

Mizmor 036

A Study in Contrasts

Key Concepts

In this mizmor David contrasts the person who lives his life as a servant of Hashem with the *rasha* (wrongdoer) who lives without reference to what Hashem wants from Him. Having identified himself as Hashem's faithful servant, David asks for His protection against the wrongdoers who are his sworn enemies. In the mizmor David analyzes the misguided thinking of the wrongdoer, who falls easy prey to the glib arguments of his *yetzer hara* (evil inclination). Then David describes the thoughts of the servant of Hashem. These thoughts are expressed in form of a song of gratitude for Hashem's infinite kindness.

Exploring the Mizmor

PART 1. THE WRONGDOER. David begins by analyzing the thinking of the wrongdoer. The characteristics of the wrongdoer will be subsequently compared with those of the servant of Hashem.

(א) לְמַנְצַח לְעַבְדֵּי ה' לְדָוִד: (ב) נֶאֱמַר פֶּשַׁע לְרָשָׁע בְּקֶרֶב לִבִּי אִין פֶּחַד אֱלֹקִים לִנְגֹד עֵינָיו: (ג) כִּי הֶחְלִיק אֱלֹו בְּעֵינָיו לְמַצָּא עֲוֹנוֹ לְשֹׂנְאֵ: (ד) דְּבָרֵי פִּי אֶוּן וּמְרָמָה חֵדֵּל לְהִשְׁכִּיל לְהִיטִיב: (ה) אֶוּן יִחְשַׁב עַל מְשֻׁכָּבוּ וַתִּיַצֵּב עַל דְּרָךְ לֹא טוֹב רַע לֹא יִמָּאֵס:

(1) For the musician, by David, servant of Hashem. (2) The words of transgression of the wrongdoer, [are known] within my heart. There is no fear of G-d before his eyes. (3) For [the yetzer hara] has smoothed [the way] before him in his eyes, to find his [opportunity of] sin, to hate. (4) The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit. He has stopped thinking that he should improve. (5) On his bed he contemplates iniquity. He stations himself on a path of no good. He is not revolted by evil.

PART 2. THE SERVANT OF HASHEM. David distinguishes himself from the wrongdoer by turning to Hashem and praising Him for the qualities that the wrongdoer failed to recognize. David expresses his gratitude for Hashem's infinite kindness, which extends from this world into the World to Come. He praises Hashem for being the source of eternal life.

(ו) ה' בְּהַשְׁמִים חֲסִדָּךְ אֶמְוִנְתָּךְ עַד שְׁחֻקִים: (ז) צְדָקָתְךָ כְּהַרְרֵי אֵל מְשֻׁפָּטָךְ תִּהְיוּ

רַבָּה אָדָם וּבְהֶמָּה תוֹשִׁיעַ ה': (ח) מִה יָקָר חֶסֶדְךָ אֱלֹקִים וּבְנֵי אָדָם בְּצֵל כְּנָפֶיךָ
 יַחֲסִיוּ: (ט) יִרְוּ מִדְּשׁוֹן בֵּיתְךָ וְנַחַל עֲדָנֶיךָ תִּשְׁקֶם: (י) כִּי עֲמַד מְקוֹר חַיִּים בְּאֹרֶךְ
 נְרָאָה אֹר: נְרָאָה אֹר:

(6) Hashem, Your kindness is unto the heavens. Your faithfulness is to the distant skies. (7) Your caring justice is like the mighty mountains. Your judgments are as the vast watery deep. You save both man and beast, Hashem. (8) How precious is Your kindness, O G-d! And the children of man will take refuge in the shelter of Your wings. (9) They will receive their fill from the abundance of Your house. And from the stream of Your delights You will give them to drink. (10) For with You is the source of life. In Your light may we be permitted to see the light [of eternal life].

PART 3. PLEA FOR PROTECTION. David concludes with a special plea for Hashem to show His kindness in This World by granting him protection from the wrongdoers who persecute the servants of Hashem.

