

THE ABCDEGFHIJ FAMILY EDITION

מדרש תהלים

שחר טוב

MIDRASH TEHILLIM

WITH INTRALINEAR TRANSLATION, ELUCIDATION
AND CLASSICAL COMMENTARIES ON BOOK OF PSALMS
ILLUMINATED BY CHASSIDIC INSIGHTS



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Midrash Tehillim — The Midrash on Psalms

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A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

The Nature of this Work

This volume presents an original English elucidation and commentary, prepared through a combination of advanced language and translation technology and experienced human editorial oversight. The methods employed were carefully configured to adhere to Orthodox Jewish *hashkafa* and to preserve fidelity to the original Hebrew text, and portions of the work were reviewed by an experienced translator and editor of Torah literature. Even so, this edition does not carry the authority of a translation prepared and certified by a full team of rabbinic scholars.

Usage and Limitations

This translation is intended as a tool to help advanced learners access the depth of the original work. It is **not** intended to replace the original Hebrew source, nor to serve as a substitute for study under a qualified teacher.

Because the nuance of Torah study often transcends any single method of preparation, we ask the reader to keep two things in mind:

1. **Verification:** Any novel insight, ruling, or conclusion drawn from this translation should be checked against the original Hebrew.
2. **Consultation:** All practical questions or derived lessons should be discussed with and verified by a qualified rabbinic authority before being relied upon.

The goal of this edition is to make these teachings accessible to a wider audience, but the responsibility for accurate understanding and practical application remains with the reader.

BS"D

*With heartfelt gratitude to Hashem,
this sefer is lovingly dedicated
in loving memory of*

**R' Avraham ben Yaakov z"l
and Sarah bas Moshe a"h**

*who cherished every letter of the holy Torah
and lived by its light*

The ABCDEFG Family

(full-page dedication — sample)

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PSALM I

Praise of the man who shuns the wicked and delights in Torah; Dovid's composition of Tehillim and its application to Adam, Noah, Avraham, the tribe of Levi, and the sons of Korach

SUMMARY

The midrash on the opening psalm of Tehillim is among the longest and most expansive in the collection, fitting for the verse that opens the entire book. Its governing *pesicha* is *Mishlei* 11:27 — “He who desires good seeks favor” — read as a portrait of Dovid HaMelech, who sought the good of the Jewish people and the resting of the Divine Presence so that he might bless them with the word *Ashrei*.

A series of *davar acher* (alternative) expositions follows, each rereading the threefold structure of the verse — “did not walk... did not stand... did not sit” — and the praise of the Torah-saturated “tree planted by streams of water.” The midrash applies the psalm in turn to Adam (who failed to escape the serpent’s scoffing), to Noah (who shunned three corrupt generations), to Avraham (who broke with the generation of the Dispersion and with Sodom), to the tribe of Levi (which refused the Golden Calf), and to the sons of Korach (who broke ranks with their father).

Interwoven are major aggadic units: the comparison of Moshe and Dovid as the choicest of prophets and kings; the ten authors and ten modes of song that make up Tehillim; the cumulative chain of blessing from creation through the Patriarchs down to Dovid’s *Ashrei*; the rabbinic resolution of how one can “meditate day and night” through tefillin and Krias Shema; the comparison of Torah to water; and a closing meditation on the final judgment, in which the righteous endure like a tree while the wicked are scattered like chaff and consumed in Gehinom. Throughout, the midrash insists that Dovid, like his Creator, “let no unseemly word leave his mouth” — choosing the gentle “*did not walk*” over a curse.

Peticha: Dovid sought the good of the Jewish people

“אֲשֶׁרִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הֵלֵךְ. זֶה שְׂאֵמֵר הַטּוֹב (משלי יא כז) שׁוֹחֵר טוֹב יִבְקֹשׁ רָצוֹן.” “The praises of the man who did not walk.” This is what Scripture says: “He who desires good seeks favor” (*Mishlei* 11:27). The midrash opens *Tehillim* 1:1 with its signature *pesicha* from *Mishlei* — the verse from which this whole work takes its name, *Shocher Tov*. מִי הוּא זֶה. זֶה דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל. שֶׁהָיָה שׁוֹחֵר בְּטוֹבָתָן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהַעֲמִיד מִיָּהוּן כ"ד מִשְׁמְרוֹת כְּהֻנָּה וְעִשְׂרִים וָאַרְבַּע מִשְׁמְרוֹת לְוִיָּה. Who is this? This is Dovid, king of the Jewish people, who sought the good of the Jewish people, to establish from among them twenty-four watches of kohanim and twenty-four watches of Levites. “He who desires good” (*shocher tov*) is Dovid, whose seeking of the nation’s welfare took concrete form in organizing the priestly and Levitical service. יִבְקֹשׁ רָצוֹן שֶׁהָיָה מִבְּקֹשׁ. רַחֲמִים שֶׁתִּשְׁרָה עָלָיו שְׂכִינָה כְּדִי לְבָרֶךְ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְהִיכֵן בִּרְכוֹן בְּאֲשֶׁרִי הָאִישׁ. “Seeks favor” — for he would beseech mercy that the Divine Presence rest upon him, so that he might bless the Jewish people. And where did he bless them? In “*Ashrei ha’ish*.” Dovid’s “seeking of favor” was his prayer for inspiration to bless the nation, and that blessing is the very word *Ashrei* with which the book opens. (שם) וְדוֹרֵשׁ רָעָה תְּבוֹאָנָו. זֶה דּוֹעַג וְאַחִיתּוֹפֵל. “But he who seeks out evil — it will come upon him” (*Mishlei* 11:27). This is Doeg and Achitofel. The verse’s second clause is read as the foil to Dovid: those who plotted his harm, whose evil recoiled upon themselves.¹

