

Mizmor 127

To Build the House

Key Concepts

David composed this mizmor when he learned that even though he had put tremendous effort into preparing for the construction of the *Bais Hamikdash* (Temple), he would not be permitted to see the project through to completion. Instead, his son Shlomo would be given the *zechus* (merit) of building Hashem's dwelling place in Yerushalayim.

In the mizmor David proceeds to draw an important lesson for every Jew. Each person should put his efforts into doing what is right. But he should always keep in mind that what actually happens depends on the will of Hashem. Despite appearances a person should not delude himself into thinking that it is his own efforts that have made the project succeed or fail. This means he should not lose himself in his devotion to *hishtadlus* (personal effort), expending time and energy on material things at the expense of *avodas Hashem*.

David also reflects upon how he was consoled by the decision to allow the construction of the *Bais HaMikdash* to be carried out by his son Shlomo. This made David realize what a blessing it is to be granted worthy children.

Exploring the Mizmor

PART 1. THE WILL OF HASHEM. David reflects on the will of Hashem. He concludes that the plans and effort men put into a project will not succeed unless Hashem wills it.

(א) שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת לְשִׁלְמֹה. אִם ה' לֹא יִבְנֶה בַּיִת שְׂוֹא עֲמָלוֹ בּוֹנְיוֹ בּוֹ אִם ה' לֹא יִשְׁמֵר עִיר שְׂוֹא שָׂקֵד שׁוֹמֵר: (ב) שְׂוֹא לָכֶם מִשְׁכִּימֵי קוֹם מֵאַחֲרֵי שֶׁבֶת אֲכָלִי לֶחֶם הַעֲצָבִים כִּן יִתֵּן לִידִידוֹ שְׁנָא:

(1) [The eighth] song of the steps concerns Shlomo. If Hashem does not build a house, in vain do its builders labor over it. If Hashem does not watch [over] a city, in vain does the watchman guard [it]. (2) In vain, you who rise [extra] early, [you] who sit up late, [and you who] eat the bread of miserable drudgery. For indeed, He gives sleep [and sustenance] to His

beloved ones.

PART 2. THE LEGACY OF HASHEM. David reflects on the great blessing of worthy children, especially sons who can hold their own in Torah learning.

(ג) הִנֵּה נַחֲלַת ה' בְּנִים שְׂכָר פְּרֵי הַבֶּטֶן: (ד) כְּחֻצִים בְּיַד גִּבּוֹר כֵּן בְּנֵי הַנְּעוּרִים: (ה) אֲשֶׁרִי הַגִּבֹּר אֲשֶׁר מְלֵא אֶת אֲשַׁפְּתוֹ מֵהֶם לֹא יִבְשׁוּ כִּי יִדְבְּרוּ אֶת אוֹיְבֵים בַּשַּׁעַר:
 (3) Look, the legacy of Hashem is children. The fruit of the womb is a [great] reward. (4) Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of [one's] youth. (5) Fortunate is the man who fills his quiver with them. They will not be ashamed when they talk [in learning] with their adversaries at the gate where Torah discussions are held.

Additional Thoughts

In Mizmor 127 David turns from visions of a future Exile, which occupied his attention in the previous seven mizmorim. He now focuses upon a lesson of avodas Hashem that he has learned from his own life. The fact that he would not be permitted to build the Bais Hamikdash was at first very frustrating for him. However, he accepted it as the will of Hashem and that inspired him to teach the Jewish people about the limits of hishtadlus in their daily lives. Hashem wants our hishtadlus, but He wants it to be constrained by bitachon (trust) in Him. Without bitachon a person would spend all his efforts in making a living.

Bitachon was also emphasized in the previous seven mizmorim that focused on the years of Exile. It is only through bitachon in the Geulah that we have been able to survive. So bitachon is an essential link between our history and our present.

Learning the Mizmor

PART 1. THE WILL OF HASHEM.

(א) שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת לְשִׁלְמֹה

This, the eighth **song of the steps** – שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת, concerns David's son **Shlomo** – לְשִׁלְמֹה.

אִם ה' לֹא יִבְנֶה בַּיִת
 שׁוּא עֲמָלוֹ בּוֹנֵיו בּוֹ

I desperately wanted to have the *zechus* of building the *Bais Hamikdash* but was

not permitted to go beyond the initial preparations. A person may work on something, but it will not succeed unless it is the will of Hashem. **If Hashem does not build a house** — **לֹא יִבְנֶה בַּיִת** — **in vain do its builders labor over it** — **שׁוּא עֲמָלוֹ בּוֹנֵי בּוֹ**.

