Mizmor 104

See The Light

Key Concepts

This mizmor is a song of deep appreciation for the wonderful world Hashem created. The song gives us a poetic tour of the things we take granted in everyday life. It encourages to stop and marvel at how each aspect of our world is in itself a miracle for which we need to be grateful.

David begins his song with the wonderful phenomenon of light, which came into being by the word of Hashem on the first day of Creation.

This mizmor is featured in our monthly tefilos on the day of Rosh Chodesh because it draws our attention to the moon, the heavenly body that sends us a monthly gift of brilliantly clear white light.

Exploring the Mizmor

PART 1. THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE WORLD. David introduces us to the creation of light, its first role being to illuminate the heavens. The broad canvas of the heavens then becomes the scenic framework for the creation of clouds and wind to deliver the water that is to become an essential blessing for life on earth. The flaming fire of lightning appears in the sky as a dramatic accompaniment to the wind and the clouds. It is at this point in the narrative of Creation that David introduces the earth, the stable platform upon which man will live.

We first become aware of the existence of the newly created earth in its initial state, as a platform upon which the oceans have been spread on the Third Day of Creation. Their waters are to prove essential to our terrestrial home that is soon to take shape.

The process of making water available to life on earth begins by restricting the oceans so that land may appear above the surface. It is only then that our gaze turns to the flow of waters as they stream down from the mountains and through the valleys. From there the flowing water joins the rivers emptying out into the oceans to complete the majestic cycle of life-giving water. But now the oceans have been placed under Divine restraint so that their salty water may not flow back into the shores from which they are being fed.

That grand cycle of water depends on the clouds drawing up the pure vapor from

the oceans and bringing it down to the mountains and fertile valleys in the form of rain. It is the blessed rain which will ultimately provide fresh water to the thirsty creatures that are to live upon the land.

(א) בָּרֲכִי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־ה' ה' אֱלֹקַי גָּדַלְתָּ מְאֹד הוֹד וְהָדָר לָבָשְׁתָּ׃ (ב) עֹטֶה־אוֹר כַּשַּׂלְמָה נוֹטֶה שָׁמַיִם כַּיְרִיעָה׃(ג) הַמְקָרֶה בַמַּיִם עֲלִיּוֹתָיו הַשָּׂם־עָבִים רְכוּבוֹ הַמְהַלֵּךְ עַל־כַּנְפֵי־רוּחַ׃ (ד) עֹשֶׂה מַלְאָכָיו רוּחוֹת מְשָׁרְתָיו אֵשׁ לֹהֵט׃ (ה) יָסַד־אֶרֶץ עַל־מְכוֹנֶיהָ בַּל־תִּמּוֹט עוֹלָם וָעֶד׃ (ו) תְּהוֹם כַּלְבוּשׁ כִּסִּיתוֹ עַל־הָרִים יַעַמְדוּ־מָיִם׃ (ז) מִן־גַּעֲרָתְךָ יְנוּסוּן מִן־קוֹל רַעַמְךָ יֵחָפֵזוּן׃ (ח) יַעֲלוּ הָרִים יֵרְדוּ בְקָעוֹת אֶל־מְקוֹם זֶה יָסַדְתָּ לָהֶם׃ (ט) גְּבוּל־שַׂמְתָּ בַּל־יַעֲבֹרוּן בַּל־יְשׁוּבוּן לְכַסּוֹת הָאָרֶץ׃

(1) Bless Hashem O my soul. Hashem, my G-d, You are uniquely great. You are clothed with glory and majesty. (2) He wraps the world with light as with a garment. He spreads out the heavens like a tapestry. (3) He forms the rafters of His upper chambers from water. He sets the clouds as His chariot, which flies on wings of wind. (4) He makes the winds His messengers, the flames of fire His ministers. (5) He established the earth on its firm foundations, never to be moved. (6) You covered it with the deep oceans as with a garment. (7) [The waters] fled from [before] Your raging [winds]. They hurried away at [the sound of] Your thunder. (8) [The waters] rose [over the] mountains and flowed down into the valleys to the place You established for them. (9) You set the boundary they may not cross [so that] they will not return to inundate the earth.

PART 2. SUSTENANCE AND SHELTER. The story of feeding and sheltering the creatures of the earth begins with water springing up out of the earth. Water is the basis of life because it enables the growth of vegetation that supports all life. Also, all creatures depend on water to quench their thirst. The flowing waters invite the birds of the sky which find shelter in the trees that grow along the river banks.

