

Introduction

During illness, we can feel lonely, even if we are not alone. We call out to God for comfort and salvation.

A Maskil of David; while he was in the cave. A prayer. I cry aloud to God; I appeal to God loudly for mercy. I pour out my complaint directly; I recount my tale of trouble when my spirit fails within me. You know my course; they have laid a trap in the path I walk. Look at my right and see—I have no friend; there is nowhere I can flee, no one cares about me. So I cry to You, Lord; I say, “You are my refuge, all I have in the land of the living.” Listen to my cry, for I have been brought very low; save me from my pursuers, for they are too strong for me. Free me from prison, that I may praise Your name. The righteous shall glory in me for Your gracious dealings with me.

מִשְׁכִּיל לְדָוִד בְּהֵיאוֹתוֹ בְּמַעְרָה תְּפִלָּה: קוֹלִי
אֶל־יְהוָה אֶזְעַק קוֹלִי אֶל־יְהוָה אֶתְחַנֵּן:
אֲשַׁפֵּךְ לִפְנֵי שִׂיחֵי צָרָתִי לִפְנֵי אֲגִיד: בְּהִתְעַטֵּף
עָלַי רוּחִי וְאַתָּה יְדַעְתָּ נְתִיבָתִי בְּאַרְחֻזֵי אֲהַלְךָ
טָמְנָו פֶּחַ לִי: הִבֵּיט יָמִין וּרְאֵה וְאִין־לִי מִכִּיר
אֲבַד מְנוּס מִמֶּנִּי אִין דּוֹרֵשׁ לְנַפְשִׁי: זְעַקְתִּי
אֶל־יְיָ הִוָּה אֲמַרְתִּי אַתָּה מַחְסֵי חֶלְקִי בְּאַרְצֵי
הַחַיִּים: הִקְשִׁיבָה אֶל־רִנָּתִי כִּי־דַלּוֹתִי מְאֹד
הִצְלִינִי מִרְדְּפֵי כִּי אֲמָצוּ מִמֶּנִּי: הוֹצִיאָה
מִמִּסְגָּר נַפְשִׁי לְהוֹדוֹת אֶת־שִׁמְךָ בִּי יִכְתְּרוּ
צְדִיקִים כִּי תִגְמַל עָלַי: (תהלים קמב)

This Psalm is a supplication to God from the depths of a difficult and painful time. “I cry aloud to God; I appeal loudly to God for mercy” (קוֹלִי אֶל־יְהוָה אֶזְעַק קוֹלִי אֶל־יְהוָה אֶתְחַנֵּן). This is not a whispered prayer, but rather a loud cry for help. The phrase, “I recount my tale of trouble” (צָרָתִי לִפְנֵי אֲגִיד), can seem confusing. How could it be that God doesn’t already know about our suffering and needs us to share our story with Him? The commentators explain that it means we are speaking about our troubles in the form of prayer. God already knows what is happening in our lives. Yet it brings a sense of relief to us to share the story of what we are going through. The very act of talking to God about it can lighten our burden.

This Psalm also speaks about the deep sense of loneliness and abandonment that can be felt during difficult times. “Look at my right and see—I have no friend; there is nowhere I can flee, no one cares about me” (הִבֵּיט יָמִין וּרְאֵה וְאִין־לִי מִכִּיר אֲבַד מְנוּס מִמֶּנִּי אִין דּוֹרֵשׁ לְנַפְשִׁי). There may be people around trying to provide help and support, but we can still feel isolated. Each experience with illness is unique. It may feel like no one else can understand our circumstances or truly empathize. But God is here with us. He listens to our recounting and understands our despair. “So I cry to You, O Lord; I say, You are my refuge, all I have in the land of the living” (זְעַקְתִּי אֶל־יְיָ הִוָּה אֲמַרְתִּי אַתָּה מַחְסֵי חֶלְקִי בְּאַרְצֵי הַחַיִּים). When saying this Psalm for someone else who is ill, we cry out to God for Him to comfort and make them feel less alone. We also share the loneliness of being a caregiver, or the abandonment a family member may feel when watching their loved one suffer.

The Psalm ends with a prayer for a future that is free of misery. Even in the most difficult times looking towards a better future can help us focus our mindset during prayer. We want to cry out to God about our suffering, but we also want to work towards a more peaceful and healthy period. “The righteous shall glory in me for Your gracious dealings with me” (בִּי יִכְתְּרוּ צְדִיקִים כִּי תִגְמַל עָלַי). We pray for a time when others see what we went through and acknowledge God’s hand.