Lord.’ (NASB)</p> | <p><b>Toviyah Psalms 129</b><br/> 129:1 A song that was uttered on the ascents of the abyss. Many are they who have oppressed me from my youth – let Israel now say – 129:2 Many are they who have oppressed me from my youth, yet they have not been able to do me harm. 129:3 Upon my body the plowers have plowed, they have made their furrow long. 129:4 The Lord is righteous; he has severed the bonds of the wicked. 129:5 They will be ashamed and withdraw: all those who hate Zion. 129:6 They will be like the grass of the rooftops, which, before it blossoms, the east wind comes blowing on it and it has withered. 129:7 Which the reaper does not fill his hand with, nor the sheaver his shoulder. 129:8 And those who pass by do not say there, “The blessing of the Lord be upon you,” nor will they answer, “We bless you in the name of the Lord.” (EMC)</p> | <p><b>Psalmoi Psalms 129</b><br/> A Song of Degrees. 129:1 Many a time have they warred against me from my youth, let Israel now say: 129:2 Many a time have they warred against me from my youth: and yet they prevailed not against me. 129:3 The sinners wrought upon my back: they prolonged their iniquity. 129:4 The righteous Lord has cut asunder the necks of sinners. 129:5 Let all that hate Sion be put to shame and turned back. 129:6 Let them be as the grass of the house-tops, which withers before it is plucked up. 129:7 Wherewith the reaper fills not his hand, nor he that makes up the sheaves, his bosom. 129:8 Neither do they that go by say, The blessing of the Lord be upon you: we have blessed you in the name of the Lord. (LXX)</p> |
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In this week’s study from *Tehillim / Psalms 129:1-8*, the psalm opens saying, אִשִּׁיר הַמַּעְלוֹת רַבָּת 129:1 ‘Many times they have persecuted me from my youth up,’ Let Israel now say, 129:2 ‘Many times they have persecuted me from my youth up; Yet they have not prevailed against me. (NASB) In life, as the children of God, we will see persecution. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (2 Timothy 3:12) there is no doubt that persecution is a stark reality of life as part of our walk before God and His Messiah Yeshua. Just as Paul wrote, all who desire to live a godly life in the Messiah will be persecuted. We are also told Yeshua said if they persecuted Him they will also persecute His followers (John 15:20). Yeshua clearly states that the world will hate God’s people just as the world hated him. The reason this is so is because God’s people are not vain, arrogant, sensual and given to pleasure, ambitious for wealth, and covetous. The world would not oppose those who walk in the counsel of the ungodly or after the fleshly desires. This is the concept of not belonging to the world because who we are has been given from above. We do not walk in the way the world walks, and as a result, the world engages in persecution (John 15:18 ‘If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. 15:19 ‘If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. NASB). The world is driven by its love for sin and those who belong to the world are motivated by sin in their lives. The difference is the principles the Lord gives His people in the Torah, and the Lord Himself working in our lives motivating us by the love He has placed in our hearts for Him and for others. It is this discordance between the children of God and the way of the world that separates us from the world and causes those who belong to the world to have animosity against God’s people. (I

*Peter 4:3-4*) Studying the Torah, the letters of Paul, and the Gospels, we learn there is value in persecution in the sense that we see how the Lord is working in our lives. It is through persecution that drives us to the Lord in prayer and in His Word. This is what Paul calls surrendering for the cause of Christ and all that he had gained as loss (*Philippians 3:8*) such that he might share in the “*fellowship of [Christ’s] sufferings*” (*Philippians 3:10*). Paul even counted his chains as a favor that God had given to him (*Philippians 1:7*). James argued that trials test our faith, develop endurance in our lives, and help develop maturity (see *James 1:2-4*). The question though, is the testing of our faith from the Lord or is it from the evil one? This testing is paralleled to working steel in the forge and the tempering of the metal. The trials and persecution serve to strengthen the character of believers. A person who yields his life to persecution demonstrates that he is of superior quality as compared to his adversaries (*Hebrews 11:38*); but this is not to say that we are to lay down our lives for the slaughter if we are able to take a stand to defend our families. This is not a form of hatefulness but speaks of our duty to family and truth. The Lord who works in our hearts and lives through persecution, does so producing kindness and blessing in the face of evil opposition. Peter says of Yeshua, “*When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly*” (*1 Peter 2:23*). Through persecution we learn to trust in the Lord and we learn how to come together as faithful children of God to help one another in a supportive way. Trials and calamity leads us to love and comfort one another, to reach out to one another to show how the Lord is in fact working on our behalf. It is in these ways we press onward and continue on in the faith. It may be that David pressed on understanding these things. He had a group of loyal and faithful people who went with him during his times of trouble regardless of what he had done.

The Torah describes us as God’s people who are holy in the sense that we have a responsibility to a rigorous moral code. In the book of Shemot / Exodus we read Moshe saying “*You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt*” (*Shemot / Exodus 22:21*) It is here the people made a covenant with God to receive the instructions of God that urge us as His people to “*learn to do good; seek justice, and to correct oppression*” and *Tehillim / Psalm 82* proclaims our responsibility to “*Give justice to the weak and to maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.*” Note something here, Judaism is not about “*every person for his or herself.*” Judaism is also not about “*every ethnic group for itself.*” And most importantly, Judaism is not about shooting other people or blowing up houses or synagogues. This quote from Shemot / Exodus is the most telling about what Judaism is about, an all powerful God who calls a people that had been oppressed so much for so long. History explains how the Jewish people have lived and existed as “*strangers in the land.*” Therefore, inherent in the Judaism as taken from the descriptions of the Tanach is the history of Judaism that is described as having commonality with those who are oppressed. Therefore, we are to do what is right, just, and true towards all peoples. The Rabbis have the following to say concerning these things:

***Chizkuni, Shemot / Exodus 22:21:1***

כל אלמנה ויתום לא תענון, “*Do not oppress any widow or orphan.*” The word כל in this verse has to be understood as in *Exodus 20,10: כל מלאכה לא תעשה*, not as meaning: “*do not do ail the work,*” but as: “*do not do any work.*” Compare also *Exodus 20,4: תמונה*, “*do not make for yourself any likeness;*” it does not mean that you are only forbidden to make for yourselves likenesses of all] that is on heaven or earth.” The Torah mentions the proselyte as he has no family in Israel and therefore no one who can advise him or protect him. He belongs to the weakest members of society. Next the Torah mentions widows and orphans, who though natural born Israelites either have lost their protectors or had never had any.

