

Any chapter of *Psalms* that was especially dear to King David, פתח בה באשרי וסיים בה – he opened with a verse containing the word “praiseworthy” and concluded with a verse containing the word “praiseworthy.” פתח באשרי דכתיב – He therefore opened the first chapter of *Psalms* with the word “praiseworthy,” as it is written: “אשרי האיש” – Praiseworthy is the man, וסיים באשרי דכתיב – and concluded it with a verse containing the word “praiseworthy,” as it is written: “אשרי כל” – praiseworthy are all who trust in Him.^[1] Now the phrase *praiseworthy are all who trust in Him* actually appears at the close of the second chapter of *Psalms*, not the first! Evidently, the first two chapters are in reality one long chapter.

Having mentioned the verse *Let sinners cease from the earth*, the Gemara goes on to recount an incident regarding the correct explication of this verse:

There were certain boors^[2] in R' Meir's neighborhood, והיו קא מצערין ליה טובא – and they caused [R' Meir] considerable distress. והיו קא בעי – Once, R' Meir was praying for mercy regarding them, so that they would die.^[3] His wife, Beruria, said to him:^[4] – אמרה ליה ברוריא דביתהו – What is your reasoning to pray for their deaths? Because it is written: *Let sinners (chataim) cease from the earth*.^[5] You therefore emulate King David – just as he prayed for the death of sinners, so too do you pray for their deaths. מי כתיב חטאים – But is it then the word *chotim* that is written in the verse, in which case the verse would refer to sinners? No!^[6] – [The word] written is

chataim, which refers to that which causes one to sin, i.e. the Evil Inclination!^[7] Accordingly, King David is not praying for the death of sinners, but for an end to the Evil Inclination that leads them into sin! ועוד שפיל לסיפיה דקרא – And furthermore, go down to the end of the verse, which states: “ורשעים עוד אינם” – and let the wicked be no more. עור – Now, is it definitely the case that once sinners cease from the world, the wicked will be no more? But the cessation of present-day sinners does not ensure that future wicked men will not appear on the scene!^[8] Evidently, then, the term *chataim* refers not to sinners, but to that which causes sin – the Evil Inclination.^[9] – אלא בעי רחמי עלויהו דלקדרו בתשובה – Therefore, you should rather pray for mercy regarding [these boors] that they should repent of their wickedness, and turn away from their Evil Inclination! – ורשעים עוד אינם – In the absence of any urge to sin, the wicked will indeed be no more! בעא רחמי – [R' Meir] heeded her advice and prayed for mercy regarding [these boors], and they indeed repented of their wickedness.^[10]

The Gemara continues with another incident involving Beruria:

A certain heretic once said to Beruria: “רני עקרה לא ילדה” – It is written regarding the desolate city Jerusalem: *Sing out, O barren one who has not given birth*.^[11] – משום דלא ילדה רני – But should she then sing because she has not given birth? But surely barrenness is cause only for sadness, not for rejoicing!^[12] – אמרה ליה – [Beruria] said to him: שטןא שפיל לסיפיה דקרא – Fool! Go down to the end of the verse, and see what is written there! – בנן שוממא מוכני בעולה אמר ה' – For in conclusion it is written: *for the children of the desolate one (Jerusalem) are more*

NOTES

1. *Tosafos* ask: By stating that King David employed this formulation with any chapter that was dear to him, the Gemara implies that this occurs several times in *Psalms*. But the first chapter of *Psalms* is in fact the only instance of a chapter that begins and ends with a verse containing the word *אשרי*, praiseworthy! *Tosafos* explain that this rule is not limited to psalms beginning and ending with the word *praiseworthy*, but includes all psalms that conclude with the identical expression with which they begin – any psalm possessing this formulation can be assumed to be one especially dear to King David [e.g. the many chapters that begin and end with the word *הללויה*, *Praise God!*]. The Gemara cites the case of the first chapter as one example of this phenomenon (see *Ben Yehoyada* for another way to resolve this difficulty).

