

Mizmor Segment 119-009

Beis Pesukim: Implementation of the Torah

(009 - 016)

Key Concepts of the Beis Pesukim

(ט) בַּמָּה יִצְּכָה נַעַר אֶת אֶרְחוֹ לְשֹׁמֵר כְּדִבְרֶךָ:

(9) How can a young man purify his path ? To guard it according to Your word.

Beis 1: Complexity - In the previous segment of the mizmor David emphasized the wholeness and unity of the Torah and mitzvos. He gave us a broad perspective of the various categories of mitzvos, all sharing the purpose of serving Hashem. The individual who observes the mitzvos was described as being on a main road or way (דֶּרֶךְ) with a destination of wholeness in fulfilling Hashem's will.

David now begins bridging the gap between that conceptual "way" of life and the specific steps that are needed to implement each individual mitzvah. This involves a recognition that the world of mitzvos is elaborately complex in terms of the specific requirements of each mitzvah (the who, what, when, and how) and the underlying thoughts (the why). Just as Hashem created a miraculous world of boundless complexity and depth, He created a perfect Torah of boundless detail, all fitting together in a unified wholeness according to His plan. (See Mizmor 019.)

(י) בָּכַל לִבִּי דָרַשְׁתִּיךָ אֵל תִּשְׁגָּנִי מִמִּצְוֹתֶיךָ:

(10) I have searched for You with all my heart, do not let me go astray from Your mitzvos.

Beis 2: Devotion - Having introduced us to the young man who is concerned about doing the right thing, David now recalls his own experience in the complex world of mitzvos. David immediately focuses on the most important point: The purpose of doing mitzvos is to serve Hashem and to be close to Him.

This means that despite the challenge presented by what may seem to be a bewildering complexity, the dominant thought in doing mitzvos must be a feeling of devotion to Hashem. Every mitzvah that a person does should actively be perceived as an act requested by Hashem. The person doing the mitzvah is consciously aware that he depends on Hashem's help to successfully complete the task in which he

happens to be engaged. As a servant of Hashem he knows that it is only through his devotion to Hashem that he has a hope of doing what Hashem expects of him.

(יא) בְּלִבִּי צָפַנְתִּי אִמְרֹתֶיךָ לְמַעַן לֹא אֶחָטָא לְךָ:

(11) I have concealed Your spoken word within my heart, so that I would not sin against You.

Beis 3: The Oral Torah - Because of its scope and complexity, the wisdom of the Torah far exceeds the physical limitations of the written word (**תּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּכַתָּב**). These limitations were overcome by the spoken word originally transmitted by Hashem as He taught the Torah to Moshe Rabbeinu. Without that spoken wisdom, the Torah could have been a mysterious collection of unresolved secrets.

The aggregated spoken wisdom is the Oral Torah (**תּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּעַל פֶּה**), which was subsequently passed on in an unbroken chain from generation to generation, father to son and teacher to student. Each generation was held responsible for learning this content by heart and that challenge continued to grow as the Sages of each generation added to it in the form of further insights and halachic rulings that were called for by the new situations that arose over the years.

Ultimately, the tragic conditions of the Galus after the destruction of the Second Bais Hamikdash made it necessary to transcribe the Oral Torah and record its wisdom in written form. However, at the time of David Hamelech, that momentous process was still far off in the distant future.

Even in David's time, the ever-growing scope and complexity of the Oral Torah made the challenge of keeping the Torah alive in human memory all the greater. This challenge continued to be an urgent necessity. Each individual has always had the great mitzvah of keeping the Torah content fresh in his mind so that he could be guided by the Torah knowledge in his day-to-day observance.

(יב) בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' לְמַדְנִי חֻקֶיךָ:

(12) Blessed are You, Hashem, teach me Your decrees.

Beis 4: Learning Torah - To be able to learn Torah effectively a person must realize that he cannot do it alone. Since the Torah originates with Hashem and belongs to Him, a person can only learn Torah if Hashem teaches it to him.

What must the person do to get Hashem to teach him Torah? He must first acknowledge Hashem's essential role in the process. He must then humbly ask for Hashem to teach the Torah to him.

The next step is for the individual to apply himself to study the words and thoughts

of the Torah. As he does so he will find that his mind is absorbing these words and thoughts as a gift from Hashem, his Teacher. He may be also gratified to discover new insights and interpretations in the meaning of what he is learning. If he is worthy, those new ideas will become part of the Oral Torah which he may pass on to others.