אם ה' לא ישמר עיר
שוא שקד שומר:

And this principle is not only true of building something new. It also applies to preserving what already exists, such as protecting Yerushalayim, the city in which the *Bais Hamikdash* is to be built. **If Hashem does not watch over a city** — **אם שוא שקד שומר** — **ה', in vain does the watchman guard it** — **לֹא יִשְׁמַר עִיר**.

(ב) שוא לכם משכימי קום
מאחרי שבת

In vain, you who rise extra early — **שוא לכם משכימי קום** to put in more time on the job or your business, and you **who sit up late** — **מאחרי שבת**, thinking that if you put in extra hours, you will get more done. You are wasting the time that you could be spending in *avodas Hashem*. Don't you realize that your income depends on His wishes, not your efforts?

אכלי לחם העצבים

In vain, you who **eat the bread of miserable drudgery** — **אכלי לחם העצבים** without asking yourself whether you are sacrificing eternity for what you think you need.

כן יתן לידידו שנה:

For indeed — **כן**, look to Hashem. **He gives** — **יתן** sustenance **to His beloved ones** — **לידידו** and even provides them with restful **sleep** — **שנה**, without the need for back-breaking labor.

PART 2. THE LEGACY OF HASHEM.

(ג) הנה נחלת ה' בנים
שכר פרי הבטן:

Look — **הנה** and think! Do the will of Hashem and don't squander your efforts in building wealth. Look instead to **the legacy of Hashem** — **נחלת ה'**, that is, to your **children** — **בנים**. Your destiny will be fulfilled though your children just as my

destiny of building the Bais Hamikdash will be fulfilled through my son Shlomo.

The fruit of the womb is a great reward – שְׂכָר פְּרִי הַבֶּטֶן.

(ד) כְּחֻצִים בְּיַד גִּבּוֹר

כֵּן בְּנֵי הַנְּעוּרִים:

Like arrows in the hand of a warrior – כְּחֻצִים בְּיַד גִּבּוֹר, who is praised for striking a distant target, **so are the children of one's youth – כֵּן בְּנֵי הַנְּעוּרִים**, for he has the strength to teach them and he is rewarded with many years to bask in their accomplishments.

(ה) אֲשֶׁרִי הַגִּבֹּר

אֲשֶׁר מָלֵא אֶת אֲשַׁפְּתוֹ מֵהֶם

Fortunate is the man – אֲשֶׁרִי הַגִּבֹּר, who fills his quiver with them, raising many such children – **אֲשֶׁר מָלֵא אֶת אֲשַׁפְּתוֹ מֵהֶם**, teaching them everything he knows, without concern that their accomplishments will exceed his.

לֹא יִבְשׁוּ כִּי יִדְבְּרוּ אֶת אוֹיְבֵים בְּשַׁעַר:

He will be fulfilled by raising *talmidei chachamim* who **will not be ashamed – לֹא יִבְשׁוּ**, when they talk about learning the Torah **with their adversaries at the gate – כִּי יִדְבְּרוּ אֶת אוֹיְבֵים בְּשַׁעַר**, where Torah discussions are held.

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.

[127:1] BUILDING IT. – אִם ה' לֹא יִבְנֶה בַּיִת שׁוּא עֲמָלוֹ בּוֹנֵיו – "If Hashem does not build a house, in vain do its builders labor over it." Put your efforts into doing what is right, but always keep in mind that what actually happens depends on the will of Hashem.

Lessons for Life - Your Behavior.

[127:2] YOUR EFFORT. – שׁוּא לָכֶם מִשְׁפִּימֵי קוֹם מֵאַחֲרֵי שֶׁבֶת אֲכָלִי לֶחֶם – הֶעֱצַבִים – "In vain, you who rise [extra] early, [you] who sit up late, [and you who] eat the bread of miserable drudgery." Don't lose yourself in

hishtadlus (personal effort), expending time and energy on material things at the expense of *avodas Hashem*.

Tefillos for Life - Your Berachah.

[127:3] WORTHY CHILDREN. – נַחֲלַת ה' בְּנֵי שָׂכָר פְּרֵי הַבֶּטֶן – “*the legacy of Hashem is children. The fruit of the womb is a [great] reward.*” Ask Hashem to bless you with worthy children.

Sources

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

ד – רד"ק, המאירי, מצודות
ה – רש"י, המאירי, מצודות, נר לרגלי,

א – רד"ק, מלבי"ם, המאירי, מצודות
ב – אבן עזרא, המאירי, מצודות
ג – רד"ק, המאירי, מצודות, מלבי"ם,

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