

## Mizmor 019

# Seeking Perfection

### Key Concepts

In this mizmor David contrasts the perfection of Hashem's Creation with the imperfection of man. The perfection of Creation is demonstrated by the starry heavens which obey the Creator's will with mathematical precision. It is also demonstrated by the perfection of the Torah, which provides man with perfect wisdom in the form of mitzvos. The mitzvos express the will of Hashem for the benefit of mankind.

However, when the perfection of the Torah encounters the imperfection of man there is a need for Hashem's special intervention. This takes the form of His forgiveness for unintentional sins that a man may have committed and His help in avoiding intentional sins. However, to receive Hashem's forgiveness and His help, man must request them in the form of tefillah. This is what David does as the mizmor draws to a close, concluding with a final plea that his words and thoughts are found acceptable in the eyes of his Creator.

**Navigating Tehillim.** In Mizmor 019 David is alluding to a special relationship between the Torah and the heavens. The heavens have been given the mission of defining the flow of time, measured through day and night (19:3). Correspondingly, man's total commitment to the Torah requires that he learn Torah at every opportunity, by day and night. This suggests a link to Mizmor 001 where David declares that man achieves fulfillment when he contemplates "his" Torah day and night (1:2).

### Exploring the Mizmor

**PART 1. THE HEAVENS.** David extols the heavens as the most obvious sign of the perfection of Creation.

(א) לַמִּנְצַחַּ מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד: (ב) הַשָּׁמַיִם מִסִּפְרִים כְּבוֹד אֵל וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו מְגִיד הַרְקִיעַ: (ג) יוֹם לַיּוֹם יִבְיַע אֱמֹר וְלַיְלָה לְלַיְלָה יִתְוַה דְּעַת: (ד) אֵין אֱמֹר וְאֵין דְּבָרִים בְּלִי נִשְׁמָע קוֹלָם: (ה) בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ יֵצֵא קוֹם וּבִקְצֵה תֵבֵל מְלִיָּהֶם לְשִׁמְשׁ שָׁם אֶהֱל בָּהֶם: (ו) וְהוּא כְּחֹתֵן יֵצֵא מִחֻפְתּוֹ יִשְׁיֵשׁ כְּגִבּוֹר לְרוּץ אֶרֶץ: (ז) מְקַצֵּה הַשָּׁמַיִם

מוֹצְאוֹ וּתְקוּפָתוֹ עַל קְצוֹתָם וְאִין נִסְתָּר מִחֻמָּתוֹ:

(1) For the musician, a mizmor by David. (2) The [outer] heavens tell the glory of G-d but [the full perfection of] His handiwork is declared by the [inner] sky. (3) [Each] day promises a following day and [each] night expresses the knowledge of a following night. (4) Without verbal communication and without words; their voice is not heard. (5) The line stretches forth throughout the world, and their words reach the end of the inhabited world. In their midst He has set up a tent for the sun. (6) It is like a bridegroom as he emerges from his wedding canopy, like a warrior who rejoices in running his course. (7) Its origin is at the [eastern] edge of the heavens. And its orbital path is bounded by their [other horizon] edges. There is nothing hidden from its heat.

**PART 2. THE TORAH.** David now extols the Torah as the perfect instrument to guide mankind in fulfilling the will of Hashem.

(ח) תּוֹרַת ה' תִּמְיָמָה מְשִׁיבַת נֶפֶשׁ עֵדוּת ה' נֶאֱמָנָה מִחֻכְיֵימַת פִּתִּי: (ט) פְּקוּדֵי ה' יִשְׂרָיִם מְשֻׁמְחֵי לֵב מִצְוֹת ה' בְּרָה מְאִירַת עֵינַיִם: (י) יִרְאֵת ה' טְהוֹרָה עוֹמְדַת לְעַד, מְשֻׁפְטֵי ה' אֲמַת צְדָקוֹ יַחֲדוּ: (יא) הַנְּחֻמָּדִים מְזַהֵב וּמְפִז רַב וּמְתוֹקִים מְדַבֵּשׁ וְנֹפֵת צוּפִים:

(8) Hashem's Torah is perfect; it restores the soul. Hashem's testimony is trustworthy; it makes the simple wise (9) The directives of Hashem are upright; they gladden the heart. Hashem's mitzvos are clear, enlightening the eyes. (10) The fear of Hashem is pure, enduring forever. The mishpatim of Hashem are true, altogether righteous. (11) They are more desirable than gold. They are even more desirable than an abundance of fine gold. They are sweeter than honey and drippings from honeycombs.

