

Mizmor 016

The Way to Life

Key Concepts

David expresses his gratitude for being shown the Torah way of life. He speaks of the debt he owes to the holy ancestors who are now buried in the earth, but who bequeathed their merit to the present generation. David speaks out against idol worshippers and against those who live an empty life. He points out the distinction between such people and someone who serves Hashem. He ends with a tefillah for Hashem's guidance in traveling the road to his ultimate reward in the World to Come.

Navigating Tehillim. In Mizmor 001 David had introduced us to the fulfillment that comes from a life that is centered around learning Torah. Now he adds that such a life depends upon gratitude to Hashem and constant awareness of His presence.

Exploring the Mizmor

PART 1. INTRODUCTION. David introduces the mizmor as a *michtam* which means "adornment of purest gold." He begins this special composition by declaring his loyalty to Hashem.

(א) מִכְתָּם לְדָוִד שְׁמֹרֵנִי אֲלֵל כִּי חָסִיתִי בְּךָ:

(1) *Protect me O G-d, for I have taken refuge with You.*

PART 2. GRATITUDE FOR LIFE. David turns to his own soul, symbolizing his life, and calls upon it to recognize the generosity of Hashem. David is indebted to Hashem for the joys of his lot in life and he is grateful to his holy ancestors who are now buried in the earth, but who bequeathed their merit to the present generation.

(ב) אָמַרְתָּ לֵה' אֲדֹנָי אַתָּה טוֹבָתִי בֵּל עֲלִיךָ: (ג) לְקַדּוֹשִׁים אֲשֶׁר בְּאָרֶץ הַקָּמָה וְאֲדִירֵי כָּל חֲפָצֵי בָם: (ד) יִרְבוּ עֲצָבוֹתֶם אַחַר מְהָרוּ בֵּל אֲסִיף: נִסְכֵיהֶם מִדָּם וּבֵל אֲשָׂא אֶת שְׂמוֹתֶם עַל שְׂפָתַי:

(2) [O my soul,] say to Hashem, You are my Master. My good is not on You [to provide]. (3) [It is] for the sake of the holy ones who are in the earth and [Your] mighty ones [who fear You]. Because of them all my wishes have been granted. (4) Let their sorrows abound, [those] who hurry after other

gods. I will not pour their sacrificial offerings of blood and I will not bear their [gods'] names upon my lips.

PART 3. GRATITUDE FOR DESTINY. David thanks Hashem for granting him the opportunity to live a fulfilled life among those who serve Him.

(ה) ה' מִנֵּת חֶלְקִי וְכוֹסֵי אֶתֶּה תוֹמִיךָ גּוֹרְלִי: (ו) חֲבָלִים נָפְלוּ לִי בְּנִעְמִים אֶף נִחַלְתָּ שְׂפָרָה עָלַי:

(5) Hashem, [You are] my allotted portion and my share. You have determined my destiny. (6) The portions that have fallen to me are among the sweetest. My inheritance is beautiful to me.

PART 4. GRATITUDE FOR GUIDANCE. David reflects upon his gratitude for Hashem's guidance and his constant awareness of Hashem's abiding presence in this world:

(ז) אֲבָרַךְ אֶת ה' אֱשֶׁר יַעֲצֵנִי אֶף לִילוֹת יִסְרוּנִי כְּלִיּוֹתַי: (ח) שְׁוִיתִי ה' לְנִגְדֵי תַמִּיד כִּי מִימִינִי בַל אֶמוֹט: (ט) לָכוֹן שָׂמַח לְבִי וַיִּגַּל כְּבוֹדִי אֶף בְּשָׂרִי יִשְׁכֹּן לְבַטָּח:

(7) I bless Hashem for counseling me; even in the nights my kidneys are counseling me (8) I constantly set Hashem before me, for He is at my right hand. I will not falter. (9) Therefore, my heart rejoices and my soul is elated. Even my body dwells secure.