(יג) בְּשִׁפְטַי סִפַּרְתִּי כָּל מִשְׁפָּטֵי פִיךָ:

(13) With my lips I have recounted all the Mishpatim of Your mouth.

Beis 5: Sharing Torah - The process of learning Torah is not limited to listening to the words of the Torah and studying them. A higher degree of fulfillment in learning Torah requires a sense of sharing the insights of the Torah with other people. The Torah was given to the nation of Yisrael as a community and it needs to be absorbed and lived by the people as a community.

A person's lips symbolize the mechanism that we have been given to share wisdom. By formulating and expressing words verbally a person tests his own understanding and teaches it to others. Furthermore, each time he recounts the words of the Torah he rises to a higher level in his understanding of what he has learned.

This is especially true of the aspect of the Torah called Mishpatim. Since their rationale is relatively straightforward, there is much more depth in these teachings than is initially apparent. The more a person repeats the words and the ideas the greater is his comprehension and the greater is his appreciation for their wisdom.

(יד) בְּדַרְךְ עֵדוּתֶיךָ שִׁשְׁתִּי כָּעַל כָּל הוֹן:

(14) I rejoiced over the way of Your Eidos as much as in all riches.

Beis 6: Joy in Mitzvos - The Testimonies (Eidos) were introduced in the second pasuk of Mizmor 119. These are the narratives and mitzvos that bear witness to the Creation of the world and the historical events of our Jewish national experience.

David now sings of the joy he has found in experiencing a Torah life founded upon faithful observance of the mitzvos that characterize the Eidos. Through the medium of the Eidos the Jew is able to relive in the present the dramatic events of the past that brought our forefathers to an intense closeness with the Creator.

We rejoice in the discovery of meaning and purpose in occurrences and ideas linked together by new insights across the vistas of time. With this awareness we are gratified to be able to bear witness to the mission of our people within the framework of universal mankind and the infinite universe.

The Eidos present a grand picture of awareness within which we are privileged to live our lives productively and creatively in service to the Creator. In this pasuk

David joyfully declares that the spiritual and emotional reward we receive each day far exceeds the pleasure we might get from the material possessions that ornament our lives.

(טו) בַּפְּקֻדֵיךָ אֲשִׁיחָה וְאֶבִּיטָה אֶרְחֹתֶיךָ:

(15) I meditate upon Your Pikudim and I look closely at Your ways.

Beis 7: Meditation - The Doctrines (**פְּקֻדִים**), which David introduced in the fourth pasuk of the Aleph Segment, are mitzvos that we are called upon to perform primarily with our minds. These Pikudim involve our sincere thoughts of trust, belief, gratitude, love, and reverence towards Hashem. They also involve corresponding attitudes to our fellow man.

As a person goes through life he often has quiet moments when he can perform a variety of mitzvos simply by meditating upon his life in this world and his relationship with his Creator. He can also think about the many kindnesses that Hashem does for each of us every minute of the day. Only by his awareness of the flow of life and goodness that Hashem showers upon us, can man begin to have appreciation for the gratitude he owes.

(טז) בְּחֻקֹתֶיךָ אֲשַׁתְּעָשֶׂע לֹא אֲשַׁכַּח דְּבָרֶיךָ:

(16) I will absorb myself in Your Chukim, I will not forget Your word.

Beis 8: Fascination - David began the Beis segment of the mizmor from the perspective of a young man faced with the daunting complexity of the Torah and its mitzvos. During the course of the segment he explored various aspects of learning Torah, including his dependence on Hashem as the Teacher (Beis 4) and his joy in learning (Beis 6).

He now ends the segment by summarizing his approach to learning as being one of total absorption in the Torah and its mitzvos. This expresses David's fascination with the continuous unfolding of new insight while living a Torah life.

He mentions specific categories of mitzvos in the various pesukim. However, many of the thoughts he expresses could easily apply in varying degrees to the other categories. However, it is useful to think about the specific categories because it helps the student become more knowledgeable of a mitzvah by thinking of how it fits in to the overall scheme.

Learning the Mizmor

BEIS 1: COMPLEXITY

(ט) בַּמָּה יִזְכֶּה נֶעֶר אֶת אָרְחוֹ
לְשֹׁמֵר כְּדַבְּרֶךָ:

How can a young man who has taken on the responsibility of mitzvos **purify his path** — **בַּמָּה יִזְכֶּה נֶעֶר אֶת אָרְחוֹ** ? The answer is simply **to guard it**, observing each mitzvah, **according to Your word** — **לְשֹׁמֵר כְּדַבְּרֶךָ**.

