

Psalm 120:1

A song of ascents.

In my distress I called to the LORD
and He answered me.

² O LORD, save me from treacherous lips,
from a deceitful tongue!

³ What can you profit,
what can you gain,
O deceitful tongue?

⁴ A warrior's sharp arrows,
with hot coals of broom-wood.

⁵ Woe is me, that I live with Meshech,
that I dwell among the clans of Kedar.

⁶ Too long have I dwelt with those who hate peace.

⁷ I am all peace;
but when I speak,
they are for war.

Psalm 120 is not part of our liturgy, and perhaps for good reason. There is a tone to verse 5 that can be problematic if we were to think about who Meshech and Kedar might represent. I want to focus, however, on an aspect of the psalm that probably has little to do with why we are not familiar with it. The psalm looks like a typical lament: there is a problem that the speaker asks God to resolve. Missing from this lament, however, is the expected note at the end of confidence or hope that God will indeed fix the problem.

The speaker's situation is that others are out to get him - and, remember, paranoia is not the only reason to feel this way! These others attack with words and arrows. Is it true, however, that they - Meshech and Kedar - hate peace, while the speaker is "all peace?" In order to make that claim about himself, would it not be better to avoid such harsh and hostile claims about the others? When we feel persecuted by others, we may feel that they attack us unfairly and with deceit. I hope that we can be as sure that our own defenses and counter-attacks are as fair and truthful as they can be, if we want the moral high ground that we indeed seek peace. Otherwise, we are hateful and untruthful just as they, and we cannot have the confidence that our position will triumph and we will be freed of those enemies.

Shavua Tov, Har Zion. I wish you all a good week, of safety and health.