¹ Doeg the Edomite and Achitofel were Dovid’s most dangerous adversaries; their plots recoiled fatally upon themselves, the embodiment of “he who seeks out evil — it will come upon him” (*Mishlei* 11:27).

Davar acher: “And David sat before Hashem”

דָּבָר אַחֵר אֲשֶׁרִי הָאִישׁ. זֶה שֶׁאָמַר הַפֶּתוּב (שמואל-ב ז יח) וַיָּבֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד וַיֵּשֶׁב לִפְנֵי ה'. An-other interpretation of “Ashrei ha’ish.” This is what Scripture says: “And King David came and sat before Hashem” (II Shmuel 7:18). A new exposition is launched from Dovid’s unusual act of *sitting* before Hashem in the Sanctuary. **וְכֵן תָּנִי רַבִּי חִיָּיא אֵין יוֹשִׁיבָה בְּעֶזְרָה אֶלָּא לְמַלְכֵי בֵּית דָּוִד בְּלֻבָּד. וְכֵן רַבִּי אַמִּי בְּשֵׁם רִישׁ לָקִישׁ אָמַר אֵין יוֹשִׁיבָה בְּעֶזְרָה אֶלָּא מְקוֹם מַלְכֵי בֵּית דָּוִד בְּלֻבָּד. וְכֵן** And so Rabbi Chiya taught: There is no sitting in the Temple courtyard except for the kings of the house of David alone. Rabbi Ami in the name of Reish Lakish said: There is no sitting in the courtyard — only [it is permitted in] the place of the kings of the house of David alone. And so it says, “And David sat.” The privilege of sitting in the sacred courtyard belonged uniquely to Davidic kings, which is why the verse records that Dovid “sat.” **וְלֹא כֵן אָמַר רַב הוּנָא בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי יִשְׁמַעְאֵל אֵין יוֹשִׁיבָה לְמַעְלָה שְׁנֹאֲמַר (דניאל ז טז) קִרְבַּת עַל חַד “sat.” מִן קְאָמְיָא. שְׂאִין לָהֶם קְפִיצַת הָרָגָל. שְׁנֹאֲמַר (יחזקאל א ז) וְרַגְלֵיהֶם רָגַל יִשְׁרָה. וְכַתִּיב (ישעיה ו ב) שְׂרָפִים עֹמְדִים מִמַּעַל לוֹ. וְכַתִּיב (זכריה ג ז) וְנָתַתִּי לָהֶם מַהֲלָכִים בֵּין הָעֹמְדִים הָאֵלֶּה. לְמַעְלָה אֵין יוֹשִׁיבָה. וְדָוִד יוֹשֵׁב.** But did not Rav Huna say in the name of Rabbi Yishmael: There is no sitting on high, as it says, “I came near to one of those who stood by” (Daniel 7:16) — for they have no bending of the leg, as it says, “and their legs were a straight leg” (Yechezkel 1:7); and it is written, “Serafim stood above Him” (Yeshaya 6:2); and it is written, “I will grant you free passage among these who stand” (Zechariah 3:7). If there is no sitting on high, shall Dovid sit? A difficulty is raised: even the angels do not sit before Hashem — their legs are unbending and they perpetually stand. How then could Dovid sit?² **אָמַר רַבִּי אַמִּי אַף לְמַלְכֵי בֵּית דָּוִד אֵין לָהֶם** Rabbi Ami said: Even the kings of the house of David have no [literal] sitting. And what is “and he sat”? That he braced himself. Rabbi Ami resolves that Dovid did not literally sit either; *vayeshev* means he leaned or supported himself. **וְלָמִי הִיתָה.** And to whom did **יֹשִׁיבָה הָיָי אֹמֵר לְכֹהֵן גָּדוֹל. שְׁנֹאֲמַר (שמואל-א א ט) וְעֲלִי הַכֹּהֵן יֹשֵׁב עַל הַכִּסֵּא.** sitting belong? You must say: to the High Priest, as it says, “And Eli the kohen was sitting on the chair” (I Shmuel 1:9). Genuine seated rest in the Sanctuary belonged to the High Priest alone. **אִם כֵּן מָהוּ וַיֵּשֶׁב לִפְנֵי ה' שְׂיֹשֵׁב עֲצָמוּ בְּתַפְלָה.** If so, what is “and he sat before Hashem”? That he settled himself in prayer. Dovid’s “sitting” denotes his composing himself for prayer. **תָּמָן תִּנְיִנָן עֲמוּנֵי וּמוֹאֲבֵי אִיסוּרָן אִיסוּר עוֹלָם אֲבָל נִקְבוּתֵיהֶן מִתְּרוּת מִיָּד.** There we learned: An Ammonite and a Moavite — their prohibition is an eternal prohibition, but their women are permitted at once. The midrash now turns to the content of Dovid’s prayer, which hinges on this law: the prohibition against marrying into Ammon and Moav applies only to the males, while their women may marry into the Jewish people immediately. **(שמואל-ב ז יח) וַיֹּאמֶר מִי אֲנֹכִי וְגו'.** וּמִי בֵּיתִי כִּי הִבִּיאֲתָנִי עַד הָלֶם. מָה הוּא עַד הָלֶם. לֹא דִי שִׁבְאֲתִי בִקְהָל אֶלָּא שְׁעִשִׁיתָנִי מֶלֶךְ. וְאֵין הָלֶם וּמִי בֵּיתִי כִּי הִבִּיאֲתָנִי עַד הָלֶם. אֶלָּא מֶלֶךְ שְׁנֹאֲמַר (שמואל-א י כב) הֲבָא עוֹד הָלֶם אִישׁ. “And he said, Who am I... and what is my house, that You have brought me thus far (ad halom)?” (II Shmuel 7:18). What is “thus far”? It is not enough that I have entered the assembly, but You have made me king. And “halom” denotes nothing but kingship, as it says, “Has the man yet come here (halom)?” (I Shmuel 10:22). Dovid — descended from Ruth the Moavite — marvels not only that he was