Chizkuni looks at the statement not to oppress the widow or the orphan. This is paralleled to the proselyte, the ger who lives in the midst of Israel to join himself with the Lord and with Israel. Note he has no family and no one to advise him on how to live. It appears as if the proselyte has not been given instruction in the Mishnah to understand how he should live out his faith. The orphan and widow is found in a similar man-

ner, not having family or those who would advise them how to live or take care of them. The Lord cares about those who are all alone and in need. The Lord provides for the needs of the innocent, and gives us a community to join in order to have a family and friends.

**Chizkuni, Shemot / Exodus 22:21:2**

לֹא תַעֲנוּן, *the reason why the Torah used the plural mode when exhorting us not to exploit this group of people, something most unusual, is because so many people are in the habit of doing just that when they face weak people. The Torah includes therefore all the people who witness such exploitation and do not protest it, are included in this prohibition. This is why also the penalty for people guilty of this has been written in the plural mode. וַחֲרָה אַפִּי וְהִרְגַתִּי אֹתְכֶם*, “My anger will flare up and I will kill you;” (verse 23)

Chizkuni brings out an important point, the plural mode of the Hebrew word leads us to understand that we all have the capability of doing injustice to the weak, the poor, and the widow. Those who witness such behavior or activity are also included as having done this themselves. The Lord says that His anger will flare up against us if we do not repent and turn from this way. We are to function with innocence of heart, and purity in our relationships with others.

**Rashi on Shemot / Exodus 22:21:1**

כָּל אֵלְמָנָה וַיְתוּם לֹא תַעֲנוּן *YOU SHALL NOT AFFLICT ANY WIDOW, OR FATHERLESS CHILD — That is also the law regarding any person, but Scripture is speaking of what usually happens and therefore mentions these in particular, for they are feeble in defensive power (i. e. they have no one to protect them) and it is a frequent occurrence for people to afflict them (Mekhilta d’Rabbi Yishmael 22:21).*

Rashi states something similar, saying the affliction and oppression of the widow and fatherless happens often. Do you find it interesting how Rashi so long ago believes these things are a frequent occurrence to afflict the poor, the needy, and the widow? The fact that the Lord had to put this command in the Torah, provides us with a historical context of 1400 years BC of oppression and affliction going on, the nature of man is to sin. The Lord God of Israel set a very high standard for His people.

**Sforno on Shemot / Exodus 22:21:1**

לֹא תַעֲנוּן אִם עָנָה תַעֲנֵה אוֹתוֹ; *if, in the process of oppressing an orphan your intention was only to oppress him alone; if your “oppressing” him was in the nature of disciplining him in order to ultimately bestowing loving kindness on him after he responded to your rebuking him, your disciplining him is considered an act of loving kindness. [the author interprets verse 22 starting with the word אִם as an alternative, moderating what has been written in verse 21. Ed.]*

Sforno makes the point of oppression as a method of disciplining in order to ultimately bring a blessing upon a person (mercy, lovingkindness, chesed) as a result of the rebuke. This mercy is designed to lead one to repentance. It is a little difficult to understand how oppression can be used as a form of rebuke and loving kindness.

**Tur HaAroch, Shemot / Exodus 22:21:1**

כָּל אֵלְמָנָה וַיְתוּם לֹא תַעֲנוּן, “Do not oppress any widow or orphan.” The word כָּל, “every,” is meant to include wealthy widows and well to do orphans. It teaches that contrary to appearances, such people are keenly aware of the loss of companionship and moral support they have sustained, and that cannot be compensated for simply by earthly possessions. The

*Torah addresses people generally, society, hence the word תענון, is in the plural mode. Ibn Ezra comments that the penalty for someone witnessing such oppression without protesting the behaviour of the party guilty of it, is the same as the person actually guilty of such oppression of the orphan and widow.*

All of the commentaries agree, the command to not afflict any who are widows or fatherless (orphan) whether wealthy or not, the command remains as binding upon us all as God's Children. The point of Tur Haaroch commentary is that earthly possessions do not sustain a person. We need relationships. We are meant for relationships. This characteristic of God's people is worked out in the lives of the widow and the fatherless.

ג על-גְּבִי חָרְשׁוּ הַרְשִׁים הָאֲרִיכוּ לְמַעְנוֹתָם [לְמַעְנֵיהֶם]: ד יְהוָה צִדִּיק קָצַץ עֲבוֹת רְשָׁעִים: 129:3 *'The plowers plowed upon my back; They lengthened their furrows.'* 129:4 *The Lord is righteous; He has cut in two the cords of the wicked.* (NASB) David describes the kind of treatment that he is receiving, his persecution is as if one is plowing into his back deep furrows in order to plant their evil seeds. Yeshua the Messiah said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:10). Yeshua defines "persecution" as being reviled and having false things uttered against us. This is similar to what the psalmist is saying, but the Lord God turns the persecution into a future expectation of a blessing. One caveat regarding this blessing is that it is for persecution for "righteousness' sake." This is connected to our taking the Word of God into the world and living righteously before men and God. The Talmud Bavli Sotah 11b has the following to say concerning *Tehillim / Psalms 129:3*.

#### ***Talmud Bavli Sotah 11b Part 8***

*And once the Egyptians would notice them, realizing that they were Jewish babies, they would come to kill them. But a miracle would occur for them and they would be absorbed by the earth. And the Egyptians would then bring oxen and would plow upon them, as it is stated: "The plowers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows" (Psalms 129:3). After the Egyptians would leave, the babies would emerge and exit the ground like grass of the field, as it is stated: "I caused you to increase even as the growth of the field" (Ezekiel 16:7).*

The rabbis describe the situation in Egypt when the Egyptians came to destroy the children of Israel. The Lord worked a miracle where the ground opened up, swallowed the children up for protection, and the Egyptians plowing the ground in order to find the children. Note how children going down into the ground is as one who has died. The children coming out of the ground is as one who was raised from the dead. This commentary from the Talmud speaks of the enemy who seeks to kill and destroy, to persecute, even to plowing into one's back, but the Lord turns this around for blessing with the future expectation of resurrection. Being persecuted for righteousness sake, this is something we do, not something that is ascribed to us spiritually only. The rabbis believe practicing righteousness has its rewards when persecuted for righteousness sake. The extent of the miraculous is so great, the miracle the Lord will perform for us is at the level of resurrection power. This should tell us something about the importance of living our lives for the Lord!

