

## Mizmor 049

# Priorities

### Key Concepts

The theme of the mizmor is the role of material possessions in a person's life. Each person was put on this earth for a higher purpose, not simply to accumulate and enjoy material possessions. On the contrary, those possessions were given to him as a means to fulfill his spiritual mission on earth. If he does so he can salvage his spiritual existence so that it will reach beyond his short time here.

If, however, he fails to recognize his true purpose in life and if he regards the acquisition of material wealth as an end in itself, then he will forfeit immortality. He will be no better than an animal and ultimately his existence will come to an end in the grave.

### Exploring the Mizmor

**PART 1. CALL TO MANKIND.** The singer calls upon people everywhere to hear his important message concerning the pursuit of material wealth, for it applies to all humanity.

(א) לְמַנְצַחַ לְבְנֵי קִרַח מִזְמוֹר: (ב) שְׁמְעוּ זֹאת כָּל הָעַמִּים הָאֲזִינוּ כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲלָד: (ג)  
גַּם בְּנֵי אָדָם גַּם בְּנֵי אִישׁ יַחַד עָשִׂיר וְאֶבְיוֹן: (ד) פִּי יִדְבֵר חֲכָמוֹת וְהַגִּוֹת לִבִּי תְבוּנוֹת:  
(ה) אֶטָּה לְמִשְׁלַל אֲזִנִּי אֶפְתַּח בְּכִנּוֹר חִידָתִי:

*(1) For the musician, by the sons of Korach, a mizmor. (2) Listen to this all [you] nations, incline your ear all who dwell in this transitory world. (3) Ordinary men as well as men of distinction, rich and poor alike. (4) My mouth speaks words of wisdom [and] the meditations of my heart [that have yielded] insight. (5) I incline my ear [to my own] analogy. I will open my symbolic text with a harp.*

**PART 2. THE FUTILITY OF WEALTH.** The singer challenges his audience not to place their trust in material wealth. It will not save them from the consequences of their sins.

(ו) לָמָּה אִירָא בֵימֵי רָע עֹון עֲקָבֵי יְסוּבְנֵי: (ז) הַבְּטָחִים עַל חֵילָם וּבְרַב עֲשָׂרָם  
יִתְהַלְלוּ: (ח) אַח לֹא פָדָה יִפְדֶּה אִישׁ לֹא יִתֵּן לְאֱלֹהִים כְּפָרוֹ: (ט) וַיִּקַּר פְּדִיוֹן נַפְשָׁם

וְחָדַל לְעוֹלָם: (י) וַיַּחֲיוּ עוֹד לְנֹצֵחַ לֹא יִרְאֶה הַשְּׁחָת: (יא) כִּי יִרְאֶה חֲכָמִים יָמוּתוּ יַחַד  
כְּסִיל וְבַעַר יִאֲבְדוּ וְעֲזָבוּ לְאַחֲרִים חֵילָם:

*(6) Why should I [devote myself to material wealth because I] fear bad times? The sin [following] on my heels will surround me. (7) Those who place their trust in their wealth and take pride in the abundance of their riches [should be afraid]. (8) A man cannot redeem [his own] brother [from death]. He cannot give his ransom to G-d [for his own life]. (9) The redemption of their soul [for money] is unattainable. [After death, repentance] is ended forever. (10) [He thinks] he will live forever, never to see the pit. (11) He sees that wise men die, that the fool and the boor both perish and leave their wealth to others.*

**PART 3. THE GRAVE AWAITS.** To make his audience face the seriousness of their situation he reminds them that a person devoted to material wealth is no better than an animal that has no future beyond death.

(יב) קִרְבָּם בְּתִימוֹ לְעוֹלָם מִשְׁפָּנֶתֶם לְדֹר וְדֹר קָרְאוּ בְשִׁמוֹתָם עָלַי אֲדָמוֹת: (יג)  
וְאָדָם בִּיקָר בַּל יִלִּין נִמְשַׁל כַּבְּהֵמוֹת נְדָמוֹ: (יד) זֶה דַּרְכָּם כֶּסֶל לָמוֹ וְאַחֲרֵיהֶם  
בְּפִיָּהֶם יִרְצוּ סֵלָה: (טו) כִּצְאֹן לְשֹׂאוֹל שְׂתוּ מוֹת יִרְעֵם וַיִּרְדּוּ בָם יִשְׂרָיִם לְבָקָר  
וְצִירִים וְצוֹרֵם לְבָלוֹת שְׂאוֹל מִזָּבֵל לוֹ: (טז) אַךְ אֵלֶקִים יִפְדֶּה נַפְשִׁי מִיַּד שְׂאוֹל כִּי  
יִקְחֵנִי סֵלָה:

*(12) Their innards [imagine] their houses [to be] eternity, their dwellings [as lasting] from generation to generation. They have proclaimed their names on [their] land. (13) But with honor [alone] a man will not survive the night . [Such men are] comparable to the animals that fall silent [when they die.] (14) This way of theirs is their folly. And yet [their children] after them [follow] their mouths willingly, Selah! (15) They have set themselves as sheep for the grave. Death will shepherd them. The upright will supersede them at the dawn. Their strength [is destined] to outlast the grave, rather than being its rotted remains. (16) But, may G-d redeem my soul from the power of the grave. May He take me [to Him for eternal life], Selah!*

**PART 4. BEYOND THE GRAVE.** The singer again uses the comparison between men and animals, reminding his audience that if a person fails to develop his moral and spiritual qualities in this world he will be like an animal that has nothing to take with it beyond the grave.

(יז) אֵל תִּקְרָא כִּי יַעֲשֶׂר אִישׁ כִּי יִרְבֶּה כְּבוֹד בֵּיתוֹ: (יח) כִּי לֹא בָמוֹתוֹ יִקַּח הַכֹּל לֹא  
יִרְדּוּ אַחֲרָיו כְּבוֹדוֹ: (יט) כִּי נִפְשׁוּ בְחַיָּיו יִבְרָךְ וַיִּוֹדֶךָ כִּי תִיטִיב לָךְ: (כ) תִּבְוֹא עַד דֹּר  
אֲבוֹתָיו עַד נֹצֵחַ לֹא יִרְאוּ אוֹר: (כא) אָדָם בִּיקָר וְלֹא יָבִין נִמְשַׁל כַּבְּהֵמוֹת נְדָמוֹ:

(17) Don't be troubled when a man grows rich, when he increases the glory of his house. (18) For upon his death he will not take anything [with him]. His glory will not descend after him. (19) Even though during his lifetime he blesses himself, "They will praise you because you have done well for yourself." (20) But if you come [to study] the generation of his fathers, they will see no light for all eternity. (21) Even with [wealth and] honor, [if] a man does not understand, he is comparable to the animals that fall silent.

## Learning the Mizmor

### PART 1. CALL TO MANKIND.

(א) לְמַנְצַחַ לְבְנֵי קִרַח מִזְמוֹר:

This *mizmor* was prepared **by the sons of Korach** — לְבְנֵי קִרַח מִזְמוֹר — through the power of *nevuah*. It was subsequently incorporated by David into the Book of Tehillim and was turned over **to the musician** — לְמַנְצַחַ — to be performed.

(ב) שְׁמְעוּ זֹאת כָּל הָעַמִּים

הָאֲזִינוּ כָּל יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ:

**Listen to this** — שְׁמְעוּ זֹאת — earnest message **all you nations** — כָּל הָעַמִּים, **incline your ear** — הָאֲזִינוּ — and pay attention **all you who dwell in this transitory world** — כָּל יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ. My message applies to everyone without exception, whether you are a public person or a private individual. Your time on this earth is short-lived. It is too valuable to waste. Accept my words of wisdom and rescue your spiritual existence, which is immortal.

(ג) גַּם בְּנֵי אָדָם גַּם בְּנֵי אִישׁ

יַחַד עֹשִׂיר וְאֶבְיוֹן:

What I have to say is for **ordinary men as well as men of distinction** — גַּם בְּנֵי — גַּם בְּנֵי אִישׁ, **rich and poor alike** — יַחַד עֹשִׂיר וְאֶבְיוֹן.

(ד) פִּי יְדַבֵּר חֻכְמוֹת

וְהַגִּיתָ לְבִי תְבוּנוֹת:

**My mouth speaks words of wisdom** — פִּי יְדַבֵּר חֻכְמוֹת — These are the received teachings that can guide you in making good choices in life. But to correctly apply those choices you need a level of insight and understanding. And so I am also sharing with you **the meditations of my heart** that have yielded the **insight** —

וְהָגוֹת לְבִי תְבוּנוֹת necessary to implement these teachings.

