

Mizmor 032

Teshuvah is the Answer

Key Concepts

In Mizmor 032 David instructs his listeners on how to deal with the pain and suffering that everyone experiences at some point in their lives. He suggests that a major purpose of pain is to encourage us to face up to our moral and spiritual failings. The message here is that we will make great strides in our personal development if we do *teshuvah* (confess our sins and repent). If we respond positively to this lesson, we will experience great joy in being free of sin. We will come to appreciate all the more how we are surrounded by Hashem's love.

David refers to this mizmor as a *maskil*, which is the name given to one of the distinctive musical styles that David used in composing his songs. This particular style is associated with the purpose of the song, which is to offer enlightenment and instruction.

Navigating Tehillim. This mizmor is a natural follow-up to Mizmor 031 which emphasized the importance of *bitachon* (trust) in Hashem throughout the ups and downs of life. This concept is carried a step further in Mizmor 032 where David advises his listeners that it is not enough to maintain *bitachon*. One needs to draw a lesson from one's experiences, especially the pain and suffering. That lesson is to admit one's failings and do teshuvah. In that sense even the pain is revealed as a sign of Hashem's *chesed* (kindness) because it leads the person to the lofty state of being free of sin.

Exploring the Mizmor

PART 1. TO BE FREE OF SIN. David begins by telling his listeners how good it is to be free of sin as a result of doing *teshuvah*.

(א) לְדָוִד מִשְׁפִּיל אֲשֶׁרִי נְשׂוּי פָּשַׁע כְּסוּי חַטָּאתָהּ; (ב) אֲשֶׁרִי אָדָם לֹא יַחֲשֵׁב ה' לוֹ עֹן וְאֵין בְּרוּחוֹ רְמִיָּהּ:

(1) A song of enlightenment by David. Fortunate is [the man] whose transgression has been forgiven, his sin covered over. (2) Fortunate is the man against whom Hashem counts no guilt. His spirit has no deceit.

PART 2. EXPERIENCE OF TESHUVAH. David turns directly to Hashem and reminisces about his personal experience in doing *teshuvah*. He acknowledges that at first he refused to accept responsibility for the troubles he was experiencing. But finally he came to the conclusion that he would have no true relief until he did *teshuvah*.

(ג) כִּי הִחַרְשֵׁתִי בָּלוּ עַצְמִי בְּשִׂאֲגָתִי כָּל הַיּוֹם: (ד) כִּי יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה תִכְבַּד עָלַי יְדָךְ
נְהַפְדָּ לְשִׁדִּי בְּחַרְבֵּי קִיץ סֵלָה: (ה) חֲטָאתִי אֹדִיעֶךָ וְעוֹנִי לֹא כִסִּיתִי אֶמְרָתִי אֹדְהָ
עָלַי פִּשְׁעֵי לֵה' וְאַתָּה נִשְׂאָתָ עוֹן חֲטָאתֵי סֵלָה:

(3) [Hashem,] as long as I stayed silent my limbs were wasting away from my sighing all day long. (4) For day and night Your hand weighed heavily upon me. My vitality was reversed by summer droughts, Selah. (5) I acknowledged my sin to You and did not cover up my guilt. I resolved that I would confess my full transgression to You, Hashem. You would surely forgive the guilt of my sin for all time, Selah.

PART 3. LESSON LEARNED. David elaborates on the lesson that he learned about doing *teshuvah*, a lesson which is applicable to everyone. David advises his listeners to learn from his own experience and act with intelligence rather than mindless stubbornness.

(ו) עַל זֹאת יִתְפַּלֵּל כָּל חֹסִיד אֱלֹהִים לְעֵת מְצָא רַק לְשִׁטּוֹף מִיָּם רַבִּים אֱלֹהִים לֹא יִגִּיעוּ:
(ז) אַתָּה סִתָּר לִי מִצָּר תִּצְרַנִּי רְנִי פִּלֵּט תִּסּוּבְּבִנִי סֵלָה:

(6) Therefore, [Hashem,] let every devout man pray to You at the opportune time. But a flood of mighty waters should not reach him. (7) You are my shelter. You protect from trouble. You surround me [with ministering angels] crying out, 'Rescue!' Selah."