² The cited verses establish that the celestial beings stand and do not sit: *Daniel* 7:16 (“those who stood by”), *Yechezkel* 1:7 (“a straight leg”), *Yeshaya* 6:2 (“Serafim stood”), *Zechariah* 3:7 (“among these who stand”).

admitted into the congregation of the Jewish people but that he was raised to kingship, the word *halom* alluding (as at Shaul's selection) to royalty. (שְׁמוּאֵל-ב ז יט) וַתִּקַּטְן עוֹד זֹאת בְּעֵינֶיךָ בְּאֵינֶשׁ. “And this was yet small in Your eyes” (II Shmuel 7:19) — like a person who says to his fellow: This is a small thing in your sight. A colloquial gloss: Dovid expresses that even this kingship Hashem regards as a minor gift. (שָׁם) וַתִּדְבֹּר גַּם אֶל בֵּית עֲבָדְךָ. “And You have spoken also concerning Your servant's house for a great while to come (l'merachok)” — for I was far off and was brought near. *L'merachok* is read against Dovid's distant, Moavite origins: he who was “far” has been drawn close. (שָׁם) וְזֹאת. זאת שִׁפְתֵּיךָ בְּתוֹרָתְךָ (דְּבָרִים כג ד) לֹא יָבֹא עַמּוֹנִי וּמוֹאָבִי. לֹא כְתִבְתָּ אֶלָּא עַל הָאָדָם. וְזֹאת תוֹרַת הָאָדָם אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב אֵין בְּתֵיב כָּאן. אֶלָּא תוֹרַת. וְזֹאת תוֹרַת הָאָדָם אַבְרָהָם, יִצְחָק, וְיַעֲקֹב, “And this is the teaching of man (torat ha'adam)” — this which You wrote in Your Torah, “An Ammonite and a Moavite shall not enter” (Devarim 23:4): You wrote it only of the male (ha'adam), but their women are permitted at once. Dovid reads *torat ha'adam* as the legal warrant for his own legitimacy: the verse bars the *man*, not the woman, of Ammon and Moav. אֶלָּא תוֹרַת. “And this is the teaching of man” — it does not say here “Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov,” but rather “the teaching of man.” The choice of the generic word *adam* rather than the Patriarchs' names is itself significant, setting up the next theme. וּמִי הוּא מְשֻׁבַּח שְׁבַנְבְּיָאִים. מְשֻׁבַּח שְׁבַנְבְּיָאִים זֶה מֹשֶׁה. מְשֻׁבַּח שְׁבַנְבְּיָאִים זֶה דָּוִד. And who is the choicest of the prophets and the choicest of the kings? The choicest of the prophets is Moshe; the choicest of the kings is Dovid. The word *ha'adam* — “the man” — points to the two preeminent figures who will now be compared. אֶת מוֹצֵא שְׁכַל מֶה שֶׁעָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה עָשָׂה דָּוִד. מֹשֶׁה הוֹצִיא אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם, וְדָוִד הוֹצִיא אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִשְׁעַבְדֵּי מַלְכֵיכִיּוֹת. מֹשֶׁה עָשָׂה מִלְחָמוֹת בְּסִיחוֹן וְעוֹג, וְדָוִד עָשָׂה מִלְחָמוֹתָיו שֶׁל הַקֶּב"ה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שְׁמוּאֵל-א כה כח) כִּי מִלְחָמוֹת ה' אֲדֹנֵי נִלְחָם. מֹשֶׁה מָלָךְ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְהוּדָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (דְּבָרִים לג ה) וַיְהִי בִישְׂרֹון מָלָךְ, וְדָוִד מָלָךְ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְהוּדָה. מֹשֶׁה קָרַע לֵהֶם אֶת הַיָּם, וְדָוִד קָרַע לֵהֶם אֶת הַנְּהָרוֹת שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (תְּהִלִּים ס ב) בְּהַצֹּתוֹ אֶת אֲרָם נְהָרִים. מֹשֶׁה בָּנָה מִזְבֵּחַ, וְדָוִד בָּנָה מִזְבֵּחַ, זֶה הַקָּרִיב וְזֶה הַקָּרִיב. מֹשֶׁה נָתַן לֵהֶם חֻמְשֵׁי תוֹרָה, וּכְנֻגָּדָם נָתַן לֵהֶם דָּוִד סֵפֶר תְּהִלִּים שֵׁשׁ בּוֹ חֻמְשֵׁי סִפְרִים: אֲשֶׁרֵי הָאִישׁ, לְמִנְצֵחַ מִשְׁכִּיל, מִזְמוֹר לְאֶסְכֶּר, תְּפִלָּה לְמֹשֶׁה, וְדָוִד כָּל הַבְּרָךְ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרָךְ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל. מֹשֶׁה בְּרָךְ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרָךְ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל. You find that everything Moshe did, Dovid did. Moshe brought the Jewish people out of Mitzrayim, and Dovid brought the Jewish people out of subjugation to the kingdoms. Moshe waged wars against Sichon and Og, and Dovid waged the wars of the Holy One, as it says, “for my lord fights the battles of Hashem” (I Shmuel 25:28). Moshe was king over the Jewish people and Yehudah, as it says, “And he was king in Yeshurun” (Devarim 33:5), and Dovid was king over the Jewish people and Yehudah. Moshe split the sea for them, and Dovid split the rivers for them, as it says, “when he strove with Aram Naharaim” (Tehillim 60:2). Moshe built an altar, and Dovid built an altar; this one offered, and this one offered. Moshe gave them the five books of the Torah, and corresponding to them Dovid gave them the book of Tehillim, which contains five books: “Ashrei ha'ish,” “Lamnatze'ach maskil,” “Mizmor le'Asaf,” “Tefillah le'Moshe,” “Yomru ge'ulei.” Moshe blessed the Jewish people with “Ashrecha,” and Dovid blessed with “Ashrei.” A sustained set of parallels establishes that Dovid mirrors Moshe in every respect — culminating in the structural parallel between the Five Books of the Torah and the five books of