PART 5. ETERNAL LIFE. David now appeals to Hashem, asking His continued help and guidance in living a Torah life. He knows he will then be able look forward to eternal life in the World to Come:

(י) כִּי לֹא תַעֲזֹב נַפְשִׁי לְשֵׂאוֹל לֹא תַתֵּן חַסִּידֶךָ לְרֵאוֹת שְׁחַת: (יא) תוֹדִיעֵנִי אֶרְחַ חַיִּים שֶׁבַע שְׂמָחוֹת אֶת פְּנִיךָ נַעֲמוֹת בְּיַמִּינֶךָ נֶצַח:

(10) For You will not leave my soul in the grave. You will not allow the body of Your devout one to see the grave. (11) Teach me the way to true life with fulfillment of the joys of Your Presence, the eternal delights in Your right hand.

Learning the Mizmor

PART 1. INTRODUCTION.

(א) מִכְתָּם לְדָוִד

This song is a **michtam** composed by **David** — **מִכְתָּם לְדָוִד**. A *michtam* is a very

fine composition, whose name means "adornment of purest gold."

שְׁמַרְנִי אֱלֹהֵי כֹחַ כִּי חָסִיתִי בְּךָ:

Protect me O G-d of power — שְׁמַרְנִי אֱלֹהֵי כֹחַ for I have taken refuge with You alone — כִּי חָסִיתִי בְּךָ and have not turned to any other heavenly power.

PART 2. GRATITUDE FOR LIFE.

(ב) אָמַרְתָּ לַה' אֲדֹנָי אַתָּה,

טוֹבָתִי בִלְעֻדְךָ:

When you, my soul, stand in prayer, **you should** declare your unconditional devotion and **say to Hashem — אָמַרְתָּ לַה' אֲדֹנָי אַתָּה, the Master of all. The good You do for me is not an obligation on You to provide — טוֹבָתִי בִלְעֻדְךָ.** I do not serve You for the benefits I get. I am obligated to serve You even if You do not reward me.

(ג) לְקַדוּשֵׁים אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ הַמָּה

וְאֲדִירֵי כָּל חַפְצֵי בָם

I am not worthy of the benefits that I have received from You Hashem. They have been given to me **for the sake of the holy ones — לְקַדוּשֵׁים who** faithfully walked before You and **are now buried in the earth — אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ הַמָּה, and** for the sake of all **the ones who were mighty — וְאֲדִירֵי** in their fear of You. **It is because of them that all my wishes have been granted — כָּל חַפְצֵי בָם.**

(ד) יִרְבוּ עֲצָבוֹתָם אַחֵר מִהֲרוּ

But sadly there are others who have turned away from Hashem. **Let their sorrows abound — יִרְבוּ עֲצָבוֹתָם, those who hurry after other gods — אַחֵר מִהֲרוּ.** I will not emulate them.

בִּלְאִסְיָךְ נִסְכֵיהֶם מִדָּם

וּבִלְאִשָּׂא אֶת שְׁמוֹתָם עַל שִׁפְתָי:

I will not — בִּלְאִסְיָךְ be like them to serve their false gods and **pour their sacrificial offerings of blood — נִסְכֵיהֶם מִדָּם; and I will not even bear their gods' names upon my lips — וּבִלְאִשָּׂא אֶת שְׁמוֹתָם עַל שִׁפְתָי.**

PART 3. GRATITUDE FOR DESTINY.

(ה) ה' מִנַּת חֶלְקִי וְכוֹסִי,
אַתָּה תוֹמִידָּ גוֹרְלִי:

Hashem, You are **my allotted portion** – ה' מִנַּת חֶלְקִי – **and my share** – וְכוֹסִי in life. Everything I have is from You and dedicated to You. **You have even guided** my hand – אַתָּה תוֹמִידָּ – to choose **my destiny** – גוֹרְלִי – wisely. You stirred my heart to believe in You.

(ו) חֲבָלִים נָפְלוּ לִי בִּנְעָמִים,

Because I am in Your care, I am much better off than the idol worshippers, in terms of both spiritual and physical well-being. The spiritual **portions that have fallen to me** – חֲבָלִים נָפְלוּ לִי – **are among the sweetest** – בִּנְעָמִים. The Torah delights my eternal soul. In contrast, the idol worshippers don't have true happiness.