**PART 3. THE IMPERFECTION OF MAN.** David now speaks directly to Hashem, humbly declaring his commitment to fulfilling the mitzvos, but asking for Hashem's help. Individualized help is needed to forgive man's unintentional sins, to help him avoid intentional sins, and even to formulate the tefillos by which he pleads for that help.

(יב) גַּם עֲבָדֶךָ נִזְהָר בָּהֶם בְּשִׁמְרָם יֵקֵב רַב: (יג) שְׁגִיאוֹת מִי יָבִין מִנְסֻתָרוֹת נִקְנִי: (יד) גַּם מִזֵּדִים חֲשָׂךְ עֲבָדֶךָ אֵל יִמְשְׁלוּ בִי אֲזוּ אֵיתָם וְנִקִּיתִי מִפֶּשַׁע רַב: (טו) יְהִי לְרָצוֹן אִמְרֵי פִי וְהִגִּיוֹן לִבִּי לְפָנֶיךָ ה' צוּרִי וְגֹאֲלִי:

(12) Also, [I], Your servant, am scrupulous in [the mitzvos]. In observing them there is great reward. (13) Who can be aware of unintentional sins?

*Cleanse me from unwitting faults. (14) Even from intentional sins restrain Your servant. Let them not dominate me. Then, I shall be whole. I will be cleansed of gross transgression. (15) May the utterances of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart find favor before You, Hashem, my Rock and My Redeemer.*

## Learning the Mizmor

### PART 1. THE PERFECTION OF THE HEAVENS.

(א) לְמַנְצַח מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד:

This song has been prepared **for the musician** — לְמַנְצַח, who will perform it. It is **a mizmor** composed **by David** — מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד.

(ב) הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד אֱלֹהִים

וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו מִגִּיד הַרְקִיעַ:

**The outer heavens** — הַשָּׁמַיִם with their panorama of sun, moon, and stars effectively **tell the glory of G-d** — מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד אֱלֹהִים. **But** the even greater perfection of **His handiwork** — וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו is **declared by the inner sky** — מִגִּיד הַרְקִיעַ containing the atmosphere with its clouds and winds. The constantly changing patterns of rain and dew reflect man's behavior and so they are evidence of *Hashem's* active involvement in the world He created.

(ג) יוֹם לְיוֹם יִבְיַע אֱמֶת

וְלַיְלָה לְלַיְלָה יִחְוֶה דָּעַת:

The regularly repeating cycle of days and nights reflects the motion of the heavenly bodies and inspires mankind to thank *Hashem*. Each **day promises** the certainty of **a following day** — יוֹם לְיוֹם יִבְיַע אֱמֶת and **each night expresses the** certain **knowledge** of **a following night** — וְלַיְלָה לְלַיְלָה יִחְוֶה דָּעַת when man can rest from his labors and prepare himself mentally and spiritually for another day.

(ד) אֵין אֱמֶת וְאֵין דְּבָרִים

בְּלִי נִשְׁמָע קוֹלָם:

All of this is **without verbal communication and without words** — אֵין אֱמֶת וְאֵין דְּבָרִים; **their voice is not heard** — בְּלִי נִשְׁמָע קוֹלָם. The heavenly bodies behave in a disciplined way, marking the passage of time and communicating the

knowledge of Hashem to mankind, all without speaking.

(ה) בְּכֹל הָאָרֶץ יֵצֵא קוֹם  
וּבְקֵצָה תִּבֵּל מְלִיָּהֶם

Their orbital paths, which trace **their line** of movement **stretch forth throughout the world** — בְּכֹל הָאָרֶץ יֵצֵא קוֹם, **and their words**, even though unspoken, **reach the end of the inhabited world** — וּבְקֵצָה תִּבֵּל מְלִיָּהֶם.