Tehillim, and the shared blessing-word *Ashrei*.³ (מְשַׁלִּי ח ח) בְּצֶדֶק כָּל אֲמָרֵי פִי אֵין בָּהֶם נִפְתָּל וְעִקֵּשׁ. אֵין בָּהֶם לֹא קִפְדָּנוֹת וְלֹא עֲקָמנוֹת. מְצִינוּ שְׁעָקָם הַכְּתוּב שְׁתֵּים וְשָׁלֹשׁ אוֹתִיּוֹת וְלֹא הוֹצִיא דָּבָר מִגִּנָּה. “All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing twisted or perverse in them” (Mishlei 8:8) — there is in them neither harshness nor crookedness. We find that Scripture went out of its way by two or three letters so as not to let an unseemly word leave its mouth, as it says, “of the clean animal, and of the animal that is not clean” (Bereishis 7:8). Rather than write the shorter “the unclean animal,” the Torah used the longer circumlocution “the animal that is not clean,” to avoid an indelicate phrase. (וַיִּקְרָא יֵאֵד) אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹדֵן בֶּר' מְנַשֵּׂיָא אַף כְּשָׁבָא לִפְתָּח בְּסִימְנֵי טְהֵרָה. (שָׁם ז) וְאַתָּה הִחֲזִיר כִּי לֹא מַעֲלָה גֵרָה אֶת הַגָּמֶל כִּי לֹא מִפְּרִיס פֶּרֶסָה אֵין כְּתִיב כֹּאן אֶלָּא כִּי מַעֲלָה גֵרָה. Rabbi Yudan son of Rabbi Menasheh said: Even when it came to open with signs of cleanness — it is not written here “the camel, for it does not split the hoof,” but rather “for it chews the cud” (Vayikra 11:4); and it is not written “the swine, for it does not chew the cud,” but rather “for it splits the hoof” (Vayikra 11:7). Even in listing forbidden animals, Scripture leads with each creature’s *clean* sign before naming its disqualifying one, so as to speak of them favorably. אָמַר דָּוִד אַף הַקֵּב"ה הֵעִיד עָלַי וְאָמַר (שְׁמוּאֵל-א יג יד) בָּקֵשׁ. אֶת הַגָּמֶל כִּי לֹא מִפְּרִיס פֶּרֶסָה אֵין כְּתִיב כֹּאן אֶלָּא כִּי מַעֲלָה גֵרָה. Dovid said: ה' לֹא אִישׁ כָּלִבָּבוֹ. וְכִנָּה שְׁמוֹ לְבוֹרְאוֹ מִה בּוֹרְאוֹ לֹא מוֹצִיא דָּבָר מִגִּנָּה מִפִּיו אַף דָּוִד כֵּן. The Holy One too testified about me and said, “Hashem has sought for Himself a man after His own heart” (I Shmuel 13:14); and He likened his manner to that of his Creator — just as his Creator lets no unseemly word leave His mouth, so too Dovid. Being “after Hashem’s heart” means imitating the Divine restraint in speech. הָיָה לוֹ לומר אֲרוּר הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הִלֵּךְ בְּעֵצַת. רַשָּׁעִים אוֹ אֲשֶׁרִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הִלֵּךְ בְּעֵצַת צְדִיקִים. וְלֹא אָמַר אֶלָּא לֹא הִלֵּךְ. He could have said, “Cursed is the man who walked in the counsel of the wicked,” or “Praiseworthy is the man who walked in the counsel of the righteous”; yet he said only, “did not walk.” Dovid chose the gentle negative formulation — neither cursing the wicked nor framing the praise positively — to keep an unseemly word from his mouth.⁴ כִּיּוֹצֵא בְּדָבָר אֶתְּהָ אֹמֵר (יִרְמְיָה טו א) אִם יַעֲמֵד מֹשֶׁה וְשְׁמוּאֵל. אֶתְּהָ מוֹצֵא שְׁכָל מִה שְׁכָתוֹב בְּזֶה כְּתוּב בְּזֶה. זֶה לֹי וְזֶה לֹי. זֶה בָּנָה מִזְבֵּחַ וְזֶה בָּנָה מִזְבֵּחַ. זֶה הִקְרִיב וְזֶה הִקְרִיב. זֶה מָלַךְ וְזֶה מָלַךְ. וְכֵן הוּא אֹמֵר (דְּבָרִים יח טו) נָבִיא מִקְרָבָה מֵאַחֲרֵי כְּמוֹנֵי יָקִים. וְכֵן תִּמְצֵא בִּירְמְיָה. מִה שְׁכָתוֹב בְּזֶה כְּתוּב בְּזֶה. כִּיּוֹצֵא בְּדָבָר דָּוִד וְשְׁלֹמֹה. מִה שְׁכָתוֹב בְּזֶה כְּתוּב בְּזֶה. Similarly you may say: “Even if Moshe and Shmuel were to stand” (Yirmiyahu 15:1). You find that everything written of this one is written of that one: this one a Levite and that one a Levite; this one built an altar and that one built an altar; this one offered and that one offered; this one ruled and that one ruled. And so it says, “A prophet from your midst, from your brethren, like me, will Hashem raise up” (Devarim 18:15). And so you will find with Yirmiyahu — what is written of this one is written of that one. Similarly with Dovid and Shlomo — what is written of this one is written of that one. The pattern of paired equivalents recurs: Moshe and Shmuel, Moshe and the future prophet, Dovid and Shlomo each mirror one another. Rabbi Yudan says: This psalm is the

³ The five books of Tehillim are identified by their opening verses: Book I — *Ashrei ha'ish* (Ps. 1); Book II — *Lamnatze'ach maskil* (Ps. 42); Book III — *Mizmor le'Asaf* (Ps. 73); Book IV — *Tefillah le'Moshe* (Ps. 90); Book V — *Yomru ge'ulei* (Ps. 107). Moshe’s blessing closes, “Ashrecha Yisrael” (*Devarim* 33:29).

