

Mizmor 128**The Virtuous Life****Key Concepts**

Mizmor 128 offers a heart-warming picture of the blessings of Jewish family life. In fact, many have the minhag (custom) of singing it under the Chupah (wedding canopy) after the ceremony.

In the mizmor David shows how the virtuous family life is the source of blessing that binds together the individual and the entire nation for the present and the future.

David begins the mizmor by establishing a principle: the virtuous life is built on the fear of Hashem. On that essential basis the individual is motivated to overcome his human weaknesses and do the right thing in every aspect of his life. David then takes up the issue of building the home. This requires facing the challenge of earning a livelihood. The message here is moderation and hard work. A man should earn what he needs to feed his family, but he must be careful to avoid excess. Finally, David shows how Hashem extends the blessing of a peaceful family life to the entire nation.

In describing the ideal home life, David puts the wife and mother at its center. He compares her to a flourishing vine, whose roots are deep within the inner recesses of her home. The children that she bears are compared to vigorous olive saplings and are described as gathering around the family table where they can draw inspiration and guidance in the closeness of family love.

Exploring the Mizmor

PART 1. THE INDIVIDUAL. Because he fears Hashem the individual avoids what is forbidden to him and he fulfills what Hashem asks of him. In turn, he can count on Hashem's blessings.

(א) שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת אֲשֶׁר־י כָּל יִרְאֵה ה' הַהֹלֵךְ בְּדַרְכָּיו:

(1) *[This is the ninth] song of the steps. Fortunate is every person who fears Hashem and who walks in His ways.*

PART 2. THE FAMILY. David offers guidelines for the good life based on a moderate life style, hard work, and the serenity of a close-knit family. In contrast, a person who adopts a self-indulgent life-style or seeks to live off money that he has not earned, will be exposing himself to corrupting influences. At the core of the family is

the Jewish woman. Although she finds her fulfillment within her home, her influence is visible to all in the achievements of her husband and her children as they go about their lives.

(ב) יִגִּיעַ כְּפִידָה כִּי תֹאכַל אֲשֶׁרִידָה וְטוֹב לָךְ: (ג) אֲשֶׁתְּךָ כְּגֶפֶן פְּרִיָּה בְּיַרְכְּתֵי בֵּיתְךָ בְּנֵיךָ כְּשֹׁתְלֵי זֵיתִים סָבִיב לְשִׁלְחָנְךָ:

(2) When you eat the labor of your hands, you will be happy and it will be good for you. (3) Your wife will be like a fruitful vine in the inner chambers of your home. Your children will be like vigorous sapplings round your table.

PART 3. THE NATION. David begins this part by emphasizing again the importance of fearing Hashem, which is something that each individual must do. He then describes Hashem’s blessing as originating in Tzion, symbolizing the Torah, which is the wellspring of blessing to Klal Yisrael. Starting from this origin, the blessing of a happy family brings with it the joy of children and grandchildren, which in turn are the continuity of Klal Yisrael.

(ד) הִנֵּה כִּי כֹן יִבְרַךְ גֹּבֵר יִרָא ה': (ה) יִבְרַכְךָ ה' מִצִּיּוֹן וְרָאָה בְּטוֹב יְרוּשָׁלַם כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ: (ו) וְרָאָה בָנִים לְבָנֶיךָ שְׁלוֹם עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל:

(4) Indeed, for so will the man be blessed who fears Hashem. (5) May Hashem bless you from Tzion. May you witness the good fortune of Yerushalayim all the days of your life. (6) You will see children to your children; peace upon Yisrael.

Learning the Mizmor

PART 1. THE INDIVIDUAL.

(א) שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת

This is the ninth **song of the steps** – שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת.

אֲשֶׁרִי כָּל יִרָא ה'

הַהֲלֵךְ בְּדַרְכָּיו:

Fortunate – אֲשֶׁרִי is every person who fears Hashem – כָּל יִרָא ה', and **who walks in His ways** – הַהֲלֵךְ בְּדַרְכָּיו.

PART 2. THE FAMILY.

(ב) יִגִּיעַ כַּפֶּיךָ כִּי תֹאכַל
אֲשֶׁרֶיךָ וְטוֹב לָךְ:

When you eat what is produced by **the labor of your hands** – יִגִּיעַ כַּפֶּיךָ כִּי תֹאכַל, avoiding excesses in wealth-accumulation, **you will be happy** – אֲשֶׁרֶיךָ in this world, **and it will be good for you** – וְטוֹב לָךְ in the World to Come.

(ג) אֲשֶׁתְּךָ כְּגֶפֶן פְּרִיָה
בְּיַרְכְּתֵי בֵיתְךָ

Your wife will be like a fruitful vine – אֲשֶׁתְּךָ כְּגֶפֶן פְּרִיָה, which is rooted **in the inner chambers of your home** – בְּיַרְכְּתֵי בֵיתְךָ, but whose branches reach out to the sun.