(ה) אָטָה לְמַשָּׁל אָזְנִי  
אֶפְתַּח בְּכִנּוֹר חִידָתִי:

**I incline my ear to** listen to my own **poetic analogy** — אָטָה לְמַשָּׁל אָזְנִי at the same time that I present it, for the lesson it conveys applies to me just as much as to my listeners. And after I have fully absorbed the lesson in my own life, **I will open up** and interpret the hidden meaning of **my symbolic text with my harp** — אֶפְתַּח בְּכִנּוֹר חִידָתִי for the benefit of others. The rhythm and melody of the music will lend meaning to words that might seem opaque otherwise.

## PART 2. THE FUTILITY OF WEALTH.

(ו) לָמָּה אֵירָא בְיָמַי רָע  
עוֹן עֲקָבַי יִסּוּבֵנִי:

Why I should I devote my life to accumulating wealth for old age or sickness? **Why should I fear bad times** — לָמָּה אֵירָא בְיָמַי רָע ? My true protection is Hashem. The only thing I really have to fear is **the sin** — עוֹן that follows **on my heels** — עֲקָבַי in the course of my pursuit of wealth. If I don't correct my ways, such sin **will surround me** — יִסּוּבֵנִי and will be the cause of my suffering.

(ז) הַבְּטָחִים עַל חֵילָם  
וּבְרַב עֲשָׂרָם יִתְהַלְלוּ:

The people who should be afraid when times are bad are those **who place their trust in their wealth** — הַבְּטָחִים עַל חֵילָם to protect them from trouble **and who take pride in the abundance of their riches** — וּבְרַב עֲשָׂרָם יִתְהַלְלוּ. A person should never take pride in his money, but rather in the wisdom he has acquired and the good he has done.

(ח) אַח לֹא פֹדֶה יִפְדֶּה אִישׁ  
לֹא יִתֵּן לְאֱלֹקִים כְּפָרוֹ:

It is foolish to trust in wealth. Hashem is the source of life and death and does not accept bribes. No matter how rich he is, **a man cannot redeem** his own **brother** — אַח לֹא פֹדֶה יִפְדֶּה אִישׁ from death. And if he is too stingy to pay for his brother's life, what would he not give for his own life? But a man **cannot give** all his possessions as **his ransom to G-d** — לֹא יִתֵּן לְאֱלֹקִים כְּפָרוֹ to release him

from being punished for his sins.

(ט) וַיִּקַּר פְּדִיוֹן נַפְשָׁם  
וְחָדַל לְעוֹלָם:

No matter how much wealth men may have, **the redemption of their soul for money** is unattainable — וַיִּקַּר פְּדִיוֹן נַפְשָׁם. If they are doomed because of their sins, they die and the opportunity to repent **is ended forever** — וְחָדַל לְעוֹלָם.

(י) וַיַּחֲסֵי עוֹד לְנֶצַח  
לֹא יִרְאֶה הַשְּׁחָת:

What does the rich man think? That **he will live forever** — וַיַּחֲסֵי עוֹד לְנֶצַח, **never to see the pit** — לֹא יִרְאֶה הַשְּׁחָת where he will have to answer for his sins?

(יא) כִּי יִרְאֶה חֲכָמִים יָמוּתוּ  
יַחַד כָּסִיל וְבַעַר יֵאָבְדוּ  
וְעֲזָבוּ לְאַחֲרִים חֵילָם:

When the rich man **sees that even wise men die** — כִּי יִרְאֶה חֲכָמִים יָמוּתוּ, does he still think that he can cheat death? When he sees **that the fool and the boor both perish** — יַחַד כָּסִיל וְבַעַר יֵאָבְדוּ and **leave their hard-earned wealth to others** — וְעֲזָבוּ לְאַחֲרִים חֵילָם, does he still think he will live forever? What about the world to come?

### PART 3. THE GRAVE AWAITS.

(יב) קָרְבָּם בְּתֵימוֹ לְעוֹלָם  
מִשְׁכַּנְתָּם לְדָר וְדָר

Such men are not concerned with a life beyond the present. **Their innards** — קָרְבָּם yearn only for physical possessions and **their houses** — בְּתֵימוֹ are their concept of **eternity** — לְעוֹלָם. They see **their dwellings** as lasting **from generation to generation** — מִשְׁכַּנְתָּם לְדָר וְדָר.

קָרְאוּ בְּשִׁמוֹתָם עָלֵי אֲדָמוֹת:

And so all their thoughts are on acquiring property which will perpetuate their fame to posterity. In their stupidity **they have proclaimed their names on their land** — קָרְאוּ בְּשִׁמוֹתָם עָלֵי אֲדָמוֹת, thinking that people will always remember them by

the land holdings which they now possess.