At this point David introduces us to the blessed rain which waters the land to enable the growth of vegetation. The vegetation sustains the creatures of the earth, which feed on the plant life in its natural state. In addition, the vegetation is processed by mankind to provide specialized foods including wine from grapes, oil from olives, and bread from grain.

David now introduces us to the trees that don't bear edible fruit. Even so they provide a sheltering habitat for the birds of the air to build their nests. Men use the wood of these trees to build their homes and to burn as fuel. David also mentions other creatures that depend on their environment, examples of which are found in the high mountains and their rocky crags that shelter mountain goats.

(י) הַמְשַׁלֵּחַ מַעְיָנִים בַּנְּחָלִים בֵּין הָרִים יְהַלֵּכוּן׃ (יא) יַשְׁקוּ כָּל־חַיְתוֹ שָׂדָי יִשְׁבְּרוּ פְרָאִים צְמָאָם׃ (יב) עֲלֵיהֶם עוֹף־הַשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׁכֹּון מִבֵּין עֳפָאיִם יִתְּנוּ־קוֹל׃ (יג) מַשְׁקֶה הָרִים מֵעֲלִיּוֹתָיו מִפְּרִי מַעֲשֶׂיךָ תִּשְׂבַּע הָאָרֶץ׃ (יד) מַצְמִיחַ חָצִיר לַבְּהֵמָה וְעֵשֶׂב לַעֲבֹדַת הָאָדָם לְהוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן־הָאָרֶץ׃ (טו) וְיַיִן יְשַׂמַּח לְבַב־אֱנוֹשׁ לְהַצְהִיל פָּנִים מִשָּׁמֶן וְלֶחֶם לְבַב־אֱנוֹשׁ יִסְעָד׃ (טז) יִשְׂבְּעוּ עֲצֵי ה׳ אַרְזֵי לְבָנוֹן אֲשֶׁר נָטָע׃ (יז) אֲשֶׁר־שָׁם צִפֳּרִים יְקַנֵּנוּ חֲסִידָה בְּרוֹשִׁים בֵּיתָהּ׃ (יח) הָרִים הַגְּבֹהִים לַיְעֵלִים סְלָעִים מַחְסֶה לַשְׁפַנִּים׃

(10) You make the springs [gush forth] in streams making their way between the mountains. (11) They deliver drinking water to every beast of the field. They even slake the thirst of the wild asses. (12) The birds of the air make their nest nearby. From among the branches they give voice to song. (13) He waters the mountains from His lofty chambers. The needs of the earth are satisfied with the blessed rain which is the special fruit of His works. (14) He causes vegetation to grow for the cattle and cereal grasses to grow with man's labor and bring forth bread from the earth. (15) Also, wine to cheer the heart of man, oil to make his face glow, and bread to strengthen man's heart. (16) The trees of Hashem have their fill [of fresh water], the cedars of Lebanon that He planted ... (17) there where the birds make their nests. And for the stork, cypresses are its home. (18) High mountains are for the wild goats. rocky crags provide refuge for the badgers.

PART 3. THE WISDOM OF DAY AND NIGHT. In His wisdom Hashem arranged the conditions that would prevent conflict between the two kinds of powerful creatures that inhabit the earth: man and beast. To achieve this purpose He allocated each 24-hour cycle between periods of light and periods of darkness. The period of darkness in wilderness regions was given over to the wild beasts who roam the forests. The period of light was given over to mankind who works in the fields when the wild animals retreat to their lairs. The darkness of night and the light of day, are regulated by the sun and the moon, the two major heavenly bodies, both created on Day Four of Creation.

The moon, which rules the night, is also associated with the seasons of the year and the festivals, based on a monthly calendar. Because of this special role, the entire Mizmor 104 is publicly recited once a month on the Shabbos preceding the New Moon (Rosh Chodesh).

(יט) עָשָׂה יָרֵחַ לְמוֹעֲדִים שֶׁמֶשׁ יָדַע מְבוֹאוֹ׃ (כ) תָּשֶׁת־חֹשֶׁךְ וִיהִי לָיְלָה בּוֹ־תִרְמֹשׂ כָּל־חַיְתוֹ־יָעַר׃ (כא) הַכְּפִירִים שֹׁאֲגִים לַטָּרֶף וּלְבַקֵּשׁ מֵאֵל אָכְלָם׃ (כב) תִּזְרַח הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ יֵאָסֵפוּן וְאֶל־מְעוֹנֹתָם יִרְבָּצוּן׃ (כג) יֵצֵא אָדָם לְפָעֳלוֹ וְלַעֲבֹדָתוֹ עַדֵי־עָרֶב׃

(19) He made the moon for the festivals, the sun knows when to set. (20) You bring on darkness, and it is night; that is when all the beasts of the forest creep forth. (21) Then the young lions roar after their prey to seek their food from G-d. (22) The sun rises, they steal away and lie down in their dens to rest. (23) Man goes forth to his work and to his labor until the evening.