(ח) אֲשַׁכִּילְךָ וְאוֹרְךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ זֶה תִלְךָ אֵינְעֶצֶה עֲלֶיךָ עֵינַי: (ט) אֵל תִּהְיוּ כְּסוֹס כְּפָרָד אֵין
הֲבִין בְּמִתְגַּן וְרָסוֹן עֲדִיו לְבָלוֹם בַּל קָרַב אֱלֹהִים:

(8) [David addresses the people:] I will instruct you and enlighten you in which path to go. I will advise you with my eye. [9] Don't be like a horse or mule, which is uncomprehending. [The rider must use force] with bit and bridle to restrain it from veering off.

PART 4. A JOYFUL CONCLUSION. David assures his listeners that if they follow his advice they can be assured of rejoicing in Hashem's loving kindness.

(י) רַבִּים מְכַאוֹבִים לְרָשָׁע וְהַבּוֹטִחַ בַּה' חֹסֵד יְסוּבְּבֵנוּ: (יא) שִׂמְחוּ בַה' וְגִילוּ צְדִיקִים

וְהִרְנִינוּ כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל לַיהוָה:

(10) [David continues in his address to the people:] Many things are painful to the wicked person. But he who trusts in Hashem is surrounded by lovingkindness. (11) You righteous people, rejoice in Hashem and be delighted. Inspire joyful song in everyone who is upright of heart.

Learning the Mizmor

PART 1. TO BE FREE OF SIN.

(א) לְדָוִד מִשְׁכִּיל
אֲשֶׁרִי נִשְׁוִי פְּשָׁע
כְּסוּי חֲטָאָה:

A song of enlightenment by David — לְדָוִד מִשְׁכִּיל. I sing the **praises of — אֲשֶׁרִי** the repentant **sinner whose serious transgression has been forgiven — נִשְׁוִי פְּשָׁע** after *teshuvah*. His **sin** has been **covered over — כְּסוּי חֲטָאָה** and treated as though it was committed by accident.

(ב) אֲשֶׁרִי אָדָם לֹא יִחַשְׁבֵהוּ לֹא עֵוֹן
וְאֵין בְּרוּחוֹ רְמִיָּה:

I especially sing the **praises of — אֲשֶׁרִי** the worthy **man — אָדָם** who has sincerely repented without reservation. In his case **Hashem does not count — לֹא** any **guilt — יִחַשְׁבֵהוּ** at all **against him — עֵוֹן**. This is because **his spirit has no deceit — וְאֵין בְּרוּחוֹ רְמִיָּה**. He will surely not return to his sinful behavior because he has thoroughly cleansed his soul.

PART 2. EXPERIENCE OF TESHUVAH.

(ג) כִּי הִחַרְשֵׁתִי
בְּלוּ עַצְמִי בְּשִׁאֲגָתִי כָּל הַיּוֹם:

Hashem, **as long as I stayed silent — כִּי הִחַרְשֵׁתִי** and did not confess my sins to You, I was at great risk. I failed to appreciate that the bad things that happened to me were a sign of Your anger. **My limbs were wasting away — בְּלוּ עַצְמִי** from my anguished **sighing all day long — בְּשִׁאֲגָתִי כָּל הַיּוֹם**.

(ד) כִּי יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה תִּכְבֵּד עָלַי יָדְךָ
נִהְפָּךְ לְשִׁדְי בְּחַרְבֵּי קִיץ סֵלָה:

For day and night — כִּי יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה, the blows of **Your hand weighed heavily upon me** — נִהְפָּךְ לְשִׁדְי and became dried up as though **by summer droughts** — בְּחַרְבֵּי קִיץ, all because of emotional distress at my unexplained misfortune, **Selah** — סֵלָה.

(ה) חֲטָאתִי אוֹדִיעֶךָ
וְעוֹנֵי לֹא כִסִּיתִי

Finally, **I** decided to **acknowledge** and confess **my sin to You** — חֲטָאתִי אוֹדִיעֶךָ **and** I determined that I would **not cover up my guilt** — וְעוֹנֵי לֹא כִסִּיתִי by making excuses for myself.

אֶמְרָתִי אוֹדָה
עָלַי פִּשְׁעֵי לֹה

I resolved that I would confess — אֶמְרָתִי אוֹדָה **my full transgression to You, Hashem** — עָלַי פִּשְׁעֵי לֹה, not limiting my confession to my lesser sins.

וְאַתָּה נִשְׂאתָ עוֹן חֲטָאתִי סֵלָה:

I was confident that when You saw my sincerity, **You would surely forgive the guilt of my sin** — וְאַתָּה נִשְׂאתָ עוֹן חֲטָאתִי, and wipe it out completely for all time, **Selah** — סֵלָה, never again to be mentioned.