⁴ Compare Rashi (*Tehillim* 1:1), who reads the threefold negation as a single descending sequence — “because he did not walk, he did not stand; and because he did not stand, he did not sit” — the verse praising the man’s careful avoidance at each stage.

⁵ Cf. *Mishlei* 25:6, on not presuming to take a place among the great. The midrash uses it to introduce Rabbi Pinchas's expansive chain of blessings from creation down to Dovid.

comprised. Rabbi Levi in the name of Rabbi Chama said: He did not bless him, but gave him gifts. And why did he not bless him? A parable follows to explain Avraham's reticence. מְשַׁל לְמַלְךְ שֶׁהָיָה לוֹ פֶּרֶס וּמָסָר. אָמַר הָאָרִיס אִם לְאָרִיס וְהָיָה בּוֹ כָּל מִינֵי אֵילָנוֹת פְּרוּכִין זֶה בָּזֶה. אֶחָד שֶׁל סֵם חַיִּים וְאֶחָד שֶׁל סֵם הַמָּוֶת. אָמַר הָאָרִיס אִם אֲנִי מְשַׁקָּה שֶׁל סֵם חַיִּים שֶׁל סֵם הַמָּוֶת יִחְיֶה עִמּוֹ. וְאִם אֵין אֲנִי מְשַׁקָּהוּ הֵיאָה זֶה שֶׁל סֵם חַיִּים חֵי. הָזָר וְאָמַר אוֹתוֹ הָאָרִיס לְשָׁנָה זוֹ אֲנִי מְשַׁלֵּם אֶת אָרִיסוֹתַי וְהוֹלֶךְ לִי וְיִמָּה דְאֶהְיֶה לְמַרְיָה דְּפֶרְדִּיסָא עֲבִיד. A parable of a king who had an orchard and entrusted it to a tenant. In it were all kinds of trees intertwined with one another — one of an elixir of life and one of a poison of death. The tenant said: If I water the one of the elixir of life, the one of the poison of death will live along with it; and if I do not water it, how will the one of the elixir of life live? That tenant then said: For this year I will complete my tenancy and go my way, and let the master of the orchard do with it what pleases him. The intertwined trees represent Yitzchak's descendants intermingled with Yishmael's and Keturah's, whom a blessing might also benefit. כָּה אָמַר אַבְרָהָם. אֲנִי אֵינִי מְבָרֵךְ אֶת יִצְחָק לְפִי שֶׁעֲכָשׁוּ בְנֵי יִשְׁמָעֵאל וּבְנֵי קֶטוּרָה מִתְבָּרְכִים. אָמַר אַנָּה בֶּשֶׁר וְדָם הַיּוֹם. So Avraham said: I will not bless Yitzchak, since now the children of Yishmael and the children of Keturah would be blessed [as well]. He said: I am flesh and blood — today here and tomorrow in the grave — and whatever [Hashem] wishes to do in His world, let Him do. Avraham left the blessing to Hashem rather than risk extending it to the unworthy. שָׁם בֵּינוֹן שְׁמַת אַבְרָהָם נִגְלָה הַקֹּב"ה עַל יִצְחָק וּבְרָכּוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שָׁם) כָּה יָא וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי מוֹת אַבְרָהָם וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹקִים אֶת יִצְחָק בְּנֹו. וְכֵן עָשָׂה לְיַעֲקֹב שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שָׁם לָה ט) וַיֵּרָא. When Avraham died, the Holy One revealed Himself to Yitzchak and blessed him, as it says, "And it came to pass after Avraham's death that God blessed Yitzchak his son" (Bereishis 25:11). And so He did for Yaakov, as it says, "And God appeared to Yaakov again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him" (Bereishis 35:9). Hashem Himself took up the blessing of Yitzchak and Yaakov. וְעַמֵּד יִצְחָק וַיְבָרֶךְ. אֶת יַעֲקֹב בְּנִתְיָנָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שָׁם כז כח) וַיִּתֵּן לָהּ הָאֱלֹקִים מִטַּל הַשָּׁמַיִם. וְחֶתֶם בְּקִרְיָא (שָׁם כח א) And Yitzchak arose and blessed Yaakov with "giving," as it says, "And may God give you of the dew of heaven" (Bereishis 27:28); and he closed with "calling," as it says, "And Yitzchak called Yaakov and blessed him" (Bereishis 28:1). Now begins the interlocking sequence Rabbi Yudan noted: Yitzchak's blessing closes with the word "called." עַמֵּד יַעֲקֹב לְבָרֶךְ אֶת הַשִּׁבְטִים וּפָתַח בְּמָה שֶׁחֶתֶם יִצְחָק. הִדָּא הוּא דְּכָתִיב (שָׁם מט א) וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב. Yaakov arose to bless the tribes and opened with what Yitzchak had closed. This is what is written, "And Yaakov called his sons" (Bereishis 49:1); and he closed with "this," as it says, "And this is what their father spoke to them" (Bereishis 49:28). Yaakov begins with "called" (where Yitzchak ended) and ends with "this." עַמֵּד מֹשֶׁה לְבָרֶךְ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל אָמַר יַעֲקֹב בְּכוֹרוֹ שֶׁל מָקוֹם פָּתַח בְּקִרְיָא וְחֶתֶם. בְּזֹאת הָרִינִי פּוֹתַח בְּמָה שֶׁחֶתֶם יִצְחָק וְקִנִּי וּפָתַח (דְּבָרִים לג א) בְּזֹאת הַבְּרָכָה. וְחֶתֶם (שָׁם כט) בְּאַשְׁרֵיָה. Moshe arose to bless the Jewish people. He said: Yaakov, the firstborn of the Omnipresent, opened with "calling" and closed with "this"; I shall open with what my grandfather closed. And he opened with "And this is the blessing" (Devarim 33:1), and closed with "Ashrecha" (Devarim 33:29). Moshe begins with "this" (Yaakov's closing word) and ends with "Praiseworthy are you." כֵּינוּן שֶׁעַמֵּד דָּוִד פָּתַח בְּמָה שֶׁחֶתֶם מֹשֶׁה וְאָמַר אֲפִי אֲנִי אַבְרָהָ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאַשְׁרֵי. When Dovid arose, he opened with what Moshe had closed, and said: I too will bless the Jewish