בְּנֵיךָ כְּשֵׁתְלֵי זַיִתִּים
סָבִיב לְשִׁלְחָנְךָ:

Your children will be like vigorous **olive saplings** – בְּנֵיךָ כְּשֵׁתְלֵי זַיִתִּים that are fresh and green throughout the year. They will gather **round your table** – סָבִיב לְשִׁלְחָנְךָ where they can be under your guidance. Just as the oil of the olive is a source of light, so will your children light up the world with their Torah.

PART 3. THE NATION.

(ד) הִנֵּה כִּי כֹן יִבְרַךְ
גֹּבֵר יִרְאֵהוּ:

Indeed – הִנֵּה, **for so will the man be blessed** – כִּי כֹן יִבְרַךְ גֹּבֵר **who fears Hashem** – יִרְאֵהוּ. The ordered, moderate existence based on the fear of Hashem, is in itself a blessing for one's life in this world.

(ה) יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' מִצִּיּוֹן

May Hashem bless you from Zion – יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' מִצִּיּוֹן, which symbolizes the Torah. The Torah is the source of blessing to the world and it is from there that Hashem commands His blessing to the entire nation.

וְרֵאָה בְּטוֹב יְרוּשָׁלַם
כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:

May you witness the good fortune of Yerushalayim – וְרֵאָה בְּטוֹב יְרוּשָׁלַם all the days of your life – כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ. You will benefit from being part of the *klal* (community of Yisrael) and your life will be blessed by the *zechus* (merit) of contributing to the welfare of the *klal*.

(ו) וְרֵאָה בָּנִים לְבָנֶיךָ
שְׁלוֹם עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל:

In the *zechus* of the *mitzvos* that you do, you will be granted a long life, so that **you will see children born to your children – וְרֵאָה בָּנִים לְבָנֶיךָ.** You will have the satisfaction of seeing your children and grandchildren contribute to the nation and bring **peace upon Yisrael – שְׁלוֹם עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל.** They will carry forward the goodwill that they acquired in a loving home so that the entire nation will share in the virtues of Jewish family life.

Living the Mizmor

Listed below are some of the thoughts you might have in mind when you say the words of the mizmor as *tefillos* expressing your gratitude to Hashem and as *tehillos* expressing your recognition of Hashem.

Lessons for Life - Your Attitude.

[128:1] HAPPINESS. – אֲשֶׁרִי כָּל יְרָא ה' הַהֲלֵךְ בְּדַרְכָּיו – “Fortunate is every person who fears Hashem and who walks in His ways.” Consider yourself fortunate to live a virtuous life. It is the secret to happiness.

[128:3] WOMAN IS THE HEART. – אֲשֶׁתְּךָ כְּגִפְנֵי פְרִיָה בְּיִרְכָתַי בֵּיתְךָ – “Your wife will be like a fruitful vine in the inner chambers of your home.” Respect your wife for she is the heart of your home.

[128:4] BLESSING. – כִּי כֵן יִבְרַךְ גְּבוֹר יְרָא ה' – “Indeed, for so will the man be blessed who fears Hashem.” The fear of Hashem is the secret to a blessed existence.

Lessons for Life - Your Behavior.

[128:2] WORK. – יִגִּיעַ כַּפֶּיךָ כִּי תֹאכַל אֲשֶׁרִיךָ וְטוֹב לָךְ – “When you eat the

labor of your hands, you will be happy and it will be good for you." Don't live beyond your means.

Tefillos for Life - Your Berachah.

[128:5] TZION. – יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' מִצִּיּוֹן וּרְאֵה בְטוֹב יְרוּשָׁלַם כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶיךָ – "*May Hashem bless you from Tzion. May you witness the good fortune of Yerushalayim all the days of your life.*" When you ask Hashem for His blessing, think of Yerushalayim for it is the source of berachah to the world.

[128:6] GRANDCHILDREN. – וּרְאֵה בְּנֵים לְבָנֶיךָ שְׁלוֹם עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל – "*You will see children to your children; peace upon Yisrael.*" Ask Hashem to grant you the privilege of seeing worthy grandchildren in your lifetime and they be permitted to live in a peaceful world.

Sources

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

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| א - אבן עזרא, המאירי, מלבי"ם | ד - אבן עזרא, רד"ק |
| ב - רש"י, אבן עזרא, ספורנו, מלבי"ם, נר לרגלי | ה - מלבי"ם, נר לרגלי |
| ג - רד"ק, המאירי, נר לרגלי | ו - רד"ק, מלבי"ם, רשר"ה, |

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