לְשֶׁמֶשׁ שָׁם אָהֵל בְּהֵם:

**In their midst He has set up a tent for the sun** — לְשֶׁמֶשׁ שָׁם אָהֵל בְּהֵם. This is a framework that determines the precise bounds for the sun's motion. The sun is the most important heavenly body, providing the heat and light that are essential to life on earth. Still, it never deviates from its assigned framework.

(ו) וְהוּא כְּחָתָן יֵצֵא מִחַפָּתוֹ

The sun emerges from the eastern horizon each morning to illuminate the world and there is nothing to restrain it because its path through the heavens is clear. **It is like a bridegroom** — וְהוּא כְּחָתָן whose face shines with the joy of optimism **as he emerges from his wedding canopy** — יֵצֵא מִחַפָּתוֹ. He sees the future in terms of endless possibilities with nothing to mar his happiness.

יָשִׁישׁ כְּגִבּוֹר לָרוּץ אֶרֶח:

The sun rising from the horizon also **rejoices like a warrior** — יָשִׁישׁ כְּגִבּוֹר **in running his course** — לָרוּץ אֶרֶח. The warrior arises refreshed from his slumbers each day, elated by the knowledge that he has been given an assignment to serve his Creator. He rejoices in full confidence that nothing will stand in his way.

(ז) מִקְצֵה הַשָּׁמַיִם מוֹצְאוֹ  
וּתְקוּפָתוֹ עַל קְצוֹתָם  
וְאֵין נִסְתָּר מִחַמָּתוֹ:

The sun rises faithfully each day. **Its visible origin** is on the eastern horizon **at the edge of the heavens** — מִקְצֵה הַשָּׁמַיִם מוֹצְאוֹ. **And its orbital path** — וּתְקוּפָתוֹ, which sometimes shifts to the north and sometimes to the south depending on the season, is bounded **by their** other horizon **edges** — עַל קְצוֹתָם. **There is nothing hidden from its heat** — וְאֵין נִסְתָּר מִחַמָּתוֹ which pervades our entire planet to make life possible wherever men travel.

PART 2. THE PERFECTION OF THE TORAH.

## (ח) תּוֹרַת ה' תְּמַיְמָה מְשִׁיבַת נֶפֶשׁ

Although the heat of the sun is essential to human life, it can be harmful. But, **Hashem's Torah is perfect** — תּוֹרַת ה' תְּמַיְמָה, **restoring the soul** — מְשִׁיבַת נֶפֶשׁ, thereby giving eternal life to those who are faithful to it.

## עֲדוּת ה' נֶאֱמָנָה מְחַכֵּימַת פְּתִי:

**Hashem's testimony** — עֲדוּת ה', incorporating the *mitzvos* that bear witness to the covenant between *Hashem* and mankind, **is completely trustworthy** — נֶאֱמָנָה. It is so rich in intellectual depth that it **makes the simple wise** — מְחַכֵּימַת פְּתִי.

## (ט) פְּקוּדֵי ה' יִשְׁרִים מְשַׂמְחֵי לֵב

**The directives** accompanying the *mitzvos* that we have been given **by Hashem are upright** — פְּקוּדֵי ה' יִשְׁרִים, being consistent with our inborn sense of right and wrong. **They gladden the heart** — מְשַׂמְחֵי לֵב because they remove the uncertainty of wondering what *Hashem* wants from us.

## מִצְוֹת ה' בְּרָה מְאִירַת עֵינַיִם:

**Hashem's** framework of *mitzvos* is bright and **clear** — בְּרָה ה' מְצוֹת, **enlightening the eyes** — מְאִירַת עֵינַיִם with the depth of His wisdom.

## (י) יִרְאַת ה' טְהוֹרָה

## עוֹמֶדֶת לְעַד

**The fear of Hashem is pure** — יִרְאַת ה' טְהוֹרָה, bringing a person to a state of purity in the eyes of His Creator. The *mitzvos* concerned with moral and spiritual purity (*chukim*) are beyond human reason but they are essential to ensuring that the fear of Hashem **endures forever** — עוֹמֶדֶת לְעַד and is passed on to future generations.