אֵף נִחַלְתָּ שְׂפָרָה עָלַי:

And as far as physical success is concerned, **my inheritance is beautiful to me** – אֵף נִחַלְתָּ שְׂפָרָה עָלַי. In contrast, the lot of the idol worshippers is not beautiful in their eyes because they are always seeking more luxuries.

PART 4. GRATITUDE FOR GUIDANCE.

(ז) אֲבָרַךְ אֶת ה' אֲשֶׁר יַעֲצֵנִי.
אֵף לַיְלֹת יִסְרוּנִי כְּלִיּוֹתַי:

I realize that the happiness which has been granted to me depends on my making the right choices in life. Although I have been given free will I am always at risk of being led astray by temptation. And so, **I bless Hashem** – אֲבָרַךְ אֶת ה' – for not abandoning me to my errors but instead **for counseling me** – אֲשֶׁר יַעֲצֵנִי – through the teachings of His holy Torah.

I am **also** grateful to Hashem for granting me an innate sense of right and wrong, even before the Torah was given, so that **my own kidneys counsel me in the nights** – אֵף לַיְלֹת יִסְרוּנִי כְּלִיּוֹתַי – when I reflect upon my behavior and try to recognize where I have erred.

(ח) שְׁוִיתִי ה' לְנִגְדֵי תַמִּיד,
כִּי מִיְמִינִי בַל אֶמוֹט:

In exercising my free will I am constantly faced with two options, one to my left and one to my right. The false option to my left is driven by a misguided sense of self-love and self-interest, choosing whatever seems to give me immediate gratification. Against this false option, **I constantly set Hashem before me** — שְׁוִיתִי ה' לְנִגְדֵי תַמִּיד, **so that He is at my right hand** — כִּי מִיְמִינִי. This is the choice by which I can fulfill my destiny as His servant, and I know that if I adhere to it, **I will not falter** — בַּל אֶמוֹט and I will surely achieve purity and holiness.

(ט) לִכֹּן שִׂמַח לְבִי וַיִּגַּל כְּבוֹדִי,

Therefore, because He is always before me **my heart rejoices** — לִכֹּן שִׂמַח לְבִי. My heart does not experience regret at continually making bad choices **and my soul is elated** — וַיִּגַּל כְּבוֹדִי knowing that when it leaves my body it will cleave to its Creator.

אֶף בְּשָׂרִי יִשְׁכֵן לְבֶטַח:

Even my body — אֶף בְּשָׂרִי benefits. It **dwells secure** — יִשְׁכֵן לְבֶטַח because it is freed from the effects of overindulgence and the emotional stress of giving in to unhealthy cravings.

PART 5. ETERNAL LIFE.

(י) כִּי לֹא תַעְזֹב נַפְשִׁי לְשָׂאוֹל

Hashem, my soul rejoices **because** — כִּי You will surely not abandon it when I die. I fully trust that **You will not leave my soul in the grave** — לֹא תַעְזֹב נַפְשִׁי לְשָׂאוֹל with my body.

לֹא תִתֵּן חֲסִידְךָ לְרֵאוֹת שְׁחַת:

And because I live my life in obedience to Your ways, I hope that You will let this life continue for many years to come. **You will surely not allow** the body of **Your devout one to see the grave** — לֹא תִתֵּן חֲסִידְךָ לְרֵאוֹת שְׁחַת prematurely.

(יא) תוֹדִיעֵנִי אֶרְחַח חַיִּים
 שְׂבַע שְׂמֻחוֹת אֶת פְּנִיךָ
 נְעֻמוֹת בְּיַמִּינְךָ נְצַח:

But I realize that my life in this world is a transitory illusion and must come to an end. The joys that I am granted here cannot truly satisfy the needs of my soul. That fulfillment can begin only when my soul puts off its fleshly clothing and is admitted to Your Presence.