entire book “Hallelu-Yah.” *Halleluyah* unites praise (*hallelu*) with the Divine Name (*Yah*), and Rav accordingly designated the whole work by this title.

“Did not walk... did not stand... did not sit”

אֲשֶׁרִי לֹא הָלַךְ בְּעֵצַת רָשָׁעִים. א"ר שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן פָּזִי וְכִי מֵאַחֵר שָׁלָא הָלַךְ הֵיכֵן עָמַד וּמֵאַחֵר שָׁלָא. “Who did not walk in the counsel of the wicked.” Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi said: Since he did not walk, how could he stand? And since he did not stand, how could he sit? And since he did not sit, how could he scoff? The verse’s three negatives seem redundant — walking, standing, and sitting form a descending progression. אָלָא לֹמַר לָהּ שָׂאֵם הָלַךְ סוּפוֹ לְעָמוּד וְאֵם עָמַד סוּפוֹ לָלוּץ וְאֵם לָץ עָלָיו הַכְּתוּב אוֹמֵר (משלי ט יב). Rather, it is to tell you that if one walked, he will end up standing; and if he stood, he will end up scoffing; and if he scoffed, of him Scripture says, “and if you scoff, you alone will bear it” (Mishlei 9:12). This teaches you that one mitzvah draws another, and [one sin draws another], etc. Sin is incremental: the first misstep leads inexorably to the next. וְכִי מֵאַחֵר שָׁלָא הָלַךְ וְלֹא עָמַד וְלֹא יָשָׁב יָכוֹל לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה לֹא. And since he did not walk, nor stand, nor sit — might one think he should do neither good nor evil, but simply put his hand to his mouth? Scripture says, “But in the Torah of Hashem is his desire” (Tehillim 1:2). Avoiding evil is not enough; the verse continues to a positive command — delight in Torah. א"ר בְּרַכְיָה מֶה בָּא הַכְּתוּב לֹמַר (קהלת ז יז) אֵל תִּרְשָׁע הֶרְבֵּה. הָא צִבְחָר לִירְשָׁע אָלָא אִם הִרְשָׁעַתָּ אֵל תוֹסֵף. Rabbi Berachiah said: What does Scripture mean by “Do not be very wicked” (Koheles 7:17)? Is one then [permitted] to be a little wicked? Rather: if you have done wrong, do not add to it. The verse is not a license for minor wickedness but a charge not to compound a sin once committed. רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחָאי אוֹמֵר יָשָׁב אָדָם וְלֹא עָשָׂה עֲבִירָה נֹתְנִין לוֹ שָׂכָר כְּעוֹשֶׂה מִצְוָה. Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai says: If a person sat and committed no transgression, they grant him reward as one who performed a mitzvah. Restraint from sin can itself merit reward. רַבִּי זְעִירָא אָמַר וְהוּא שְׁבָאֵת לִידּוֹ וְנִיצַל מִמֶּנָּה. שְׁנָאֵמַר (תהלים לד טו לו כז) סוּר מִרַע וְעֲשֵׂה טוֹב. סוּר מִרַע וְעֲשֵׂה טוֹב. Rabbi Ze’ira said: This is when [the opportunity for transgression] came to his hand and he was saved from it, as it says, “Turn from evil and do good” (Tehillim 34:15; 37:27) — turn from evil in order to do good. And so it says, “they have done no wrong; they walked in His ways” (Tehillim 119:3). The reward applies specifically when one was tempted and overcame; “turning from evil” is meant to lead onward to active good. תְּנִי דְבֵי רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן קֶרְחָא עֲשָׂרִים אֲשֶׁרִי. The school of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha taught: Twenty “Ashrei” are written in the book of Tehillim, corresponding to the twenty “Hoy” (woe) in the book of Yeshaya. The “praises” of Tehillim offset the “woes” of Yeshaya. אָמַר רַבִּי תַמָּה אֲנִי הֵיאָה לְמַדְנִי ר' יְהוֹשֻׁעַ עֲשָׂרִים אֲשֶׁרִי כְּתִיב. וְאֲנִי אוֹמֵר עֲשָׂרִים וּשְׁתַּיִם. וְלָמָּה Rabbi [Yehudah HaNasi] said: I wonder how Rabbi Yehoshua taught us that twenty “Ashrei” are written; I say twenty-two. And why? Corresponding to the twenty-two letters [of the alphabet]. Rabbi counts twenty-two, matching the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. וְעַלֵּיהֶם הוּא אוֹמֵר (תהלים יט טו) יִהְיוּ לְרִצּוֹן אֲמָרִי פִי. יַעֲשׂוּ לְדוֹרוֹת. וְיִפְתְּבוּ לְדוֹרוֹת אֲמָרִי פִי וְיִחַקְקוּ לְדוֹרוֹת. וְלֹא יִהְיוּ קוֹרִין בָּהֶם כְּקוֹרִין בְּסִפְרִים אָלָא יִהְיוּ קוֹרִין בָּהֶן. And of them it says, “May the words of my mouth find