(יא) מִשֶּׁךְ חֶסֶדְךָ לִידְעֶיךָ וְצַדִּיקְךָ לְיֹשְׁרֵי לֵב: (יב) אֵל תְּבוֹאֲנֵי רֶגֶל גְּאוּה וַיֵּד רְשָׁעִים
 אֵל תִּגְדְּנֵי: (יג) שָׁם נָפְלוּ פְעָלֵי אָוֶן דָּחוּ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ קוּם:

(11) Extend Your kindness into this world to those who know You. And, extend Your caring judgment to the upright of heart. (12) Let not the foot of [men of] arrogance come to me. And let not the hand of wrongdoers drive me away. (13) There the wrongdoers fell; they were thrown down, they could not get up.

Additional Thoughts

In Mizmor 036 David draws our attention to the *resha'im* (wrongdoers) in the world. Even though we instinctively would like to think only about good people, we need to face the reality that evil exists. We also need to understand what goes on in the mind of the wrongdoer so that we ourselves can guard against his distorted thinking. We need to be able to identify evil people so that we can avoid being influenced by them and so that we can take steps (especially *tefillah* to Hashem) to protect ourselves from the harm they might do us.

David presents us with contrasting extremes: the totally committed servant of Hashem (posuk 1) vs. the confirmed wrongdoer who is not revolted by the crimes he has committed (posuk 5). It is a shock to realize that both are “children of man” (posuk 8), which means that each of us has the possibility of fitting into either end of this spectrum.

How does a “wrongdoer” sink so low? David tells us that there is no “fear of G-d before his eyes” (posuk 2). Because he lacks the conscious awareness of Hashem’s presence, he feels free to allow his mind to wander into the swamps of immorality (posuk 5). What at first seems only an idle, self-gratifying pastime takes him down a slippery slope into tragedy.

But we have also seen that, with effort, the same slope can be a path to greatness, as David demonstrated through his own life experiences. The difference is in the constant awareness of Hashem. That is why Shlomo Hamelech begins his guide to moral behavior with the words: “The fear of Hashem is the first step to moral knowledge.” (Mishlei 1:7).

Learning the Mizmor

PART 1. THE WRONGDOER.

(א) לְמַנְצֵחַ
לְעֶבֶד ה' לְדָוִד:

This song has been prepared **for the musician** — לְמַנְצֵחַ, who will perform it. It is a mizmor composed **by David, the servant of Hashem** — לְעֶבֶד ה' לְדָוִד.

(ב) נְאֻם פֶּשַׁע
לְרָשָׁע בְּקֶרֶב לִבִּי

I know very well **the words of transgression** — נְאֻם פֶּשַׁע that are spoken by the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) **to the wrongdoer** — לְרָשָׁע deep within his mind. As for me, deep **within my own heart** — בְּקֶרֶב לִבִּי I know that the wrongdoer’s *yetzer hara* is telling him: “Go ahead! You are free to do as you please. Since Hashem is not preventing you from doing evil, it is clear that He has no objections to it.”

אֵין פֶּחַד אֱלֹקִים
לְנֶגֶד עֵינָיו:

Because the wrongdoer has been taken in by these arguments, **there is no fear of God** — אֵין פֶּחַד אֱלֹקִים **before his eyes** — לְנֶגֶד עֵינָיו and he continues to sin even though he pretends to be a religious person.

(ג) כִּי הֶחֱלִיק אֱלֹו בְּעֵינָיו
לְמַצָּא עֲוֹנוֹ לְשָׂנֵא:

For the *yetzer hara* has **smoothed** the way **before him** — כִּי הֶחֱלִיק אֱלֹו — to give him justification **in his** own **eyes** — בְּעֵינָיו — to satisfy his sinful desires. He will then feel free to go out and **find his** opportunity of **sin** — לְמַצָּא עֲוֹנוֹ. But the result will ultimately be for him **to hate** — לְשָׂנֵא — that which he desired with such passion.