I know that life in this world is just a road to that destination, but I cannot travel that road successfully without Your help. I therefore ask You to give me wisdom and **teach me the way to true life** — תוֹדִיעֵנִי אֶרְחַח חַיִּים. Then I will experience the **fulfillment of the joys of** being in **Your Presence** — שְׂבַע שְׂמֻחוֹת אֶת פְּנִיךָ. **And** my soul will be gratified by **the delights** — נְעֻמוֹת of the World to Come that are offered **in Your right hand eternally** — בְּיַמִּינְךָ נְצַח to those who are worthy.

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.

Tefillos for Life - Your Yeshuah.

[16:1] DIVINE PROTECTION. – שְׁמֹרְנִי אֵל כִּי חָסִיתִי בְּךָ – “Protect me O G-d, for I have taken refuge with You.” Ask Hashem to protect you from danger for you are depending on no one but Him.

Tefillos for Life - Your Relationship with Hashem.

[16:2] MY MASTER. – אָמַרְתָּ לֵּה' אֲדֹנָי אַתָּה טוֹבְתִי בִלְעֻלְיךָ – “[O my soul,] say to Hashem, You are my Master. My good is not on You [to provide].” Acknowledge Hashem as the Master of your life, for you owe Him your very existence and there is nothing that He owes you.

[16:8] CONTINUAL PRESENCE. – שְׁוִיתִי ה' לְנֶגְדִי תָמִיד – “I constantly set Hashem before me.” Acknowledge Hashem's constant presence throughout your life. He guides you, sustains you, and protects you.

[16:11] DIVINE GUIDANCE. – תוֹדִיעֵנִי אֶרְחַח חַיִּים – “Teach me the way to true

life." Ask Hashem to maintain His continual presence with you and to guide you in making the right choices in life so that you will ultimately be deserving of eternal life.

Tefillos for Life - Your Gratitude.

[16:3] THE HOLY ONES. – לְקַדוּשֵׁים אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ הַמָּה וְאֲדִירֵי כָּל חַפְצֵי בָּם – “[It is] for the sake of the holy ones who are in the earth and [Your] mighty ones [who fear You]. Because of them all my wishes have been granted.” Acknowledge your personal debt of gratitude to your holy ancestors and to the living tzadikim of your generation. It is because of their merit that Hashem has granted you life.

[16:5] COMPLETE DEVOTION. – ה' מִנֵּת חֶלְקִי וְכוֹסֵי אֶתָּה תוֹמִיךְ גּוֹרְלִי – “Hashem, [You are] my allotted portion and my share. You have determined my destiny.” Declare your devotion to Hashem. He is the Author of your destiny your mission in life.

[16:6] THE SWEETEST. – אֵף נַחֲלַת שְׂפָרָה עָלַי – “My inheritance is beautiful to me.” Thank Hashem and express your appreciation for the circumstances of life that He has granted you. You did nothing to earn your life.

[16:7] COUNSEL. – אֲבָרַךְ אֶת ה' אֲשֶׁר יַעֲצָנִי – “I bless Hashem for counseling me.” Thank Hashem for the guidance He is providing to you, transmitted from those around you and from within your own body.

Lessons for Life - Your Behavior.

[16:4] BAD INFLUENCES. – יִרְבוּ עֲצָבוֹתֶם אַחַר מְהָרוּ – “Let their sorrows abound, [those] who hurry after other gods. Avoid emulating people who have committed themselves to false ideals and false powers.

Lessons for Life - Your Attitude.

[16:9] CONTINUAL JOY. – לָכֵן שִׂמַח לְבִי וַיִּגַּל כְּבוֹדִי – “Therefore, my heart rejoices and my soul is elated.” The knowledge of Hashem’s presence and kindness to you should invoke a state of continual gratitude and joy.

[16:10] ETERNAL LIFE. – כִּי לֹא תַעֲזֹב נַפְשִׁי לְשֵׂאוֹל – “For You will not leave my soul in the grave.” Your joy should be enhanced by the expectation of eternal life.

Sources

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

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

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