ג על-גְּבִי חָרְשׁוּ הַרְשִׁים הָאֲרִיכוּ לְמַעְנוֹתָם [לְמַ- 129:3 עֲנֵיהֶם]: ד יְהוָה צִדִּיק קָצַץ עֲבוֹת רְשָׁעִים: 129:4 *The Lord is righteous; He has cut in two the cords of the wicked.* (NASB) is as follows:

#### ***Rabbeinu Bahya, Devarim / Deuteronomy 25:18:2***

*A Midrashic approach based on Tanchuma Ki Teytze 9 is that the words בַּךְ וַיִּזְנֹב represent an attack on the זִנְב, i.e. he cut off the foreskins of these people and threw them heavenwards saying: "take what you have chosen." The Amalekites did this to the individuals who, because of individual sins committed, had been excluded from the protective cover of the עֲנֵי*

הכבוד, *the clouds of glory enveloping the main body of the Jewish people.*

*Another Midrash in Tanchuma Ki Teytze 5 describes the meaning of the words: “remember what Amalek did to you” in the following terms: There are (here) two mentions of the word זכר “remember” in connection with Amalek. You are to remember what Amalek did to you, and to blot out the memory of Amalek. You are also to remember My promise to blot out Amalek (Exodus 17,14). The word: “the memory of you,” is comparable to the memory of ash זָכַרְנִיכֶם מִשְׁלֵי אֶפְרָר לְגַבֵּי הַחֶמֶר גְּבִיכֶם [i.e. it is completely forgotten, if used in the negative sense; if you try and emulate Avraham this “memory” will be accounted something positive, meritorious for you. Ed.] G’d said to Israel: “be very careful with the two commandments involving ‘remembrance’ which I wrote here.” The one remembrance is written here and the other in Exodus 17,14 where G’d Himself promises to blot out the memory of Amalek. If you do what I tell you to do here you will be true descendants of Avraham your forefather who described himself as dust and ashes in Genesis 18,27. If not, prepare yourselves to be like the people of total insignificance described in the verse in Job and you will be enslaved as laborers in Egypt] burdened with חומר ולבנים, “clay and bricks.” In Psalms 129,3 the slavery in Egypt is also paraphrased as על גבי חרשו חורשים, “ploughmen ploughed across my back.” [The word גבי as well as the word חומר provides the link to the verse in Job 13,12 quoted. Ed. I find the message of the Midrash confusing as it appears to warn of matters which are already past history. The people addressed here are after the redemption from Egyptian bondage, Ed.]*

*The Midrash goes on in several paragraphs to describe that what happened to Amalek and especially to Agog their king as retribution for when Amalek had attacked the Jewish people in the desert. [The reader is referred to Tanchuma Ki Teytze sections 7-9. Ed.]*

Rabbeinu Bahya speaks of a midrash on Amalek how the Amalekites scorned the command of God (circumcision) and to remember what they had done to Israel in the Torah. Amalek (עַמְלֵק) is a nation described in the Tanach that refers to the nation’s founder, a grandson of Esau; his descendant, the Amalekites; or the territories of Amalek in which they inhabited. The Tanach describes the Amalekites as a tribe which lived in ancient Israel and in the land called Moab. According to the Book of Bereshit / Genesis and 1 Chronicles, Amalek was the son of Eliphaz and the concubine Timna. Timna was a Horite and sister of Lotan. Amalek appears in the genealogy of Esau (*Bereshit / Genesis 36:12 and 1 Chronicles 1:36*) who was the chief of an Edomite tribe (*Bereshit / Genesis 36:16*). In the chant of Balaam in *Bamidbar / Numbers, 24:20*, Amalek was called the ‘*first of the nations,*’ which bears testimony as an early nation in antiquity. Rashi states, “*He came before all of them to make war with Israel.*” As being the first of the nations, note how he was first to come to make war against Israel. It seems from the very beginning, the nations were against God’s Ways. The First-century Roman-Jewish scholar and historian Flavius Josephus refers to Amalek as a ‘*bastard*’ (νόθος) in a derogatory sense. The Amalekites came against Israel through Bilam in Parashat Balak, and the midrash speaks of remembering what they did, as wanting to plough the backs of God’s people. Note the connection to plowing and sowing seeds of sin. Is this not what Bilam recommend to cause the Lord to come against Israel at Baal Peor? There is a connection between the enemy and the desire to so seeds of destruction in the form of sin and deception. In Judaism, the Amalekites came to represent the archetype enemy of Israel. In Jewish folklore the Amalekites are considered to be the symbol of evil. This concept has been used by some Hassidic rabbis such as the Baal Shem Tov to represent atheism or the rejection of God. In *Shemot / Exodus 17:14*, the Lord God of Israel promised to “*blot out the name*” of Amalek.

***Tur HaAroch, Vayikra / Leviticus 21:20:1***

*אָרְבַּי עֵינָיו, ”or abnormally long eyebrows;” the word appears in conjunction with eyes, as in*

הַיְבִשׁוּ וַיִּסְגּוּ אַחֲזֹר כֹּל שְׂנְאֵי צִיּוֹן: ו יְהִי כַחֲצִיר גִּגּוֹת שְׂקֵדָמַת שְׁלֵף יְבִשׁ: 129:5 ז שְׁלֵא מְלֵא כֹפּוֹ קוֹצֵר וְחֻצְנוֹ מְעַמָּר: ח וְלֹא אָמְרוּ | הָעֹבְרִים בְּרֶכֶת יְהוָה אֲלֵיכֶם בְּרַכְנוּ אֶתְכֶם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה הַיְבִשׁוּ וַיִּסְגּוּ אַחֲזֹר כֹּל שְׂנְאֵי צִיּוֹן: ו יְהִי כַחֲצִיר גִּגּוֹת שְׂקֵדָמַת שְׁלֵף יְבִשׁ: 129:5 ז שְׁלֵא מְלֵא כֹפּוֹ קוֹצֵר וְחֻצְנוֹ מְעַמָּר: ח וְלֹא אָמְרוּ | הָעֹבְרִים בְּרֶכֶת יְהוָה אֲלֵיכֶם בְּרַכְנוּ אֶתְכֶם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה

*describing eyebrows so bushy that they cover one's eyes. The word is related to "back," as in "plowmen plowed across my back" (Psalms 129,3) The Torah began by listing the kind of physical blemishes that consist of visibly missing or malfunctioning limbs or organs, limbs, etc., proceeding to examples of priests whose limbs are all there and functioning, but who suffer from blemishes making them appear ugly. This is followed by defects which were not congenital but the result of bone fractures, etc. At the end, we even hear about blemishes that affect the mind of a person such as knowing that one's reproductive organs, though not visibly blemished, suffered the kind of injuries which make the organ permanently dysfunctional.*

Tur HaAroch speaks of blemishes and something that makes a man appear ugly. It is interesting how this is paralleled to *Tehillim / Psalms 129:3-4*. This is the manner in which the enemy desires to inflict upon our lives, to disfigure us by sin. The commentary speaks of the enemy afflicting us in our mind as well due to something that is hidden. The Lord God of Israel however has set us free and is able to deliver us from the clutches of the enemy.

The psalm concludes saying, *May all who hate Zion Be put to shame and turned backward; 129:6 Let them be like grass upon the house-tops, Which withers before it grows up; 129:7 With which the reaper does not fill his hand, Or the binder of sheaves his bosom; 129:8 Nor do those who pass by say, 'The blessing of the Lord be upon you; We bless you in the name of the Lord.'* (NASB) The concluding verses in the Psalm may be summarized by what the prophet Isaiah wrote in *Isaiah 49*.

#### **Isaiah 49**

*49:1 Listen to Me, O islands, And pay attention, you peoples from afar. The Lord called Me from the womb; From the body of My mother He named Me. 49:2 He has made My mouth like a sharp sword, In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me; And He has also made Me a select arrow, He has hidden Me in His quiver. 49:3 He said to Me, 'You are My Servant, Israel, In Whom I will show My glory.' 49:4 But I said, 'I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity; Yet surely the justice due to Me is with the Lord, And My reward with My God.' 49:5 And now says the Lord, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the Lord, And My God is My strength), 49:6 He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.' 49:7 Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and its Holy One, To the despised One, To the One abhorred by the nation, To the Servant of rulers, 'Kings will see and arise, Princes will also bow down, Because of the Lord who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You.' 49:8 Thus says the Lord, 'In a favorable time I have answered You, And in a day of salvation I have helped You; And I will keep You and give You for a covenant of the people, To restore the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages; 49:9 Saying to those who are bound, 'Go forth,' To those who are in darkness, 'Show yourselves.' Along the roads they will feed, And their pasture will be on all bare heights. 49:10 'They will not hunger or thirst, Nor will the scorching heat or sun strike them down; For He who has compassion on them will lead them And will guide them to springs of water. 49:11 'I will make all My mountains a road, And My highways will be raised up. 49:12 'Behold, these will come from afar; And lo, these will come from the north and from the west, And these from the land of Sinim.' 49:13 Shout for joy, O heavens! And rejoice, O earth! Break forth into joyful shouting, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted His people*

*And will have compassion on His afflicted. 49:14 But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, And the Lord has forgotten me.' 49:15 'Can a woman forget her nursing child And have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. 49:16 'Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; Your walls are continually before Me. 49:17 'Your builders hurry; Your destroyers and devastators Will depart from you. 49:18 'Lift up your eyes and look around; All of them gather together, they come to you. As I live,' declares the Lord, 'You will surely put on all of them as jewels and bind them on as a bride. 49:19 'For your waste and desolate places and your destroyed land Surely now you will be too cramped for the inhabitants, And those who swallowed you will be far away. 49:20 'The children of whom you were bereaved will yet say in your ears, 'The place is too cramped for me; Make room for me that I may live here. 49:21 'Then you will say in your heart, 'Who has begotten these for me, Since I have been bereaved of my children And am barren, an exile and a wanderer? And who has reared these? Behold, I was left alone; From where did these come?' 49:22 Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I will lift up My hand to the nations And set up My standard to the peoples; And they will bring your sons in their bosom, And your daughters will be carried on their shoulders. 49:23 'Kings will be your guardians, And their princesses your nurses. They will bow down to you with their faces to the earth And lick the dust of your feet; And you will know that I am the Lord; Those who hopefully wait for Me will not be put to shame. 49:24 'Can the prey be taken from the mighty man, Or the captives of a tyrant be rescued?' 49:25 Surely, thus says the Lord, 'Even the captives of the mighty man will be taken away, And the prey of the tyrant will be rescued; For I will contend with the one who contends with you, And I will save your sons. 49:26 'I will feed your oppressors with their own flesh, And they will become drunk with their own blood as with sweet wine; And all flesh will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior And your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.' (NASB)*

Isaiah speaks of Israel as having been called and named from the womb. Through Israel the Lord would show forth His glory. Isaiah states, *49:7 Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and its Holy One, To the despised One, To the One abhorred by the nation, To the Servant of rulers, 'Kings will see and arise, Princes will also bow down, Because of the Lord who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You.'* (NASB) Isaiah speaks of this future expectation of God's blessing. The Lord says "all who hate Zion will be put to shame and turned back." This is paralleled to the Lord who saves us from our enemies, as he says in Isaiah *49:26 'I will feed your oppressors with their own flesh, And they will become drunk with their own blood as with sweet wine; And all flesh will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior And your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.'* (NASB) The idea is God's truth and His blessing comes forth from Zion, and so the one who hates Zion hates the place that bears God's name. Isaiah speaks of the Lord being Israel's redeemer. The psalm states, *הַיְבִשׁוּ וַיִּסְגּוּ אַחֲזֹר כָּל שׂוֹנְאֵי צִיּוֹן: וַיְהִיו כַּחֲצִיר גִּגּוֹת שֶׁקִּדְמַת שְׁלֵף יִבֶּשׁ: ז שְׂלֵא מְלֵא כִפּוֹ קוֹצָר, 129:5 May all who hate Zion Be put to shame and turned backward; 129:6 Let them be like grass upon the housetops, Which withers before it grows up; 129:7 With which the reaper does not fill his hand, Or the binder of sheaves his bosom; 129:8 Nor do those who pass by say, 'The blessing of the Lord be upon you; We bless you in the name of the Lord.'* (NASB) Note how the Psalmist speaks of the wicked being as grass on the rooftops not having much root which are destroyed by simply the blowing of the wind. Of such persons, people will not come with a blessing. The parallel here is to the righteous of whom the Lord will reward for their perseverance in the faith. The Lord sends the One through whom He will save His people. This expectation is found within *Tehillim / Psalms 129*, and this is paralleled to God's people upon whom the Lord has placed His name!