PART 4. CREATURES OF THE WORLD. Having touched upon creatures of the land and air, David now turns to the teeming life of the sea. On the fifth and sixth days of Creation, Hashem created vast numbers creatures on sea and land. Men skim over the surface of the sea in ships, hardly aware of the swarms below. Wherever they are, all creatures depend upon Hashem for their sustenance, but only man has an understanding of the One Who provides it to them. Ultimately, all living beings must die, but only man has a soul that exists beyond the grave into a new life.

(כד) מָה־רַבּוּ מַעֲשֶׂיךָ ה׳ כֻּלָּם בְּחָכְמָה עָשִׂיתָ מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ קִנְיָנֶךָ׃ (כה) זֶה הַיָּם גָּדוֹל וּרְחַב יָדָיִם שָׁם־רֶמֶשׂ וְאֵין מִסְפָּר חַיּוֹת קְטַנּוֹת עִם־גְּדֹלוֹת׃ (כו) שָׁם אֳנִיּוֹת יְהַלֵּכוּן לִוְיָתָן זֶה־יָצַרְתָּ לְשַׂחֶק־בּוֹ׃ (כז) כֻּלָּם אֵלֶיךָ יְשַׂבֵּרוּן לָתֵת אָכְלָם בְּעִתּוֹ׃ (כח) תִּתֵּן לָהֶם יִלְקֹטוּן תִּפְתַּח יָדְךָ יִשְׂבְּעוּן טוֹב׃ (כט) תַּסְתִּיר פָּנֶיךָ יִבָּהֵלוּן תֹּסֵף רוּחָם יִגְוָעוּן וְאֶל־עֲפָרָם יְשׁוּבוּן׃ (ל) תְּשַׁלַּח רוּחֲךָ יִבָּרֵאוּן וּתְחַדֵּשׁ פְּנֵי אֲדָמָה׃

(24) How abundant are your works, Hashem. You made them all with wisdom. The world is full of your creations. (25) The sea, great and wide, countless swarming creatures are there, and also living beings large and small. (26) Men sail there in ships. Also, the Leviathan whale that You created for men to test their strength against. (27) They all look to You expectantly, to provide their food in in its proper time. (28) You give it to them, they gather it in, they are granted satisfaction with good. (29) When You hide Your face they are in panic. When You take away their life force, they perish and return to their dust. (30) When You send forth Your spirit,

men are created anew and You give new life to the people of the earth.

PART 5. THE GLORY OF HASHEM. David concludes the mizmor with praise and recognition for the wonders of Creation that only man has been granted the wisdom to appreciate. Within the vast scope of the created world, only man has been given the possibility of sensing the glory of its Creator. Only man has been blessed with the ability to understand the blessings of life and to communicate directly with its Creator.

(לא) יְהִי כְבוֹד ה' לְעוֹלָם יִשְׂמַח ה' בְּמַעֲשָׂיו׃ (לב) הַמַּבִּיט לָאָרֶץ וַתִּרְעָד יִגַּע בֶּהָרִים וְיֶעֱשָׁנוּ׃ (לג) אָשִׁירָה לַה' בְּחַיָּי אֲזַמְּרָה לֵאלֹקַי בְּעוֹדִי׃ (לד) יֶעֱרַב עָלָיו שִׂיחִי אָנֹכִי אֶשְׂמַח בַּה'׃ (לה) יִתַּמּוּ חַטָּאִים מִן־הָאָרֶץ וּרְשָׁעִים עוֹד אֵינָם בָּרֲכִי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־ה' הַלְלוּ־יָהּ׃

(31) The glory of Hashem will endure for ever. May Hashem take delight in His wsorks. (32) He looks toward the earth and it quakes; He touches the mountains and they smoke. (33) I will sing in gratitude to Hashem for my life; I will sing praises to my G-d while I endure. (34) May my tefillah be sweet to Him. I will rejoice in Hashem. (35) Sinners will cease from the earth and the wicked will be no more. Bless Hashem, O my soul, Halleluyah.