## מְשַׁפְּטֵי ה' אֵמֶת צְדָקוֹ יִחָדוּ:

The *mitzvos* concerned with civil law (*mishpatim*) are readily adaptable to rational interpretation. However, civil law is especially subject to the distortions of greed and self-interest. Only **the mishpatim of Hashem are true** — מְשַׁפְּטֵי ה' אֵמֶת, eternally. Only they are **altogether righteous** — צְדָקוֹ יִחָדוּ. Since the *mishpatim* are based on Hashem's righteousness, they cannot conflict with one another and, if

they are rigorously observed, they are sure to prevent strife.

### (יא) הַנְּחֻמָּדִים מְזָהָב

The *mishpatim* **are more desirable than gold** — הַנְּחֻמָּדִים מְזָהָב. The monetary value of gold is realized only when the gold is spent. The wisdom of the Torah continues to benefit a person throughout his lifetime and even into the next world.

### וּמִפְּזֹזָב

**They are even more desirable than an abundance of fine gold** — וּמִפְּזֹזָב, which is used for jewelry. Gold jewelry delights the eye, but Torah delights the soul, which is eternal.

### וּמִתּוֹקִים מְדַבֵּשׁ וְנֹפֶת צוּפִים:

The *mishpatim* **are sweeter than honey** — וּמִתּוֹקִים מְדַבֵּשׁ from date palms, and even sweeter **than the drippings from honeycombs** — וְנֹפֶת צוּפִים. Honey is the sweetest of foods and yet there is only so much sweetness a person can take. After that it can be sickening. In contrast, the wisdom of the Torah becomes ever more gratifying the more knowledge one gains.

## PART 3. THE IMPERFECTION OF MAN.

### (יב) גַּם עֲבָדְךָ נֹזֵהר בָּהֶם

### בְּשִׂמְרָם עֹקֵב רָב:

**Also, I, Your servant** — גַּם עֲבָדְךָ, am among those who appreciate the sweetness of the *mishpatim*, even though I don't hold myself to be a scholar. I study their detailed laws and **am scrupulous in observing them** — נֹזֵהר בָּהֶם. For I know that **in observing them there is great reward** — בְּשִׂמְרָם עֹקֵב רָב the joy of serving You and the bliss of life in the World to Come.

### (יג) שְׂגִיאוֹת מִי יִבִּין

### מִנְסַתְרוֹת נִקְנִי:

Although I take great care to learn the *halachos* and perform the *mitzvos* correctly, I am surely not perfect and there are times when I have unknowingly gone astray. But **who can be aware of unintentional sins** — שְׂגִיאוֹת מִי יִבִּין? I ask You not to hold them against me. **Cleanse me from unwitting faults** — מִנְסַתְרוֹת נִקְנִי.

## (יד) גַם מִזְדִּים חֲשֵׁךְ עֲבָדְךָ אֵל יִמְשְׁלוּ בִּי

Although I try as best I can to observe the *mitzvos*, I am constantly being baited by the *yetzer hara* and so besides forgiving my inadvertent sins I ask Your help to avoid sin in the future. I pray that **even from intentional sins** — **גַם מִזְדִּים**, You will **restrain Your servant** — **חֲשֵׁךְ עֲבָדְךָ**. **Let them not dominate me** — **אֵל יִמְשְׁלוּ בִּי** by presenting me with temptations and emotions that are difficult to resist.

## אָז אֵיתָם וְנִקִּיתִי מִפֶּשַׁע רָב:

**Then**, when I have been forgiven my inadvertent sins and have resisted ordinary sins of intent, **I shall be whole** — **אָז אֵיתָם** for **I will surely be cleansed of gross transgression** — **וְנִקִּיתִי מִפֶּשַׁע רָב**. Through the influence of the Torah I will live a life of submission to Your will rather than rebelliousness.

## (טו) יְהִיו לְרָצוֹן אִמְרֵי פִי וְהִגִּיוֹן לִבִּי

## לְפָנֶיךָ ה' צוּרֵי וְגֹאֲלֵי:

May **the words of my mouth** — **אִמְרֵי פִי** find favor — **יְהִיו לְרָצוֹן** — **before You, Hashem** — **לְפָנֶיךָ ה'** — together with **the thoughts of my heart** — **וְהִגִּיוֹן** **לִבִּי**, which I am unable to put into words. You are **my Rock** — **צוּרֵי**, Whom I rely upon, **and My Redeemer** — **וְגֹאֲלֵי**, Who helps me overcome my sin.