## Rabbinic Commentary

The Rabbinic Commentary (Midrash) on *Tehillim / Psalms 129* has 2 parts. Reading through the Midrash we will be looking at Part 1 and 2. Let's begin by outlining *Midrash Tehillim Chapter 129, Part 1 and 2*

### Outline of Midrash Tehillim / Psalms, Chapter 129, Part 1 and 2

#### Part 1

- The Midrash introduces the Psalm with the **דיבור המתחיל** (Dibur Hamathil) saying, “*Much have they afflicted me from my youth up, let Israel now say, The plowers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows.*”
- The **פתיחה** (Petihta) the homiletic introduction to the midrash states, “*The Lord is righteous; He has cut asunder the cords of the wicked (Tehillim / Psalms 129:1-4).*”
- The **משל** (mashal) “*the parable,*” goes on to explain the **פתיחה** (Petihta), the rabbis describe a man who is persecuted by the enemy and of the Lord who sets him free.
- The **נמשל** (Nimshal) “*expansion on the parable*” expands upon the **משל** (mashal), the rabbis parallel this to a man who has a heifer who plows the ground.
- The Concluding phrase says, “*But He will come at once and break loose the yoke and cut its bows asunder, as is said, And I have broken the bars of your yoke (Vayikra / Leviticus 26:13). Hence the Psalmist says He has cut asunder the cords of the wicked.*”

#### Part 2

- The Midrash introduces the Psalm with the **דיבור המתחיל** (Dibur Hamathil) saying, “*During a Sabbatical year, Rabbi Hanina son of Papa and Rabbi Samuel son of Nahmani said to the man, Good luck.*”
- The **פתיחה** (Petihta) the homiletic introduction to the midrash states, “*Rabbi Hanina son of Papa asked Rabbi Samuel, Did you not teach me, my master, that the verse Neither do they that go by say, The blessing of the Lord be upon you (Tehillim / Psalms 129:8), means that one must not say Good luck to men who plow during a Sabbatical year?*”
- The **משל** (mashal) “*the parable,*” goes on to explain the **פתיחה** (Petihta), the rabbis speak of plowing in the sense of the shabbat and the sabbatical year to the wicked man who does not care about such things.
- The **נמשל** (Nimshal) “*expansion on the parable*” expands upon the **משל** (mashal), with a discussion of the righteous who love God's Word and seek to live for Him..
- The Concluding phrase says, “*On the contrary, you exact from us tributes, fines, poll-taxes, and taxes in kind. But finally you will have to make compensation, for it has been promised to Israel, For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver (Isaiah 60:17).*”

Midrash Tehillim 129 Part 1 opens with the **דיבור המתחיל** (Dibur Hamathil) saying, “*Much have they afflicted me from my youth up, let Israel now say, The plowers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows.*” The **פתיחה** (Petihta) the homiletic introduction to the midrash states, “*The Lord is righteous; He has cut asunder the cords of the wicked (Tehillim / Psalms 129:1-4).*” The entire midrash states the following:

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| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>מדרש תהלים פרק קכט סימן א</b></p> <p>א שיר המעלות רבת צררוני מנעורי יאמר<br/> נא ישראל, על גבי חרשו חורשים וגו', ה'<br/> צדיק קצץ עבות רשעים. מלה"ד לבעל הבית<br/> שהיה לו פרה חורשת, והשאילה לאחר להיות<br/> חורש בה, והיו לאותו האיש עשרה בנים זה<br/> בא וחורש וישב לו, וזה בא וחורש וישב לו,<br/> עד שנתגיעה הפרה ורבעה לה, נכנסו כל הפ'<br/> רות ואותה הפרה לא נכנסה, לא הספיק בעל<br/> הפרה לקבל פיוס מן אותו האיש, אלא בא<br/> מיד ושבר את העול, וקצץ הסמלונים, כך הם<br/> ישראל בעולם הזה זה השלטון בא ומשעבד<br/> והולך לו, והמענה ארוכה, שנאמר על גבי<br/> חרשו חורשים האריכו למעניתם, למחר כשי'<br/> גיע הקץ אין הקב"ה אומר לאומות העולם כך<br/> וכך עשיתם לבני, אלא מיד בא ומשבר את<br/> העול, ומקצץ את הסמלונים, שנאמר ואשבור<br/> מוטות עולכם (ויקרא כו יג), וכה"א ה' צדיק<br/> קצץ עבות רשעים.</p> | <p><b>Midrash Tehillim 129, Part 1</b></p> <p><i>1. Much have they afflicted me from my youth up, let Israel now say, The plowers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows. The Lord is righteous; He has cut asunder the cords of the wicked (Tehillim / Psalms 129:1-4). What parable explains these verses? The parable of a householder who had a plowing heifer which he lent to another man to plow with. The man had ten sons, One came, plowed, and rested; and another and another came, plowed, and rested; finally, the heifer was so exhausted that it lay down, and when all the others heifers came in from the fields the exhausted one did not come in. The owner of the heifer did not take the time to listen to the excuses of the other man, but when out at once, broke loose the yoke, and cut the ox-bows. Like the heifer is Israel in this world, One ruler comes, lays on the yoke, and goes away, and the cuts left by the lash are long, as is said, The plowers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows. At length, when the time of redemption comes, the Holy One blessed be He, will not take time to say to the nations of the Earth, such and such have you done to My children. But He will come at once and break loose the yoke and cut its bows asunder, as is said, And I have broken the bars of your yoke (Vayikra / Leviticus 26:13). Hence the Psalmist says He has cut asunder the cords of the wicked.</i></p> |
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The rabbis say Israel who is afflicted is as one being plowed, cut open, and the furrows are made long by the enemy. The Lord however is righteous to cut asunder the cords of the wicked. If there is one thing to remember from this midrash, is that rules without a relationship leads to rebellion. Just as children do not respond well to rules, what they do respond to is relationships. The fact is that the Lord God our Father in heaven laid down rules in the Torah, taking for example the Ten Commandments in Parashat Ki Tisa. The point is the Torah was given within the context of a relationship that God had with His people. The Lord knew that the Law alone would be too much for His people to bear. What would save His people would not be how well one obeys the Torah or even the Ten Commandments, but their relationship to the Lord. When the Israelites stood on the borders of the land of Canaan, Moshe addressed them and recalled the day they had provoked the Lord while he was on Mount Sinai, receiving the tablets containing the Ten Commandments. Moshe reminded them of how they had decided to party while he was gone, how they asked Aaron to make a golden calf, and how they danced around it in a drunken orgy. Coming upon the scene, Moshe smashed the tablets containing the Ten Commandments and then spent the next 30 days praying and interceding for this rebellious people. The Lord heard Moshe's prayer and withheld punishment. Instead, He instructed Moshe to chisel out two more tablets like the first ones and bring them up on the mountain where he would again inscribe on them the Ten Commandments that He had written before. Moshe summed up his story saying:

**Devarim / Deuteronomy 10:11-21**

10:11 'Then the Lord said to me, 'Arise, proceed on your journey ahead of the people, that they may go in and possess the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.' 10:12 'Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 10:13 and to keep the Lord's commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good? 10:14 'Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven

*and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. 10:15 'Yet on your fathers did the Lord set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day. 10:16 'So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer. 10:17 'For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. 10:18 'He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. 10:19 'So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. 10:20 'You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name. 10:21 'He is your praise and He is your God, who has done these great and awesome things for you which your eyes have seen. (NASB)*

Moshe states that the Lord God of Israel always treated the people as a loving father, doing everything for their own good. The Ten Commandments were given to them as a safeguard and a blessing and not a burden. We are told according to the Scriptures, the Law is perfect (*Tehillim / Psalms 19:7*) and it becomes our teacher (*Galatians 3:24*) to show one's inadequacy in one's self. It is the love of God that enables one to want to keep the mitzvot (commandments). (*Romans 13:10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. NASB*)

In the Midrash, the rabbis give a parable to describe what is going on in the psalm. They say the following:

*What parable explains these verses? The parable of a householder who had a plowing heifer which he lent to another man to plow with. The man had ten sons, One came, plowed, and rested; and another and another came, plowed, and rested; finally, the heifer was so exhausted that it lay down, and when all the others heifers came in from the fields the exhausted one did not come in. The owner of the heifer did not take the time to listen to the excuses of the other man, but when out at once, broke loose the yoke, and cut the ox-bows. Like the heifer is Israel in this world, One ruler comes, lays on the yoke, and goes away, and the cuts left by the lash are long, as is said, The plowers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows. (Midrash Tehillim 129 Part 1)*

The parable describes one who does not allow time for rest, but ruthless and relentless task masters who work the people by the end of the whip. What was missing here is the relationship factor. The enemy does not seek a relationship as our Father in heaven does. The enemy does not make us feel accepted or important, as the midrash describes being driven by the end of the whip where the lashes dig deep leaving long furrows. The Lord our God, in the context of the Torah, describes to us how He desires a covenant relationship with His people. The Lord gives us unconditional acceptance that makes us feel secure, and appreciation that makes us feel significant, and the affection that He gives us makes us feel lovable. The Lord wants to spend time with us, according to the Scriptures, this makes us feel important causing us to want to live by his commands. We are told the Lord demonstrated His love for us by sending his only begotten son to lay his life down for ours.

### ***John 3:14-21***

*3:14 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; 3:15 so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. 3:16 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 3:17 'For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 3:18 'He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 3:19 'This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. 3:20 'For*

*everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 3:21 'But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.'* (NASB)

This is the kind of relationship the Lord is looking to have for us. This burden that is described in the midrash the people are released from is not that the Law is too difficult, but that in and through our relationship with the Lord we are set free to obey His Law with peace of heart and in truth. The Lord is not in the role of playing the policeman as we react in negative ways to His commands. The Lord acted in a loving, accepting, and appreciative way to demonstrate his affection and availability towards us. It is in these things, as demonstrated in His Messiah Yeshua, that we respond positively to His commands, to love one another, to have a desire to live our lives for the Lord. The basic consensus is, instead of dwelling on how we go wrong, realize the Lord loves us and offers us the opportunity to repent, turn from our sins, and return to His way of life according to the commands. Without the Lord's acceptance and love this would be impossible. The Lord has told us according to the Scriptures, that we can know without a doubt that we are loved no matter what we might do. We must however return to the source, to the Lord God of Israel, and to His Messiah Yeshua, to walk in His ways, and seek Him all the days of our lives. In these things, the Lord comes to set us free and to lift the burden of sin from our lives.

Midrash Tehillim 129 Part 1 concludes saying, *"At length, when the time of redemption comes, the Holy One blessed be He, will not take time to say to the nations of the Earth, such and such have you done to My children. But He will come at once and break loose the yoke and cut its bows asunder, as is said, And I have broken the bars of your yoke (Vayikra / Leviticus 26:13). Hence the Psalmist says He has cut asunder the cords of the wicked."* The Lord is the one who establishes and breaks the yoke of the enemy. Jeremiah 27:12-13 states, *"Bring your necks under the yoke of the King of Babylon . . . and live"* The people however rejected God's plan and the advice of Jeremiah and suffered the consequences. In the book of Jeremiah, Hananiah falsely prophesied that God would break the Babylonian yoke in two years. Here the people were unfaithful to the Lord and the covenant, and the Lord placed a heavy burden upon the people to exile into Babylon. For those who are faithful to the Lord, the breaking of the captor's yoke is a promise, the Lord will cut asunder the cords of the wicked.