Whereas the way of living a Torah life is described as a **דְּרֶכְךָ**, the steps to be taken in observing an individual mitzvah are described as forming an **אֶרֶח** (path). Since the complexity of Torah observance may seem daunting, David begins by presenting it to us from the perspective of a young man who has just become Bar Mitzvah and is facing the awesome responsibility of observance in all its complexity.

So he asks himself, how that young man can approach the observance of each individual mitzvah path in the purest possible way. The answer David gives seems obvious, but has great meaning. The young man cannot do everything at once. However, he can commit himself to follow the word of Hashem as he understands it with every mitzvah that he performs. If he does so, he will find the quality of his observance of mitzvos continually improving as his growing Torah knowledge embellishes his day-to-day actions of fulfilling the will of Hashem.

Additional Insights:

(1) The pasuk teaches that a person's observance of mitzvos cannot be pure through learning alone. Mitzvos call for doing. Just as a person is required to teach his son Torah he is required to exercise that knowledge through practical training. (רד"ק)

(2) Observing a mitzvah according to Your word (**כְּדַבְּרֶךָ**) means more than adhering to the specific requirements of Hashem's "word." It means performing the mitzvah because Hashem's wish, rather than for any other satisfaction it may bring. Rather than think to himself that a particular sin is repugnant to him, he should think that he would really like to have that experience, but he is resisting it out of devotion to the will of Hashem. (מצודות)

(3) When David used the term **נֶעֶר** (young man) he also had in mind a sense

of his own inadequacy. He put himself in the shoes of that נַעַר and felt a great ambition to be more than he was. He was thinking of what it would take for someone as unworthy as himself to rise in his level of mitzvah observance. (המאירי, אבן יחיאל)

BEIS 2: DEVOTION

(י) בְּכָל לִבִּי דָרַשְׁתִּיךָ
אֵל תִּשְׁגְּנִי מִמִּצְוֹתֶיךָ:

With all my heart — בְּכָל לִבִּי — **I have searched for You** — דָרַשְׁתִּיךָ in my heart and in Your Torah. **Do not let me** get distracted by the pressures of life to **go astray from** correctly observing all **Your mitzvos** — אֵל תִּשְׁגְּנִי מִמִּצְוֹתֶיךָ.

David addresses Hashem directly in a tefillah that recalls the human experience of devotion in doing mitzvos. In the tefillah David effectively acknowledges that no man can be sure of doing everything that Hashem expects of him. The best he can do is throw himself at Hashem's mercy, declaring his devotion and his plea to know Hashem's wishes.

David's tefillah describes his sincere quest to do what is right. He has searched for the presence of Hashem in his own heart and he asks Hashem not to let him go astray from what Hashem wants him to be doing. The wisdom and physical ability that David needs to perform mitzvos correctly are granted to him by Hashem. Therefore, it is only Hashem Who can be counted upon to cause the mitzvos to be executed properly.

Additional Insights:

- (1) David devotes his entire heart to his quest, meaning that his entire purpose in learning the Torah is to fulfill the mitzvos and the entire purpose in doing the mitzvos is to serve Hashem. (רד"ק)
- (2) David asks Hashem for the wisdom and insight to understand the meaning of the mitzvos. (מצודות)
- (3) In searching and studying the meaning of mitzvos, David sees the risk of misinterpreting the requirements of a mitzvah based on an erroneous understanding of its meaning. He asks Hashem to keep him from such an error. (מלבים)
- (4) David is devoting his whole heart in searching for the true meaning and

method of mitzvos. He search for meaning is not motivated by any other agenda, such as finding opportunity to minimize the requirements of the mitzvos. (אלשיך)

(5) David asks that Hashem preserve him from circumstances (such as extreme wealth or extreme poverty) which may distract him from his full devotion in performing mitzvos. (בן רמון)

BEIS 3: THE ORAL TORAH -

(יא) בְּלִבִּי צִפְנֹתִי אִמְרֹתֶיךָ
לְמַעַן לֹא אֶחְטֶא לָךְ:

Deep **within my heart** — בְּלִבִּי **I have concealed** — **Your spoken word**
— אִמְרֹתֶיךָ , **so that I would not sin against You** — לְמַעַן לֹא אֶחְטֶא לָךְ.

