



Mizmor Kaf Gimmel -

Studying Psalm 23 in Hebrew

The Hebrew title for the book of Psalms is called *Tehillim*, meaning “songs of praise.” Individual psalms are referred to as *Mizmorim*: Mizmor Aleph (Psalm 1), Mizmor Bet (Psalm 2), and so on. Mizmor Kaf Gimmel (Psalm 23) is one of the most comforting and well-known of all of the *Tehillim*, revealing the *middot* (attributes) of God as the Good Shepherd (*ha-ro'eh ha-tov*).



מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד יְהוָה רֹעִי לֹא אֶחְסָר

I shall not want

The LORD is
my Shepherd

<< a Psalm of David

pasuk



Mizmor le-David. Adonai Ro'i, lo echsar

Notes:

Adonai Ro'i – “The LORD my shepherd,” hearkens to Gen 49:24, where God is described as רֹעֵה אֲבֹן יִשְׂרָאֵל, “The Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.” If God is Israel’s Shepherd, then His followers are צֹאן מִרְעִיתוֹ (*tzon mar'ito*) - the sheep of His pasture (Psalm 100:3). Note that the word “shepherd” is thought to derive from רֵעַ (*re'a*), meaning *friend*.

Lo echsar - “I shall not lack,” hearkens to Gen 22:14, where God is called יְהוָה יִרְאֵה (*Adonai Yireh*), “The LORD will Provide (or will see).” Since the LORD is our Shepherd, we will not lack His provision. God will see and fully understand our needs.



בְּנֹאֲוֹת דָּשָׁא יִרְבִּיצֵנִי עַל־מֵי מְנוּחֹת יְנַהֲלֵנִי

He leads me resting beside waters He makes me of grass in pastures lie down

pasuk



Bin'ot deshe yarbitzeini, 'al-mei menuchot yenahaleini

Notes:

Menuchah means rest, quietness, and derives from נָחַת (*nachat*), from which the name נֹחַ (*noach*, meaning “rest”) comes. The phrase ‘*al-mei menuchot* refers to “still” or “comforting” waters. אֱלֹהֵי כָל־נֶחֱמָה (*elohei khol-nechamah*), the “God of all comfort” is the term the Apostle Paul uses in 2 Cor 1:3.

This image reminds us that God is יְהוָה שָׁלוֹם (*Adonai Shalom*), the “God of peace” (Judg 6:24).

נַפְשִׁי יִשׁוּבָב יִנְחֵנִי בְּמַעְגְלֵי־צֶדֶק לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ

for His Name's sake in the paths of righteousness He leads me He restores my soul

pasuk



Nafshi yeshoveiv, yancheini ve-ma'gelei-tzedek le-ma'an shemo.

Notes:

The word *yeshoveiv* (“He restoreth”) comes from שׁוּב (*shuv*), which means “to turn or return,” and is the root of the word תְּשׁוּבָה (*teshuvah*), meaning turning back to God through repentance. As the Good Shepherd, הַרְשֵׁת הַטוֹב, (*ha-ro'eh ha-tov*), the LORD gives calls His sheep back to the right path. Ultimately, this turning of the soul is healing, and evokes the Name of God יְהוָה רֹפֵא (*Adonai Rof'ekha* - The LORD your Healer (Ex 15:26)).

The phrase *ve-ma'gelei-tzedek* uses the construct form of מַעְגָּל (*ma'gal*), a sort of track or entrenchment created by cattle being driven by a shepherd. *Ma'gelei tzedek* suggests that the Good Shepherd leads His sheep to tracks or pathways for His Name sake. Note further that this evokes the Name of God יְהוָה צִדְקֵינוּ (*Adonai Tzidkeinu*), the LORD our Righteousness (Jer 23:6, 33:16).