Midrash Tehillim 129, Part 2 opens with the Dibur Hamathil (דיבור המתחיל) saying, *"During a Sabbatical year, Rabbi Hanina son of Papa and Rabbi Samuel son of Nahmani said to the man, Good luck."* The פתיחה (Petihta) the homiletic introduction to the midrash states, *"Rabbi Hanina son of Papa asked Rabbi Samuel, Did you not teach me, my master, that the verse Neither do they that go by say, The blessing of the Lord be upon you (Tehillim / Psalms 129:8), means that one must not say Good luck to men who plow during a Sabbatical year?"* Does saying "good luck" mean that one is not acknowledging God's sovereignty? For example, if one says, *"You were fortunate"* or *"she is lucky,"* is this synonymous to showing one has bought into a world-view that believes life happens at random or chance? Does it mean life's moments are at the mercy of a mere roll of the metaphysical dice? The words that we say does matter and it is the motivation and intention behind these words that matter. The idea here is to say good luck to someone during the Sabbatical year in the sense that one is going to plow the field and do work in the ground when the Lord commanded this not to be done. This is contrasted to the blessing, that one states *"the Lord be upon you"* (Tehillim / Psalms 129:8) while violating a command during the sabbatical year. There seems to be a sense of a contradiction to give someone a blessing in the midst of their intended disobedience. The idea may be to state the blessing of the Lord be upon someone, this should have the sense of drawing them back to the knowledge of the Lord, of His instruction (Torah) and repentance. The intention of our words should be not to corrupt but to build up, to assure, and for success, and to repentance from sin. All things hinge upon our repentant attitude, the faith that we have, and the action of turning from sin to seek the Lord and His ways.

The entire midrash states the following:

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| <p><b>מדרש תהלים פרק קכט סימן ב</b></p> <p>ב רבי חנינא בר פפא ורבי שמואל בר נחמני עברו על חד חרשן שביעית א"ל רבי שמואל בר נחמני איישר, א"ל רבי חנינא בר פפא ולא כן אלפן רבי ולא אמרו העוברים ברכת ה' אליכם שאסור לומר לחורשי שביעית איישר א"ל לקרות אתה יודע ולדרוש אי אתה יודע, ולא אמרו העוברים אלו אומות העולם שהם עוברים מן העולם שלא אמרו לישראל ברכת ה' אליכם, וישראל אומרים ברכנו אתכם בשם ה', וישראל אומרים להם לא דייכם מכל הטובות והנחמות הבאות עליכם בזכותנו [ואין אתם אומרים לנו באו וטלו לכם מן הברכות הללו, ולא עוד] אלא שאתם מגלים עלינו את הפייסים וזמיות וגולגוליות וארנוניות, סוף שאתם פורעים, כד"א תחת הנחשת אביא זהב וגוי' (ישעיה ס יז).</p> | <p><b>Midrash Tehillim 129, Part 2</b></p> <p>2. <i>During a Sabbatical year, Rabbi Hanina son of Papa and Rabbi Samuel son of Nahmani said to the man, Good luck. Rabbi Hanina son of Papa asked Rabbi Samuel, Did you not teach me, my master, that the verse Neither do they that go by say, The blessing of the Lord be upon you (Tehillim / Psalms 129:8), means that one must not say Good luck to men who plow during a Sabbatical year? Rabbi Samuel replied, You may know how to read Scripture, but you do not know how to interpret it. The words Neither do they that go by refer to the nations of the earth that will pass out of the world because they will not say to the children of Israel, The blessing of the Lord be upon you, even though the children of Israel say to them, We bless you in the name of the Lord (Tehillim / Psalms 129:8). The children of Israel also say to the nations of the earth, All the boons and comforts that come to you because of us are not enough for you, for you do not say to us, Come and take a portion of these blessings. On the contrary, you exact from us tributes, fines, poll-taxes, and taxes in kind. But finally you will have to make compensation, for it has been promised to Israel, For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver (Isaiah 60:17).</i></p> |
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The midrash speaks of the rabbis discussion on plowing in the sense of the shabbat and the sabbatical year to the wicked man who does not care about such things. The midrash draws out this point that it is possible to read the Scripture and not know how to interpret it. We read the following commentary that discusses Scripture and its interpretation.

**Marbeh Lisaper on Pesach Haggadah, Magid, We Were Slaves in Egypt 2:5**

*Even if we were all wise (chakhamim), all discerning (nivonim), all elders (zikeinim), all knowledgeable in matters of Torah (Yod'im et HaTorah)... In Rabbi Amram's version of the Haggadah, the text appears as it does in our text; in Abarbanel's Haggadah it does not include the word zikeinim. Abarbanel's version is based on Deuteronomy 1:13 (which does not include zekeinim): "Pick from your tribes men who are wise, discerning and knowledgeable." So why does our version of the text have four terms instead of three? It is based on the fourfold levels of interpretation of scripture, PaRDeS: Pshat, Remez, Drash and Sod. This fourfold approach to the text is hinted at in the names of the Hebrew alphabet. When one writes out the names of the Hebrew alphabet, these are the only four letters that contain a lamed- aleph gimel dalet lamed. Lamed means learning. Therefore there are four types of 'learning.' One is related to the wise person who learns the simple meaning of the text from his teacher. One is for the discerning person who is able to gain meanings from hints (remazim) and allusions. One student of the Torah is called an 'elder' (zaken) when one can teach the masses the meaning and teachings of Torah. And one truly becomes knowledgeable in matters of Torah when he understands the hidden meaning of Torah. These four people should not say, "Why do we need to focus on the story of the Exodus – even a child in nursery school knows this story. Rather we should delve into the intricacies of the Passover offering and we will reveal the hidden meanings of the laws of Passover." To this person, one should say, "Even so it is a commandment upon us to tell the story of the Exodus simply as a story as if we personally went forth from Egypt. It is beloved to tell the story at the proper time."*

Marbe Lisaper speaks of the fourfold levels of interpreting of Scripture: Pshat, Remez, Drash, and Sod. The

hermeneutic developed in the early church, was primarily related to understanding the Hebrew Scriptures where each passage in Scripture is understood to have four meanings: Literal (What the passage says about past events), Allegorical (What the passage can tell us about Christ), Moral (What the passage can teach us about how to live), and Anagogical (What the passage tells us about our ultimate fate). From this approach, one should always begin with the literal grammatical historical methodology while examining the Scriptures and its interpretation. If one cannot apply a literal methodology one is forced to use a spiritual (allegorical) methodology. In the early church, the spiritualization of the Scriptures led to the allegorical methodology leading to further division of the interpretative method into topological and anagogical where the text not only gives a spiritual meaning but has a moral and eschatological message as well that was coupled to the divorce from the Torah and its practical applications. This has had devastating consequences historically in the lives of God's people.