David declares his devotion to serving Hashem by having committed the Oral Torah to memory. Although he has stored the Torah deep within his heart, he continues to think of that it as "Your spoken word." That means he visualizes Hashem as continually speaking directly to him. As he performs each mitzvah He recalls Hashem's instructions relative to that mitzvah because the remembered words are always accessible to his heart. David treasures Hashem's words and so they are concealed in his heart the way that one might conceal a treasure.

David states that the purpose of doing all this is to enable him to have the knowledge he needs to perform the mitzvos in a proper manner, as Hashem wishes it. He realizes that if he lacked this knowledge he would inadvertently be violating the halachic requirements of each mitzvah. That is a sin he desperately wants to avoid.

Additional Insights

(1) The word אִמְרֹתֶיךָ is based on the root אמר, which refers to the use of speech to inform or communicate an idea, that is, to have an effect upon the mind or heart of a listener. This is in contrast to the root דבר, which refers to the uttering of words without consideration of their affecting a listener. Thus, the success of בְּלִבִּי צִפְנֹתִי, is suggested by (רש"י ה).

(2) David commits himself to remembering not only the back and forth analytical discussions related to each issue, but also the final ruling so that he can be sure comply with the accepted halachah in each case. (יצודקי)

(3) In positioning the words of the Torah deep within his heart, David has internalized them so that they have become part of his active thinking process rather than a rote memorization. (נר לרגלי)

(4) David feels that he is always in the presence of the words of the Torah. Thus, he is assured of conforming his actions to them. (אבן יהי"א)

BEIS 4: LEARNING TORAH

(יב) בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה'

לְמַדְנִי חֻקֶיךָ:

Blessed are You, Hashem – בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' – teach me Your decrees – לְמַדְנִי חֻקֶיךָ.

In this pasuk David demonstrates a proper approach to learning Torah. He begins with acknowledging and praising Hashem as the source of all Torah wisdom as well as all forms of blessing that a human being can receive (בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה'). He addresses Hashem directly because the process of learning His Torah is a very personal one and is unique to each individual. As he learns, the wisdom of the Torah is being transmitted directly to his mind from the mind of Hashem.

David then asks Hashem to teach him personally, thereby committing himself to applying his mind to receive the wisdom that Hashem will choose to grant. He identifies a specific area of focus (חֻקֶיךָ) because effective learning is not random. A person needs to adopt a learning structure and a clear knowledge objective so that his mind can grasp and remember what he has learned.

David specifically focuses on the decrees in this pasuk since they present a special challenge. These are mitzvos for which some aspect of the procedure seems to have little or no apparent rationale. Therefore a person needs extra help from Hashem to gain the insight and understanding that will help him perform those mitzvos to the best of his ability.

Additional Insights

(1) By acknowledging Hashem as the Teacher of the Torah, a person becomes deserving of being taught its wisdom. (אבן עזרא)

(2) Not only is Hashem the Teacher of the Torah, His relationship with mankind is based on His quality of doing good for the beings that He has

created. (ספורנו)

(3) David has previously committed himself to observe the Decrees even though he realizes they are designed not to be fully understood (Mizmor 119-005). He now show his love for the mitzvos by asking for a greater understanding. (דמאירי, מלבי"ם)

(4) David's plea to be taught the Torah is a humble admission that without Hashems's help he will be unable to learn its wisdom by himself. (בן רמור)

BEIS 5: SHARING TORAH

(יג) בְּשִׁפְתַי סִפְרָתִי
כָּל מִשְׁפָּטֵי פִיךָ:

With my lips I have recounted — בְּשִׁפְתַי סִפְרָתִי **all the Mishpatim** (the ordnances) **of Your mouth** — כָּל מִשְׁפָּטֵי פִיךָ and shared them with other men, thereby increasing my own understanding.

In this pasuk David describes how he has adopted the practice of sharing the Mishpatim using the instrument of his lips.

David refers to the Mishpatim symbolically as the product of the mouth of Hashem. This symbolism is important because it was used by Hashem in describing the Creation of the world through His spoken words. It also symbolize the living spirit which Hashem breathed into man in giving him life. That spiritual breath represents the conversion of abstract ideas into the physical existence of speech and action.

The mouth of Hashem is therefore the means by which His wisdom is transmitted to man. Man is then permitted to emulate his Creator by using his own mouth to share that wisdom with others.