(יג) וְאָדָם בִּיקָר בַּל יָלִין  
נִמְשָׁל כְּבֵהֶמוֹת נִדְמוּ:

**But with** his wealth and outward trappings of **honor** alone **a man will not survive the night** — וְאָדָם בִּיקָר בַּל יָלִין — of the grave. Such a man **is comparable to the animals** — נִמְשָׁל כְּבֵהֶמוֹת — that have no soul and **fall silent** — נִדְמוּ — when they die, their body becoming absorbed into the surrounding elements.

(יד) זֶה יִרְכָּם כִּסֵּל לָמוֹ  
וְאַחֲרֵיהֶם בְּפִיהֶם יִרְצוּ סֵלָה:

**This way of theirs** — זֶה יִרְכָּם, trusting only in wealth and pursuing material pleasures, **is their folly** — כִּסֵּל לָמוֹ. **And yet** their children who come **after them** — וְאַחֲרֵיהֶם — repeat the pattern, following the lessons from **their parents mouths willingly** — בְּפִיהֶם יִרְצוּ, and so it goes on **forever, Selah** — סֵלָה !

(טו) כִּצְאֵן לְשֹׂאוֹל שֵׁתוּ  
מִוֹת יִרְעִים

**They have set themselves** — שֵׁתוּ — to be **like sheep** — כִּצְאֵן — that do nothing but eat and follow the unthinking flock. And so they are destined **for the grave** — לְשֹׂאוֹל, both body and soul. **Death will shepherd them** there — מִוֹת יִרְעִים — and they will lose their strength.

וַיִּרְדּוּ בָם יִשְׂרָיִם לְבָקָר

In contrast to those doomed individuals, **the upright** who take a straight path through life **will supersede them** and inherit their wealth **when the light of dawn** — וַיִּרְדּוּ בָם יִשְׂרָיִם לְבָקָר — heralds a new day for mankind.

[וצירים] וְצוֹרֵם לְבִלּוֹת שֹׂאוֹל מִזָּבֵל לוֹ:

**But** as for the upright, **their strength** — וְצוֹרֵם — **is destined to outlast the grave** — מִזָּבֵל לוֹ, rather than being its rotted remains — לְבִלּוֹת שֹׂאוֹל.

(טז) אֵךְ אֶלְקִים יִפְדֶּה נַפְשִׁי מִיַּד שָׂאוּל  
כִּי יִקְחֵנִי סֵלָה:

**However** — אֵךְ, I pray that my destiny will not be like that of the wicked. When I die and my body is interred in the grave, even though I have sinned, **may G-d redeem my soul** — אֶלְקִים יִפְדֶּה נַפְשִׁי **from the power of the grave** — מִיַּד שָׂאוּל. **For** I have done *teshuvah*. **May He take me** to Him for eternal life in the World to Come, **Selah** — כִּי יִקְחֵנִי סֵלָה !

#### PART 4. BEYOND THE GRAVE.

(יז) אַל תִּירָא כִּי יַעֲשֶׂר אִישׁ  
כִּי יִרְבֶּה כְּבוֹד בֵּיתוֹ:

**Don't be troubled** by envy **when** you see that **a man grows rich** — אַל תִּירָא כִּי יַעֲשֶׂר אִישׁ, while you remain poor. **When he increases the glory of his house** — כִּי יִרְבֶּה כְּבוֹד בֵּיתוֹ, don't think you have to abandon your way of life and devote yourself to matching his wealth. For your life will be as happy as his, and perhaps even more so.

(יח) כִּי לֹא בְּמוֹתוֹ יִקַּח הַכֹּל  
לֹא יֵרֵד אַחֲרָיו כְּבוֹדוֹ:

Such concerns are mistaken **for upon his death he will not take anything** with him — כִּי לֹא בְּמוֹתוֹ יִקַּח הַכֹּל. **His glory** and all his possessions **will not descend** into the grave **after him** — לֹא יֵרֵד אַחֲרָיו כְּבוֹדוֹ.

(יט) כִּי נִפְשׁוֹ בְּחַיָּיו יְבָרֵךְ  
וַיִּוֹדֵךְ כִּי תִיטִיב לָךְ:

**Even though during his lifetime he blesses himself** — כִּי נִפְשׁוֹ בְּחַיָּיו יְבָרֵךְ, saying, **"They will praise you because you have done well for yourself** — וַיִּוֹדֵךְ כִּי תִיטִיב לָךְ," that is only during his lifetime. They will quickly forget him after he is gone.