In Judaism, the term PaRDeS, is an acronym formed from the initials of the fourfold approach to interpreting Scripture: Peshat (פְּשָׁט) (“straight” or the literal (direct) meaning), Remez (רְמֵז) (“hints” or the deep allegoric: hidden or symbolic meaning beyond just the literal sense), Derash (דְּרָשׁ) (to “inquire” (“seek”) the comparative (midrashic) meaning, as given through similar occurrences), and Sod (סוֹד) (“secret” (“hidden”) or the esoteric/mystical meaning, as given through inspiration or revelation). Each type of Pardes interpretation examines the extended meaning of a text. As a general rule, the extended meaning never contradicts the base meaning. Note how there is no drash without the pshat. The reason being, it is not possible to get to the true implications of the Scriptures and its application for our lives without first studying the plain sense of the text themselves. Many people want to bypass the process by hearing the Sod first without having spent the time and effort in earnestly studying the intent of the author from the grammatical-historical methodology. This is how we avoid those who claim to know the true meaning of the Scriptures, or what the Scriptures “really” mean, when it is evident that they have not toiled over the plain meaning of the text itself. Beware of those who desire to “wow” you with the special insights and supposed revelations that come from some other method as opposed to the grammatical historical cultural method. When studying the pshat, this is not about the over simplification but rather it is the foundation for all that follows in biblical studies. It is difficult enough to interpret the plain meaning of the Scriptures, than to attempt to skip forward to the more esoteric meanings. Without the plain meaning, there is merely speculation about the hidden meanings of the various texts. It is also important to understand that Yeshua believed in the Hebrew Scriptures of his day, and He read the Torah portions at the synagogue each week (see *Luke 4:16, Matthew 13:54*), recognized the divisions of the Scriptures as the Torah (Law), Neviim (Prophets), Ketuvim (Writings) (see *Luke 24:44*), and considered every jot and tittle of the Torah scroll to be of eternal significance (see *Matthew 5:17-18, Luke 24:44*) and that the Scripture cannot be broken (*John 10:35*). The Scriptures have great value for our lives as God's people. If we approach the study of the Scriptures soberly, prayerfully, and humbly, the Lord will speak to our hearts about what is right, just, and true.

Midrash Tehillim 129 Part 2 concludes saying, “*The children of Israel also say to the nations of the earth, All the boons and comforts that come to you because of us are not enough for you, for you do not say to us, Come and take a portion of these blessings. On the contrary, you exact from us tributes, fines, poll-taxes, and taxes in kind. But finally you will have to make compensation, for it has been promised to Israel, For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver (Isaiah 60:17).*” Notice how the nations gain a blessing from Israel as a result of God's blessing upon Israel. This provides us with the context that because God has promised to bless us abundantly, we should be a blessing to others. When Adam and Eve disobeyed the command of God and sinned in the Garden of Eden, along with sin came the curse. Eve was cursed with pain in child-bearing and Adam was cursed with hard labor, providing for his family by the sweat of his brow. Both were cursed with death saying to dust you shall return. The blessing of God on the other hand relates to two matters, (i) the overcoming of God's curse, and (ii) the cursing of the evil one which promises his condemnation and destruction. The Abrahamic covenant takes up the promise of blessing when we read the Lord saying, “*Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you*

*a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed'” (Bereshit / Genesis 12:1-3).* The Lord God promised to bless Abraham and his offspring. He also promised Abraham that he would become a blessing to all who would bless him. This is what we read in the Midrash of the nations being blessed because of Israel. What an amazing promise this is! But just what has God promised to do for Abraham? How will Abraham be blessed, and how will he become a blessing to others? By tracing the fulfillment of this promise through the Scriptures we will better understand God’s blessings and we learn the blessing is not just one of finances but of the knowledge of God and His Messiah Yeshua. The plan of God is to bring about His glory in this world, and that plan incorporates all things (*Romans 8:28*) which includes pain, suffering, and sorrow. In this blessing to Abraham, He promised temporal and eternal blessings. This presupposes that we will endure suffering and trials as a part of His plan to bring about His blessing on earth. The Lord God chose Israel as the object of His blessings. His desire to demonstrate His blessings in and through Israel then to all men and to every nation, so that all would choose to seek Him and His ways. Therefore, those who identified with Israel and Israel’s God would also be blessed, as God told Abraham (*Bereshit / Genesis 12:2-3*). When we trust and obey, the Lord will pour out His blessing. Let’s Pray!

Heavenly Father,

Thank You Lord for Your mercy and the great work that you are doing in our lives. We believe You are able to overcome all things, from saving us from our enemies, to the deliverance from sin, and even to work in our hearts to deeply, truly, and honestly seek you all the days of our lives. We recognize the weaknesses in our strength and resolve to serve You and to do what is expected, to be humble and to pray and to remain in Your word. Lord help us to have the strength to stand for truth and life, to have the desire to seek You in prayer and in Your Word, to have faith in Yeshua Your Messiah, and to love our neighbor each day. We thank You Lord for Your continued faithfulness to Your promises and to us. Help us to grow in our faith, to walk in the spirit, and apply these truths to our lives. We praise Your Holy Name and give You all of the honor, and the glory, and the praise forever and ever.

In Yeshua’s (Jesus’) Name we pray! Amen!

Be Blessed in Yeshua, Christ our Messiah!

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הללויה לאדוננו מורנו ורבינו ישוע מלך המשיח לעולם ועד:  
Hallelujah for our Lord, our Teacher, our Rabbi,  
“Yeshua” King Messiah forever and ever

## Notes