Additional Insights

(1) In the previous pasuk (119-012) David asked Hashem to teach him the Torah. Now he commits himself to sharing that which he has been taught. (מצודות)

(2) David describes his sharing of the Torah with the word סִפְרָתִי. This word implies repeating things that are already known, but each retelling may bring with it further insight. It is therefore used in the retelling of the departure from Mitzrayim during the Pesach Seder. (מלבי"ם)

(3) David says that he has refrained from making assumptions about the knowledge of his listeners. He has gone over **all** the details (כל משפטי).
(נר לרגלי)

BEIS 6: JOY IN MITZVOS

(יד) בְּדַרְךָ עֲדוֹתֶיךָ
שִׂשְׂתִּי כְּעַל כָּל הוֹן:

I have experienced a life following **the way of Your Eidos** — בְּדַרְךָ עֲדוֹתֶיךָ, and in doing so, **I rejoiced as much as in all riches** — שִׂשְׂתִּי כְּעַל כָּל הוֹן.

In this pasuk David visualizes the Eidos as a way of living (דָרֶךְ). He is thrilled to have found a way through life that has brought him joy. He finds this spiritual and intellectual joy as being at least as satisfying as the excited pleasure someone might find from a newfound inheritance of material riches.

Additional Insights

(1) True joy comes from the acquisition of wisdom. The word בְּדַרְךָ implies gaining complete knowledge of a phenomenon, including what brought it about and what are its consequences. (היצהר)

(2) This pasuk demonstrates the importance of being in a joyful mood when doing mitzvos. (טיב התהלות)

(3) By fulfilling any of the Eidos, a person feels ennobled and exalted in a spiritual sense. He feels more capable of meeting challenges and doing more mitzvos. This magnified potential corresponds to a sense of a power that he might gain from material treasures. (רשר"ה)

BEIS 7: MEDITATION

(טו) בְּכִלְכֵּל אֶשְׁיחָה
וְאֶבִּיטָה אֶרְחֹתֶיךָ:

I meditate upon Your doctrines — בְּכִלְכֵּל אֶשְׁיחָה at every opportunity **and I look intently at Your ways** — וְאֶבִּיטָה אֶרְחֹתֶיךָ with my mind's eye.

In this pasuk David sings about the time during the day that he devotes to reflecting upon the many Pikudim and exploring their significance. To properly appreciate the opportunities for gratitude to Hashem, David allows his mind's eye to

dwell upon the endless ways by which Hashem controls every detailed aspect of the vast world we live in.

The details of the mitzvos of the mind are extensively explored in the sefer Chovos Halevavos.

Additional Insights

(1) The word **אָשִׁיחָה** has been translated as referring to meditation. However, it may also refer to speaking, such as in casual conversation. In this sense, meditation is the act of speaking to one's heart. (אבן עזרא, מצודות) (רד"ק, היצהרי)

(2) The thoughts inspired by the Pikudim should always be near the top of one's mind so that they readily come up in conversation. (נר לרגלי)

(3) Through a study of Hashem's ways, one may also be inspired to perform certain physical mitzvos such as visiting the sick and helping those who are in need. To the extent we are able to identify Hashem's ways it is a mitzvah to emulate them. (אלשיך)

BEIS 8: FASCINATION

**טו) בְּחֻקֹתֶיךָ אֶשְׁתַּעֲשֶׂע
לֹא אֶשְׁכַּח דְּבָרְךָ:**

I will absorb myself in Your Chukim — **בְּחֻקֹתֶיךָ אֶשְׁתַּעֲשֶׂע** even though they do not easily lend themselves to rational interpretation. As a result, I am sure that **I will not forget Your word** — **לֹא אֶשְׁכַּח דְּבָרְךָ**.

David reveals his fascination with the Chukim by describing his feeling of being totally absorbed in learning whatever he can about them. He is convinced that the effort he is putting into that intense involvement will prevent him from ever forgetting them.

Additional Insights

(1) The word **אֶשְׁתַּעֲשֶׂע** is based on a root (**שעע**) which suggests stroking and repeatedly turning to something. This recalls the way a child becomes so fascinated with a toy that he is oblivious to any distraction. (רש"י)

(2) David says he is constantly and repeatedly occupying my self with the

study of Chukim in order that he will not forget them. (מצודות)

(3) The joy that I get in familiarizing myself with the Chukim ensures that I will not forget them. (רד"ק)

(4) The word **בְּחֻקֶיךָ** (Your Chukim) also suggest the complex laws by which Hashem runs the universe. David is fascinated by the wondrous world we live in. (אבן עזרא)