(ד) דְּבָרֵי פִּו אָוֹן וּמְרָמָה
חָדַל לְהִשְׁפִּיל לְהִיטִיב:

Even when he talks about doing good, **the words of his mouth** — דְּבָרֵי פִּו — **are iniquity and deceit** — אָוֹן וּמְרָמָה. **He has stopped** — חָדַל — paying attention to criticism and is no longer **thinking** — לְהִשְׁפִּיל — **that he** might be mistaken and **should improve** — לְהִיטִיב — his way of life.

(ה) אָוֹן יַחֲשֵׁב עַל מְשַׁכְּבוֹ

How did he reach this point of degradation? It began in moments of relaxation when he had the opportunity to think constructively about his life. Instead, while resting **on his bed** at night **he** would give free reign to his hidden desires and **contemplate iniquity** — אָוֹן יַחֲשֵׁב עַל מְשַׁכְּבוֹ. This is something he would never have done by day.

יִתְנַצֵּב עַל דֶּרֶךְ לֹא טוֹב

Then during the following day, under the influence of his nocturnal imaginings, he would put himself in situations where he might be faced with temptation. **He** would **station himself on a path of no good** — יִתְנַצֵּב עַל דֶּרֶךְ לֹא טוֹב.

רַע לֹא יִמְאָס:

Subsequently when he succumbed to temptation he would not feel remorse. Because he had acclimated himself, **he would** find that he was **not revolted by evil** — רַע לֹא יִמְאָס — and so the cycle would repeat itself.

PART 2. THE SERVANT OF HASHEM.

(ו) ה' בְּהַשְׁמִים חֲסִדְךָ
אֲמוּנָתְךָ עַד שְׁחָקִים:

Hashem, I declare myself to be Your servant. I recognize Your kindness in providing sustenance to all living creatures and Your faithfulness in assuring the survival of mankind. **Your kindness is** so great that it reaches from the earth **unto the heavens** — ה' בְּהַשְׁמִים חֲסִדְךָ. Similarly, **Your faithfulness** — אֲמוּנָתְךָ — is so great that it reaches **to the distant skies** — עַד שְׁחָקִים.

(ז) צְדָקָתְךָ כְּהַרֵּי אֵל

Your caring justice — צְדָקָתְךָ shows abiding concern for suffering people, especially those who are righteous. It **is as** monumental and far-reaching as the highest peaks of **the mighty mountains** — כְּהַרֵּי אֵל.

The application of Hashem's justice, which takes into consideration the deserving individual, contrasts with His kindness, which as mentioned in the previous posuk reaches unto the heavens, extending equally to all mankind.

מִשְׁפָּטְךָ תְּהוֹם רַבָּה

Your judgments demand accountability from all wrongdoers. Those judgments **are as** profound as **the vast watery deep** — מִשְׁפָּטְךָ תְּהוֹם רַבָּה.

Furthermore, the unrepentant sinner will ultimately be sent to a place like the depths of the sea, from which no one can escape.

אָדָם וּבְהֵמָה תוֹשִׁיעַ ה'

However, in the world we live in, Your kindness extends to all mankind, just as it does to the beasts of the field. **You save both man and beast, Hashem** — אָדָם וּבְהֵמָה תוֹשִׁיעַ ה'. But it is a level of kindness that is transient in nature, since it exists only in This World. In the World to Come Your kindness will be eternal, but it will be reserved for those who are deserving.

(ח) מִה יִקָּר חֲסִדְךָ אֱלֹקִים

וּבְנֵי אָדָם בְּצֵל כְּנֶפֶד יַחֲסִיוּ:

How precious will be **Your eternal kindness** — מִה יִקָּר חֲסִדְךָ in that future world, where You will impose the final judgment of men **O God** — אֱלֹקִים! **And** how precious is each of **the worthy children of man** — וּבְנֵי אָדָם who **will** be

permitted to **take refuge in the shelter of Your wings** — **בְּצֵל כַּנְּפֵיךָ יִחְסִי**
because he deserves the title "man"!