PART 3. LESSON LEARNED.

(ו) עַל זֹאת
יִתְפַּלֵּל כָּל חֹסֵיד אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְעֵת מְצָא

Therefore — עַל זֹאת, Hashem, because You are known to forgive sin, **let every devout man** learn from my experience and **pray to You** — יִתְפַּלֵּל כָּל חֹסֵיד אֱלֹהֶיךָ for forgiveness **at the opportune time** — לְעֵת מְצָא, whenever he encounters trouble in his life and suspects that he is being punished for his sins.

רַק לְשִׁטּוֹן מִיָּם רַבִּים
אֱלֹו לֹא נִגִּיעוּ:

But — רַק let him not delay until he is struck by a major rebuke that comes **like a**

flood of mighty waters — לַיִשׁוּף מֵיִם רַבִּים. He should rather do *teshuvah* in a timely fashion so that overwhelming disasters **should not reach him** — אֲלֹוֹ לֹא נִגִיעוּ.

(ז) אַתָּה סִתַּר לִי
מִצָּר תִּצְרַנִּי

I am grateful to You Hashem **for You are my shelter** — אַתָּה סִתַּר לִי. **You protect me from the troubles** — מִצָּר תִּצְרַנִּי that my sins have brought upon me. Despite my sins You have not abandoned me to my enemies.

רַנִּי פִלַט תִּסּוּבְּנִי סֵלָה:

Even when I am not aware of the danger, You protect me from my enemies. **You continuously surround me** — תִּסּוּבְּנִי with *malachim* (angels), who **cry out** — רַנִּי to You with a plea to "Rescue!" — פִלַט, Selah — סֵלָה.

(ח) אֲשַׁכִּילְךָ וְאוֹרְךָ
בְּדַרְךָ זוֹ תֵלֵךְ

[David addresses the people:] **I will instruct you and enlighten you** — אֲשַׁכִּילְךָ וְאוֹרְךָ **in which path to go** — בְּדַרְךָ זוֹ תֵלֵךְ. Don't postpone doing *teshuvah* until after you feel the wrath of Hashem. Why endure needless suffering?

אִיעֲצָה עֲלֶיךָ עֵינַי:

It should be enough if **I advise you with a wink of my eye** — אִיעֲצָה עֲלֶיךָ עֵינַי to get back on the straight path.

(ט) אֶל תִּהְיוּ כְּסוֹס כְּפָרֶד אֵין הָבִין
בְּמַתְג וָרֶסוֹן עֲדִיו לְבָלוֹם

Don't be like a stubborn horse or a mule — אֶל תִּהְיוּ כְּסוֹס כְּפָרֶד, **which is uncomprehending** — אֵין הָבִין and does not readily respond to prodding. To such an animal the rider must apply force **with bit and bridle** — בְּמַתְג וָרֶסוֹן **to restrain it from veering off** — עֲדִיו לְבָלוֹם the right path.

בַּל קֹרֵב אֵלֶיךָ:

Let not such an attitude **be applicable to you** — בַּל קֹרֵב אֵלֶיךָ !

PART 4. A JOYFUL CONCLUSION.

(ו) רַבִּים מִכְּאוֹבִים לְרָשָׁע

[David continues in his address to the people:] **Many things are painful to the wicked person** — רַבִּים מִכְּאוֹבִים לְרָשָׁע who trusts his own abilities and doesn't look to Hashem for help. Whether he suffers illness, hunger, or cold, he doesn't think that he is the cause of his own suffering. And so he continues to sin and his afflictions correspondingly increase. Thus, he is surrounded by pain.

וְהַבֹּיֹטֵחַ בְּה' חֶסֶד יְסוּבֶבְנוּ:

In contrast, **he who trusts in Hashem** — וְהַבֹּיֹטֵחַ בְּה', realizes that any pain he experiences is for his benefit and is there to encourage him to do *teshuvah* and wipe away his sin. It may take a while, but in time he comes to realize that he **is surrounded by Hashem's lovingkindness** — חֶסֶד יְסוּבֶבְנוּ. The suffering will soon come to an end and he will be free of sin.

(יא) שְׂמַחוּ בְּה' וְגִילוּ צְדִיקִים

You righteous people — צְדִיקִים who trust in Hashem, **rejoice in Hashem** — שְׂמַחוּ בְּה' because of His continuing kindness **and be delighted** — וְגִילוּ with the knowledge that everything is for your benefit.

