Introduction

Sometimes we feel isolated in illness and forgotten by those around us. This Psalm reminds us to be thoughtful and understanding of each other while reaffirming that God always stands beside us and can lift us up.

For the leader. A psalm of David. Happy is he who is thoughtful of the wretched; in bad times may the LORD keep him from harm. May the LORD guard him and preserve him; and may he be thought happy in the land. Do not subject him to the will of his enemies. The LORD will sustain him on his sickbed; You shall wholly transform his bed of suffering. I said, "O LORD, have mercy on me, heal me, for I have sinned against You." My enemies speak evilly of me, "When will he die and his name perish?" If one comes to visit, he speaks falsely; his mind stores up evil thoughts; once outside, he speaks them. All my enemies whisper together against me, imagining the worst for me. "Something baneful has settled in him; he'll not rise from his bed again." My ally in whom I trusted, even he who shares my bread, has been utterly false to me. But You, Lord, have mercy on me; let me rise again and repay them. Then shall I know that You are pleased with me: when my enemy cannot shout in triumph over me. You will support me because of my integrity, and let me abide in Your presence forever. Blessed is the LORD, God of Israel, from eternity to eternity. Amen and Amen.

לַמְנַצֵּחַ מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד: אַשְׁרֵי מַשְׂכִּיל אֶל־דָּל בְּיוֹם רָעָה יְמַלְּטֵהוּ י-הוה: י-הוה יִשְׁמְרֵהוּ וִיחַיֵּהוּ (יאשר) [וְאֻשַּׁר] בָּאָרֶץ וְאַל־תִּתְּנֵהוּ בְּנֶפֶשׁ אֹיְבָיו: י-הוה יִסְעָדֶנּוּ עַל־עֶרֶשׂ דְּוָי כָּל־מִשְׁכָּבוֹ הָפַכְתָּ בְחָלְיוֹ: אֲנִי־אָמַרְתִּי י-הוה חָנֵּנִי רְפָאָה נַפְשִׁי כִּי־חָטָאתִי לָךְ: אוֹיְבַי יֹאמְרוּ רַע לִי מָתַי יָמוּת וְאָבַד שְׁמוֹ: וְאִם־בָּא לִרְאוֹת שָׁוְא יְדַבֵּר לִבּוֹ יִקְבָּץ־אָוֶן לוֹ יֵצֵא לַחוּץ יְדַבֵּר: יַחַד עָלַי יִתְלַחֲשׁוּ כָּל־שֹׂנְאָי עָלַי יַחְשְׁבוּ רָעָה לִי: דְּבַר־בְּלִיַּעַל יָצוּק בּוֹ וַאֲשֶׁר שָׁכַב לֹא־יוֹסִיף לָקוּם: גַּם־אִישׁ שְׁלוֹמִי אֲשֶׁר־בָּטַחְתִּי בוֹ אוֹכֵל לַחְמִי הִגְדִּיל עָלַי עָקֵב: וְאַתָּה י-הוה חָנֵּנִי וַהֲקִימֵנִי וַאֲשַׁלְּמָה לָהֶם: בְּזֹאת יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־חָפַצְתָּ בִּי כִּי לֹא־יָרִיעַ אֹיְבִי עָלָי: וַאֲנִי בְּתֻמִּי תָּמַכְתָּ בִּי וַתַּצִּיבֵנִי לְפָנֶיךָ לְעוֹלָם: בָּרוּךְ י-הוה אֱ-לֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵהָעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם אָמֵן וְאָמֵן:

(תהלים מא)

This Psalm begins by praising a caregiver, someone who supports and cares for a sick person. "Happy is he who is thoughtful of the wretched" (אַשְׁרֵי מַשְׂכִּיל אֶל־דָּל). But then it speaks of the disappointment and betrayal of someone "on their sickbed" (עַל־עֶרֶשׂ דְּוָי), who feels they can no longer rely on friends. "My ally in whom I trusted, even he who shares my bread, has been utterly false to me"(גַּם־אִישׁ שְׁלוֹמִי אֲשֶׁר־בָּטַחְתִּי בוֹ אוֹכֵל לַחְמִי הִגְדִּיל עָלַי עָקֵב). It is not clear if this betrayal is real or perceived. Either way, the feeling of loneliness is painful. Based on this passage, the Sages teach an important message to those trying to help the sick: Be thoughtful about how your help will be received so that it will strengthen those in need. The passage also serves as a reminder to the sick: your friends are not perfect and cannot always provide what we need.

We turn to God who remains a constant supportive presence in our time of need. God will have mercy on us and "let me rise again"(הֲקִימֵנִי). In the midst of illness, when it seems as though there is no human that can provide us with what we need, we put our trust in God.

This Psalm ends with a declaration, "Blessed is the Lord, God of Israel, from eternity to eternity" (בָּרוּךְ י-הוה אֱ-לֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵהָעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם אָמֵן וְאָמֵן). Rabbi Samson Refael Hirsch explains this refers to the past, which

remains unclear to us, and to the future, which we cannot even begin to imagine. In these difficult times, we cannot always understand what we are going through or have gone through. It feels impossible to picture a better future, and yet we put our trust in God. With the final words, "Amen and Amen", we end the Psalm by declaring our belief and trust in God.