**Living the Mizmor**

Listed below are some of the thoughts that you might have in mind when you say the words of the mizmor as a *tefillah* and some of the lessons that you can draw from this mizmor.

**Tehillos for Life - Contemplation of Hashem.**

[19:2] THE WONDERS OF THE HEAVENS. — **הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד אֱלֹהֵי וּמַעֲשֵׂהָ** — **יְדִיו מְגִיד הַרְקִיעַ** — “The [outer] heavens tell the glory of G-d but [the full perfection of] His handiwork is declared by the [inner] sky.” All of the heavens are a demonstration of the glory of Hashem, but especially the interaction between the atmosphere and mankind’s needs.

[19:3] TIME. — **יוֹם לְיוֹם יִבְיַע אִמְרֵי וְלַיְלָה לְלַיְלָה יִחוּהָ דַעַת** — “[Each] day promises a following day and [each] night expresses the knowledge of a following night.” Hashem created the dimension of time within which

mankind exists. We cannot even imagine existence outside of time. Time moves forward inexorably under Hashem's direction, but at the same time it operates within rigidly controlled calendar cycles. Just as we rely completely on the controlled passage of time, we can rely completely on Hashem's direction of our lives.

[19:5] **ABSOLUTE OBEDIENCE.** – **בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ יֵצֵא קוֹם** – *"The line stretches forth throughout the world."* Hashem sees to it that the heavenly bodies adhere to their orbital paths. None would dare deviate. Those who observe the controlled movements of bodies through space have a special sense of closeness to Creation.

[19:8] **PERFECTION.** – **תּוֹרַת ה' תְּמִימָה מְשִׁיבַת נֶפֶשׁ** – *"Hashem's Torah is perfect; it restores the soul."* You may not fully appreciate the gift of Hashem's Torah until you realize that its perfection matches and exceeds the perfection of the heavens.

#### **Lessons for Life - Your Attitude.**

[19:6] **JOY IN DUTY.** – **הוּא כְּתֵתָן יֵצֵא מִחֻפְתּוֹ יָשִׁישׁ כְּגִבּוֹר לְרוּץ אַרְחָ** – *"It is like a bridegroom as he emerges from his wedding canopy, like a warrior who rejoices in running his course."* You should take a lesson from the sun which rejoices in being given the opportunity to do its duty and fulfill its destiny in Hashem's Creation.

#### **Tefillos for Life - Your Teshuvah.**

[19:13] **UNINTENTIONAL SINS.** – **שִׁגְיֹאוֹת מִי זָבִין מִנְסֻתָרוֹת נִקְנִי** – *"Who can be aware of unintentional sins? Cleanse me from unwitting faults."* Ask Hashem to forgive the sins that you commit through lack of attention. As human beings we are physically unable to give full attention to every aspect of our lives and therefore we are subject to unintentional sin. Perfection eludes us but that should not prevent us from seeking it.

#### **Tefillos for Life - Your Relationship with Hashem.**

[19:15] **SINCERITY.** – **יְהִי לְרָצוֹן אִמְרֵי פִי וְהִגִּיוֹן לִבִּי לְפָנֶיךָ** – *"May the utterances of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart find favor before You."* Your *tefillos* have little value if they are not sincere. As you pray you should ask yourself whether you will be able to honestly make this concluding plea to Hashem, begging Him to find favor in your thoughts and words.



## Sources

The primary sources used in the interpretation of the verses of this mizmor are listed below.

ט - נר לרגלי	א - מלבי"ם
י - אבן עזרא, מלבי"ם, רשר"ה, נר לרגלי	ב - מלבי"ם, נר לרגלי
יא - רד"ק, נר לרגלי	ג - רש"י, רד"ק, נר לרגלי
יב - רד"ק, מצודות	ד - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, מצודות
יג - רש"י	ה - רש"י, רד"ק, מצודות, נר לרגלי
יד - רש"י, מצודות	ו - רד"ק, מצודות, נר לרגלי
טו - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, מצודות	ז - רד"ק, מצודות, מלבי"ם, רשר"ה
	ח - רש"י, רד"ק, מצודות

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