[King David set a precedent by concluding many psalms with the identical idea with which they begin. His style was adopted by the Rabbis in their formulation of lengthier blessings, in that the conclusions of these blessings express the same idea as their introductions (מצין פתיחתן סמוך לחתימתן) (*Rashba*; *Ritva*; see *Pesachim* 104a).]

2. These were *amei haaretz* [people ignorant of Torah, and careless of its laws] (see *Rashi* here, to *Sanhedrin* 37a בריוני, and to *Taanis* 23b בריוני משום בריוני). Alternatively, these individuals were bandits (*Tos. HaRosh*; see *Aruch* בריוני).

3. There are people who are of such surpassing wickedness that God metes out to them the ultimate punishment – He repays them in this world for the good deeds they perform, causing them thereby to forfeit the eternal reward they might have garnered in the World to Come (see *Rashi* to *Deuteronomy* 7:10). R' Meir felt that these boors were of this category and he wished to redeem them from this punishment! He therefore prayed for God to bestow mercy upon them by punishing them for their deeds in this world. God would thus kill them immediately, thereby safeguarding whatever portion they had earned in the World to Come (*Tzlach*; see above, 7a; see *Tos. HaRosh*; *Meiri*). [This is in line with the statement of the Mishnah in *Sanhedrin* (71b): *The death of the wicked is beneficial to them and beneficial to the world* (see *Maharsha*).]

4. Beruria, wife of R' Meir, was the daughter of R' Chanina ben

Teradyon. The Gemara (*Pesachim* 62b) indicates that she was a Torah scholar of exceptional sagacity.

5. *Psalms* 104:35.

6. The unvowelized word *חטאים* can be read either as *chataim* (חטאים) or as *chotim* (חטאים). While the translation of *chotim* is “sinners,” *chataim* carries another connotation (see following note). Beruria maintained that [since the word was not written as *חוטאים* (which can only mean “sinners” – with or without vowels),] its proper reading is evidently *chataim*. She therefore objected to R' Meir's action (*Rashi*; see *Maharshah*).

7. The word *חטאים*, *chataim*, when vowelized with an ordinary *patach* vowel beneath the *ches* (ח) and a *dagesh* inside the *tes* (ט), is an example of the *פיעול* form, which sometimes carries a causative connotation. It accordingly refers to that which causes others to sin – namely, the *yetzer hara*, the Evil Inclination. King David was thus praying for an end to the influence of the *yetzer hara* (*Rashi*, as explained by *Gra*, *Imrei Noam*; see *Maharshah*; see *Pnei Yehoshua* אמר ר"י; cf. *Hagahos Yavetz's* interpretation of *Rashi*; cf. *Maharsha*; cf. *Emes LeYaakov* by R' Yaakov MiLissa; cf. also *Ben Yehoyada*).

[Note that *Gra's* version of *Rashi* (ר"ה חטאים כתיב) differs slightly from that of the standard text.]

8. *Iyun Yaakov*; cf. *Beurei HaGra*.

9. See *Beurei HaGra*.

10. See *Taanis* 23b for a similar incident. [*Maharsha* questions this incident on the basis of the Talmudic dictum (below, 33b): *All is in the hands of Heaven but fear of Heaven*, which clearly precludes God's involvement in one's choice of whether or not to sin. How then did R' Meir pray for these boors to repent? See *Emes LeYaakov* by R' Yaakov MiLissa; *Anaf Yosef*, for various explanations; see also *Megadim Chadashim* at length. (See *Maharsha* for a distinction between one who prays for God's aid in his own repentance, and one who prays for another to repent.)]

11. *Isaiah* 54:1. [The regarding מינא, heretic, follows *Dikdukei Soferim* – see 7a note 25.]

12. See *Maharsha*; *Gra*, *Imrei Noam*; see also *Metzudas David* ad loc.