(כ) תָּבוֹא עַד דּוֹר אָבוֹתָיו  
עַד נִצַּח לֹא יִרְאוּ אוֹר:

**But if you come** to study **the generation of his fathers** — תָּבוֹא עַד דּוֹר אָבוֹתָיו, that is, the many individuals who have followed the same way of life as he does

now you will find that, they have all passed on into a long night of death. **They will see no light for all eternity** — **עַד יֵצֵחַ לֹא יֵרְאוּ אֹר**. The same fate is in store also for their descendant who walks in the same paths and whose wealth and splendor you would covet.

(כא) אָדָם בִּיקָר וְלֹא יָבִין  
נִמְשָׁל כְּבִהְמוֹת נְדָמוֹ:

**Even with** his wealth and **honor** if **a man** is stopped by the glitter of outward pretense **and does not** penetrate through to **understand** — **אָדָם בִּיקָר וְלֹא יָבִין** the meaning of life, he **is comparable to the animals** — **נִמְשָׁל כְּבִהְמוֹת** that have no soul and **fall silent** — **נְדָמוֹ** when they die.

## 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.

[49:2] TRANSITORY LIFE. – **הֶאֱזִינוּ כָּל יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ** – “*Incline your ear all who dwell in this transitory world.*” Remember that this world is transitory and whatever material things you build up here have no permanence.

[49:6] – **לָמָּה אֵיךָא בִימֵי רָע עֲוֹן עֲקֵבִי יִסּוּבֵנִי** – “*Why should I [devote myself to material wealth because I] fear bad times? The sin [following] on my heels will surround me.*” Your true protection is Hashem. The only thing you really have to fear is sin.

[49:21] – **אָדָם בִּיקָר וְלֹא יָבִין נִמְשָׁל כְּבִהְמוֹת נְדָמוֹ** – “*Even with [wealth and] honor, [if] a man does not understand, he is comparable to the animals that fall silent.*”

### Tefillos for Life - Your Teshuvah.

[49:9] TIME FOR TESHUVAH. – **וַיִּקָּר פְּדִיוֹן נַפְשָׁם וְחֹדֶל לְעוֹלָם** – “*The redemption of their soul [for money] is unattainable. [After death, repentance] is ended forever.*” Do teshuvah (repentance) for your sins now because you will not be able to do so after you die.



[49:16] BEYOND THE GRAVE. – אַךְ אֱלֹקִים יִפְדֶּה נַפְשִׁי מִיַּד שְׂאוֹל כִּי יִקְחֵנִי – סְלָה  
 “But, may G-d redeem my soul from the power of the grave. May He take me [to Him for eternal life], Selah!” Ask that your teshuvah will be accepted and you will have life beyond the grave.

## Sources

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

א - המאירי, ספורנו, אבן יחייא, רשר"ה	באר אברהם, נר לרגלי,
ב - בן-רמוך, מצודות, מלבי"ם, רשר"ה	יג - רש"י, אבן עזרא, רד"ק, רשר"ה
ג - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, מלבי"ם	יד - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, בן-רמוך
ד - רש"י, רד"ק, מלבי"ם, חכמות תבונות, רשר"ה	טו - רש"י, רד"ק, בן-רמוך, מצודות, רשר"ה
ה - רש"י, רד"ק, המאירי, מצודות	נר לרגלי, מאיר טוב
ו - רש"י, אבן עזרא, המאירי, מצודות	טז - אבן עזרא, רד"ק, ספורנו, אבן יחייא
ז - רד"ק, המאירי, ספורנו, באר אברהם	יז - רד"ק, המאירי, מצודות
ח - אבן עזרא, ספורנו, אבן יחייא, מצודות, מלבי"ם	יח - אבן עזרא, רד"ק
ט - אבן יחייא, נר לרגלי	יט - רש"י, בן-רמוך, רשר"ה
י - אבן עזרא, המאירי, מאיר טוב	כ - בן-רמוך, מצודות, מלבי"ם, מאיר טוב
יא - רש"י, רד"ק	כא - המאירי, ספורנו, נר לרגלי, רשר"ה,
יב - רש"י, ספורנו, אבן יחייא, מצודות,	מאיר טוב

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