גַּם כִּי־אֵלֶךְ בְּגֵי צַלְמוֹת לֹא־אִירָא רָע

evil I will fear no through the valley Yea, though I walk
of the shadow of death

pasuk



כִּי־אַתָּה עֹמְדִי שֶׁבֶטְךָ וּמִשְׁעֶנֶתְךָ הֵמָּה יְנַחֲמֵנִי

comfort me they and Your staff Your rod with me for Thou are

Gam ki-eilekh be-gei tzalmavet lo-'ira ra,
ki-attah immadi, shivtekha u-mish'antekha heimmah yenachamuni.

Notes:

Even though we might walk within *be-gei tzalmavet*, a death-like valley of shrouded darkness, God's sheep can say, *lo-'ira ra*, "I will fear no evil," since the LORD is יהוה צבאות (*Adonai Tzeva'ot*), the LORD of the armies of heaven, who is always present as יהוה שמה (*Adonai Shammah*), the "God who is there" (Ezekiel 48:35).

The Good Shepherd's rod שֶׁבֶט (*shevet*) and staff מִשְׁעֶנֶת (*mish'enet*) comforts נַחַם (*nacham*, indicating consolation over sorrow) His sheep. Like verse 2, אֱלֹהֵי כָל־נֶחֱמוֹה (*elohei khol-nechamah*), the "God of all comfort" is suggested (2 Cor 1:3).

תַּעֲרֹךְ לִפְנֵי שֻׁלְחָן נֶגֶד צָרָרִי

my enemies in front of a table before me You prepare

pasuk



דִּשְׁאֲנָה בְּשֶׁמֶן רֹאשִׁי כּוֹסִי רוֹיֵחַ

overflows my cup my head with oil You anoint

Ta'arokh lefanai shulchan neged tzorerai,
dishanta va-shemen roshi, kosi revayah.



Notes:

The LORD honors His followers by setting a *shulchan* - שֻׁלְחָן - or table in front of their enemies (i.e., those who cause the followers of the LORD *tzuris*, or grief). This image suggests the idea of יְהוָה נִסִּי (*Adonai nissi*), the LORD my banner (or the LORD my miracle). The Hebrew word נֶס (*nes*) was a triangular banner of an army unit or tribe. *Nes* also can refer to a miracle, as in *nes gadol hayah sham*, “a great miracle occurred there.”

The phrase דַּשַׁנְתִּי בַשֶּׁמֶן רֹאשִׁי (*dashanti va-shemen roshi*) means “you fatten my head with oil.” Since fat animals were considered the healthiest, and fat was regarded as the best part of the sacrifice (Psalm 20:3), the head of the follower of the LORD is said to be “anointed with oil” as a poetic description of the blessing of God. The overflowing cup also suggests the image of יְהוָה יִרְאֶה (*Adonai Yireh*), “The LORD will Provide.”

pasuk
אֶךְ טוֹב וְחֶסֶד יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל־יְמֵי חַיִּי

of my life all the days will pursue me and mercy goodness Surely

וְשָׁבְתִי בֵּית־יְהוָה לְאֶרֶךְ יָמִים

days for length in the house and I will
 of of the LORD dwell

*Akh tov va-chesed yirdefuni kol-yemei chiyai,
 ve-shavti be-veit-Adonai le-orekh yamim.*

Notes:

Goodness (*tov*) and unfailing love (*chesed*) are said to “pursue me” (*yirdefuni*) all the days of my life. The verb used here, רָדַף (*radaf*), means to run after, to track (as a hunter might track his prey), to pursue and take captive, suggesting that the Good Shepherd is *relentless* in His care and love for His sheep. God will haunt His followers with the truth of His goodness and unfailing love all the days of their lives. Yielding to the love of God causes you to return to the “house of the LORD” (the verb *ve-shavti* comes from שָׁב (*shuv*), which means “to turn or return,” and is the root of the word תְּשׁוּבָה (*teshuvah*)).