וְהִרְנִינוּ כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵב:

Share your joy and **inspire joyful song** — וְהִרְנִינוּ in everyone who is upright of heart — כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵב, and is open to following your example!

Living the Mizmor

Listed below are some of the lessons that you can draw from this mizmor, as well as some of the thoughts you might have in mind when you say the words of the mizmor as a *tefillah*, expressing your devotion to Hashem.

Lessons for Life - Your Attitude.

[32:1] TESHUVAH. – אֲשֶׁרִי נִשְׁוִי פֶשַׁע כִּסּוּי חֲטָאָה – "Fortunate is [the man] whose transgression has been forgiven, his sin covered over." Set a personal goal of becoming free of sin through *teshuvah*. If you do *teshuvah* sincerely and without reservation, your sins will be forgiven.

[32:5] – חֲטָאתִי אֹדִיעֶךָ וְעֹנִי לֹא כִסִּיתִי אֶמְרָתִי אֹדָה עָלַי פֶּשַׁעִי לֵה –

"I acknowledged my sin to You and did not cover up my guilt. I resolved that I would confess my full transgression to You, Hashem."

[32:8] - אֲשַׁכִּילְךָ וְאוֹרְךָ בְּדַרְךָ זֶה תִּלְדָּךְ - "I will instruct you and enlighten you in which path to go." Be receptive to guidance from people with wisdom and experience.

[32:6] OPPORTUNE TIME. - עַל זֹאת יִתְפַּלֵּל כָּל חָסִיד אֵלֶיךָ לְעֵת מְצָא - "Therefore, [Hashem,] let every devout man pray to You at the opportune time." If you are encountering problems in life, don't wait until they get serious, but immediately turn to Hashem and sincerely ask Him to forgive your sins.

[32:6] - רַק לְשֹׁטֵף מִיַּם רַבִּים אֱלֹהֵי לֹא יִגִּיעוּ - "But a flood of mighty waters should not reach him."

[32:8] GUIDANCE. - אֲשַׁכִּילְךָ וְאוֹרְךָ בְּדַרְךָ זֶה תִּלְדָּךְ אֵינִי עֵינֵי - "I will instruct you and enlighten you in which path to go. I will advise you with my eye." Be receptive to the guidance of people with wisdom and experience.

[32:9] RESISTANCE. - אַל תִּהְיֶה כְּסוֹס כִּפְרָד אִין הַבַּיִת - "Don't be like a horse or mule, which is uncomprehending." Don't act foolishly by resisting good advice and by resisting what you know to be the proper course of action.

[32:10] BITACHON. - רַבִּים מִכְּאוֹבִים לְרָשָׁע וְהַבּוֹטֵחַ בֵּה' חֶסֶד יְסוּבְבוּ - "Many things are painful to the wicked person. But he who trusts in Hashem is surrounded by lovingkindness." Have bitachon in Hashem and you will be rewarded by gaining Hashem's protection.

Tefillos for Life - Your Relationship with Hashem.

[32:7] ANGELS. - אַתָּה סִתָּר לִי מִצָּר תִּצְרַנִּי רְנִי פִלֵּט תְּסוּבְבֵנִי - "You are my shelter. You protect from trouble. You surround me [with ministering angels] crying out, 'Rescue!'" Hashem will send His angels to protect you from your troubles if you turn to Him.

Tehillos for Life - Public Acclaim.

[32:11] JOYFUL SONG. - שִׂמְחוּ בֵּה' וְגִילוּ צְדִיקִים וְהַרְנִינוּ כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל - "You righteous people, rejoice in Hashem and be delighted. Inspire joyful song in

everyone who is upright of heart." By publicly praising Hashem through song you will inspire others to recognize Him.

Sources

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

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| ז - אבן עזרא, הדר עזר, רד"ק, נר לרגלי | א - רש"י, מצודות, אלשיך, רשר"ה |
| ח - רש"י, מלבי"ם | ב - אבן עזרא, נר לרגלי |
| ט - רש"י, אבן עזרא, המאירי, מלבי"ם, רשר"ה | ג - רש"י, אבן עזרא, מלבי"ם, רשר"ה |
| י - רד"ק, המאירי, ספורנו, מצודות, מלבי"ם | ד - רש"י, מצודות |
| יא - רד"ק, מלבי"ם | ה - רד"ק, מצודות, באר אברהם |
| | ו - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, המאירי |

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