(ט) יְרוּנוּ מִדֶּשֶׁן בֵּיתְךָ
וְנָחַל עֲדֻנֶיךָ תִּשְׁקֶם:

They will receive their fill — **יְרוּנוּ** **from the spiritual abundance of Your**
heavenly **house** — **מִדֶּשֶׁן בֵּיתְךָ** where You will provide them with Your unlimited
goodness and light. The satisfaction that they gain in knowing You will be eternal;
it will never be followed by a spiritual hunger. **And from the eternally-flowing**
stream of Your intellectual delights — **וְנָחַל עֲדֻנֶיךָ** **You will give them to**
drink — **תִּשְׁקֶם**, so that they will never suffer thirst.

(י) כִּי עִמָּךָ מְקוֹר חַיִּים
בְּאוֹרְךָ נִרְאָה אוֹר:

For with You — **כִּי עִמָּךָ**, under Your direct control, **is the source of all life** —
מְקוֹר חַיִּים, which is like a spring that flows forever in the World to Come. We know
that we are alive when we can see the light of this world. But all light is really Your
heavenly light. It comes from Your eternal source and shines ever greater in the
World to Come. So we ask that **in Your light** — **בְּאוֹרְךָ** **may we be permitted**
to see the light — **נִרְאָה אוֹר** of eternal life.

PART 3. PLEA FOR PROTECTION.

(יא) מִשֶּׁךְ חֲסִדְךָ לִידְעֶיךָ

Although You have assured the righteous that they will be rewarded by Your
kindness in the next world, they have special need for it here in this world. It is
here that they are weighed down by the burdens of survival. **Extend Your**
kindness into this world **to those who know You** — **מִשֶּׁךְ חֲסִדְךָ לִידְעֶיךָ** so that
they will have the wherewithal to serve You as they would like.

וְצַדִּיקְתֶּךָ לְיֹשְׁרֵי לֵב:

And similarly, extend Your caring judgment to the upright of heart — **וְצַדִּיקְתֶּךָ**
לְיֹשְׁרֵי לֵב, even though they have not reached the level of those who know You.
They are desperately in need of Your help.

(יב) אֶל תְּבוֹאֲנֵי רֶגֶל גְּאֹוָה
וַיֵּד רְשָׁעִים אֶל תַּנְדְּנִי:

Let not the invading foot of men of arrogance come to oppress me — אֶל תְּבוֹאֲנֵי רֶגֶל גְּאֹוָה. And let not the cruel hand of the wrongdoers drive me away — וַיֵּד רְשָׁעִים אֶל תַּנְדְּנִי from serving You in Your House.

(יג) שָׁם נִפְּלוּ פְעָלֵי אֹוֹן
דָּחוּ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ קוּם:

There — שָׁם, wherever my enemies come to oppress me, may they be shown the consequences of their arrogance. Let the end of the story be that **the wrongdoers have fallen — נִפְּלוּ פְעָלֵי אֹוֹן; they were thrown down — דָּחוּ** so firmly that **they could not get up — וְלֹא יָכְלוּ קוּם**.

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.

[36:1] SELF-IDENTIFICATION. – **לְמַנְצַח לְעַבְד ה' לְדָוִד** – “*For the musician, by David, servant of Hashem.*” David could think of no nobler title than “servant of Hashem.” By choosing to identify himself with this title (rather than “king”) he extolled the virtues of humility and devotion. This is a lesson to all of us to live our lives in such a way that we can take pride in calling ourselves “servant of Hashem.”

[36:2] WRONGDOER. – **נֶאֱמַר פֶּשַׁע לְרָשָׁע בְּקִרְבֵּי לִבִּי אֵין פֶּחַד אֱלֹקִים לִנְגַד עֵינָיו** – “*The words of transgression of the wrongdoer, [are known] within my heart.* It is important that you understand the forces that affect the wrongdoer so that you can guard against them and influence others to do so.

