

Mizmor 119

001 - Wholeness

Key Concepts (Aleph 1)

David begins this mizmor by singing the praises of the life that is lived in devotion to Hashem. Such a life involves a wide variety of practices and ideas, but they all share a unity of common purpose, which is serving our Creator. That unity is described here in the first pasuk of the mizmor as a “wholeness” since a total commitment to every one of the elements of avodas Hashem is essential in achieving a righteous life.

To live a life of wholeness the individual embarks on a path of virtuous behavior and endeavors to stay on this path throughout his life. As he walks on the path of wholeness he can expect to encounter many challenges and he may even stumble but his overall progress will be upward, to become a better person each day of his life.

All of the thoughts of this mizmor are based on single foundation. This is the Torah that Hashem gave us to reveal His expectations for the Jewish people. The teachings of the Torah are implemented in the Jew’s daily life in the form of mitzvos that express particular elements of service to Hashem.

In Mizmor 119 David presents a unique way of thinking about the mitzvos. Some are focused on the historical aspects of Hashem’s relationship with his people. These are called the Testimonies. Others are focused on the basic principles of Hashem’s relationship with the world and with mankind. These are called the Doctrines. There are a number of other such categories, but it is important to remember that the categories are really aspects of mitzvos rather than unique lists of mitzvos. Any mitzvah may incorporate a Testimony and a Doctrine.

David introduces us to the major categories of mitzvos during the course of the first eight pesukim of the mizmor. These pesukim all begin with the letter aleph to signify their importance in the overall scheme of thought that David is giving us.

Exploring the Mizmor

In contrast with the first pasuk of Tehillim (אֲשֶׁרֵי הָאֵיֶשׁ), the first pasuk of Mizmor 119 is stated in the plural to remind us that the wholeness of which it speaks is not just the wholeness of an individual but the unity of an entire nation, leading ultimately to a universal recognition of G-d by all of mankind.

(א) אֲשֶׁרִי תְּמִימֵי דָרֶךְ הַהֲלָכִים בְּתוֹרַת ה':

Fortunate are those on the path of wholeness who walk with the Torah of Hashem

The special importance of the message of Mizmor 119 is suggested by the fact that it is the largest mizmor in all of Tehillim. The pesukim are arranged in groups of eight, with each group beginning with the same letter. The sequential arrangement of these letters emphasizes the concept of unity and wholeness, which is the theme of the entire mizmor. Every pasuk contributes to the whole, just as every prescribed practice and idea of the Torah is an essential element of the whole.

When a person performs any mitzvah in the optimum manner, he should be thinking about the special categories of observance that it reflects. The full scope and depth of such an exercise for all of the 613 mitzvos is probably beyond the normal ability of any human being, but is something that a Jew should aspire to. In that sense observance of the Torah may be viewed as a journey on the path of wholeness rather than a destination.

Note: The present plan for the Nafshi project is to present a brief commentary for each of the 176 pesukim. The commentary will be guided by the need to relate the ideas of the pasuk to the whole.

Learning the Mizmor

(א) אֲשֶׁרִי תְּמִימֵי דָרֶךְ
הַהֲלָכִים בְּתוֹרַת ה':

Fortunate — אֲשֶׁרִי are those people who have chosen to stay **on the path of wholeness** — תְּמִימֵי דָרֶךְ, practicing a consistent devotion to Hashem and continued personal development in all areas of life. It is they **who walk with the Torah of Hashem** — הַהֲלָכִים בְּתוֹרַת ה'.