The first part of *שלש עשרה מדות שלש Shelosh Esrei Middot* (Ex. 34:6), the listing of the thirteen attributes (*middot*) of God's mercy, reads: *יהוה יהוה אל רחום וחנון ארך אפים ורב־חסד נאמֶת* (*Adonai, Adonai, El Rachum ve-CHANUN, Erekh apayim, ve-rav-chesed ve-emet*), "The LORD, the LORD God of compassion and grace, slow to anger, and abundant in love and truth." Psalm 23 is a picture of what these attributes of mercy mean to those who follow the LORD and are under His care.

Psalm 23 in Hebrew

מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד יְהוָה רֹעִי לֹא אֶחְסָר:
בְּנֵאוֹת דֶּשֶׁא יַרְבִּיצֵנִי עַל־מֵי מְנוּחֹת יְנַהֲלֵנִי:
נַפְשִׁי יִשׁוּבֵב יִנְחֵנִי בְּמַעְגְּלֵי־צֶדֶק לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ:
גַּם כִּי־אֵלֶךְ בְּגֵיא צַלְמוֹת לֹא־אִירָא רָע
כִּי־אִתָּה עֲמֹדִי שִׁבְטְךָ וּמַשְׁעֲנֶתְךָ הַמָּה יִנְחֲמֵנִי:
תַּעֲרֹךְ לִפְנֵי שְׁלַחַן נֶגֶד צִרְרֵי דִשְׁנֶת
בְּשֶׁמֶן רֹאשִׁי כוֹסֵי רוּחָה:
אֵךְ טוֹב וְחֶסֶד יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל־יְמֵי חַיִּי וְשִׁבְתִּי
בְּבֵית־יְהוָה לְאָרְךָ יָמִים:

Psalm 23 (KJV)

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.



Shelosh Esreh Middot

After the Jews had committed the grievous sin with the golden calf, Moses despaired of the Jews ever being able to find favor in God's eyes again. God, however (as explained in the Talmud (Tractate Rosh Hashanah 17b)) donned a tallit, and, in the role of a chazzan, showed Moses the order of the thirteen attributes of mercy. God proclaims thirty-two words (Exod. 34:6-7) that have become known in Jewish tradition as the Shelosh Esrei Middot, the Thirteen Attributes of God:

"And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." (KJV)

שֶׁלֶשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה מִדּוֹת

יְהוָה¹ יְהוָה² אֵל³ רַחוּם⁴ וְחַנּוּן⁵ אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם⁶
וְרַב־חֶסֶד⁷ וְאֱמֶת⁸;
נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לְאֲלָפִים⁹ נִשָּׂא עוֹן וּפָשַׁע¹¹ וְחַטָּאת¹²
וְנִקָּה¹³ לֹא יִנָּקֶה פֶקֶד עוֹן אָבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים
וְעַל־בְּנֵי בָנִים עַל־שְׁלִשִׁים וְעַל־רַבָּעִים:

According to traditional interpretations, the thirteen attributes are articulated as follows:

1. The LORD (YHVH)
2. The LORD (the repetition of God's name indicates that God is merciful to one who has not yet sinned and also to one who has sinned but has repented)
3. *El* - God the Mighty
4. *Rachum*: God the compassionate;
5. *Vechanun*: God is gracious;
6. *Erech Apayim*: God is slow to anger, patient in waiting for our repentance;
7. *Verav Chesed*: God is abundant in kindness to both the righteous and the wicked;
8. *Ve'emet*: God is truthful and faithful in carrying out promises;
9. *Notzer Chesed La'alafim*: God extends kindness for a thousand generations, taking into account the merit of our worthy ancestors (Zechut Avot);
10. *Nosei Avon*: God forgives iniquity, defined in the tradition as wrongful deeds committed with premeditation;
11. *Vafesha*: God forgives transgression, defined as wrongful deeds committed in a rebellious spirit;
12. *Vechata'ah*: God forgives sin, those wrongful deeds that were inadvertent;
13. *Venakeh*: God will not cancel all punishment, only for those who are repentant.