Tehillos for Life - Contemplation of Hashem.

[36:6] KINDNESS AND FAITHFULNESS. – **ה' בְּהַשְׁמִים חֲסִדְךָ אֲמוֹנֶתְךָ עַד שְׁחָקִים** – “*Hashem, Your kindness is unto the heavens. Your faithfulness is to the distant skies.*” Because of His attribute of kindness Hashem sustains all living

creatures. Because of His attribute of faithfulness Hashem assures the survival of mankind.

[36:7] **JUSTICE AND JUDGMENT.** – צִדְקַתְךָ כְּהַרְרֵי אֵל מִשְׁפָּטְךָ תְהוֹם רָבָה – *"Your caring justice is like the mighty mountains. Your judgments are as the vast watery deep."* Because of His attribute of caring justice Hashem pays special attention to the welfare of deserving individuals. Because of His attribute of judgment Hashem demands accountability from all wrongdoers.

[36:7] **TRANSIENT KINDNESS.** – אָדָם וּבְהֵמָה תוֹשִׁיעַ ה' – *"You save both man and beast, Hashem."* In this world Hashem applies a universal attribute of kindness, which is meant for this world only.

[36:8] **ETERNAL KINDNESS.** – מִה יָקָר חֲסִדְךָ אֱלֹקִים וּבְנֵי אָדָם בְּצִל כְּנָפֶיךָ – יִחְסִיִּין – *"How precious is Your kindness, O G-d! And the children of man will take refuge in the shelter of Your wings."* In the next world we will witness Hashem's attribute of eternal kindness, which is meant for those who are worthy.

[36:9] – יִרְוִין מִדְּשֵׁן בֵּיתְךָ וְנָחַל עֲדֻנֶיךָ תִּשְׁקֶם – *"They will receive their fill from the abundance of Your house. And from the stream of Your delights You will give them to drink."*

[36:10] – כִּי עִמָּךְ מְקוֹר חַיִּים בְּאוֹרְךָ נִרְאָה אֹר – *"For with You is the source of life. In Your light may we be permitted to see the light [of eternal life]."*

Tefillos for Life - Your Berachah.

[36:11] **SPECIAL GRANT.** – מִשְׁךָ חֲסִדְךָ לִידְעֶיךָ וְצִדְקַתְךָ לְיֹשְׁרֵי לֵב – *"Extend Your kindness into this world to those who know You. And, extend Your caring judgment to the upright of heart."* Ask Hashem to extend His special kindness into this world and grant you protection from evil so that you can serve Him as you would like.

This verse is recited during the daily ritual of donning a talis. This garment with its mitzvah of tzitzis symbolizes Hashem's protection, which corresponds to the protection from the elements that a garment provides. This protection is expressed in 36:8 as "the shelter of Your wings". The kindness of Hashem is mentioned in 36:11 as being "extended" into this world. This corresponds to the way a tent is extended over a person to give him shelter and the way

the talis is extended over a person when he first puts it on. The mention of light in 36:10 may also be significant, because the key aspect of the mitzvah of tzitzis is that we see them. That's why there is no mitzvah of tzitzis at night.

Sources

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

ז - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, מצודות	א - רד"ק
ח - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, בן־רמון, נר לרגלי	ב - רש"י, אבן עזרא, רד"ק, המאירי, מצודות,
ט - רד"ק, בן־רמון, באר אברהם	מלבי"ם
י - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, ספורנו	ג - רד"ק
יא - אבן עזרא, רד"ק	ד - רש"י, רד"ק, באר אברהם
יב - רד"ק	ה - רד"ק, בן־רמון, מצודות, באר אברהם
יג - אבן עזרא, נר לרגלי	ו - רד"ק, בן־רמון

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