“But in the Torah of Hashem.” Rabbi Levi said: [These are] the six commandments that the Holy One gave to Adam, the first man, as it says, “And Hashem God commanded concerning the man” (Bereishis 2:16). “And in His Torah he meditates” — these are the six commandments He gave him. Adam’s “Torah” was the six commands given him; meditating in them fulfills *Tehillim* 1:2.⁷ וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שְׁתוּל “הַקֵּץ וְשִׁתְּלוּ בְּגֵן עֵדֶן. אֲשֶׁר פָּרִי יָתֵן בְּעֵתוֹ זֶה קִיְּנוּ. וְעָלְהוּ לֹא יָבוֹל זֶה הַכֵּל. וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלַח” “And he shall be as a tree planted” — for the Holy One took him and planted him in Gan Eden. “Which gives its fruit in its time” — this is Cain. “And whose leaf does not wither” — this is Hevel. “And all that he does prospers” — this is Sheis. “Not so the wicked” — this is the serpent. The “tree planted” is Adam himself, set in Gan Eden, his children its fruit and foliage; the serpent is the wicked counter-image. עַל כֵּן לֹא יָקוּמוּ רָשָׁעִים בְּמִשְׁפָּט הַכֹּל מִתְּרַפְּאִין לְעֵתִיד לְבוֹא חוּץ מִן הַנֶּחֱשׁ וּגְבֻעוֹנִי. שְׁנֵאֲמַר (יִשְׁעִיָּה סה כה) זֶאֱב וְטָלָה יִרְעוּ בְּאַחַד. גְּבֻעוֹנִי שְׁנֵאֲמַר (יְחִזְקֵאל מח יט) וְהָעוֹבֵד הָעִיר יַעֲבֹדוּהָ מִכָּל שְׂבָטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. יִאֲבֹדוּהָ. “Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment” — all will be healed in the time to come except the serpent and the Givonite, as it says, “the wolf and the lamb shall graze together” (Yeshaya 65:25); [and as for] the Givonite, as it says, “and the servants of the city shall serve it — out of all the tribes of Israel” (read: shall destroy it) (Yechezkel 48:19). All creatures will be reconciled in the future except the serpent and the Givonite, the latter read into the verse through the wordplay *ya’avduhu* (“serve”) / *ye’abduhu* (“destroy”). שְׁלֹשׁ מִדּוֹת טוֹבוֹת. נָתַן הַקֵּץ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל רַחֲמָנִים בְּיִשְׁנָיִם וּגְוִמְלֵי חֲסִדִּים. שְׁנֵאֲמַר (דְּבָרִים יג יח) וְנָתַן לָהּ רַחֲמִים. וְכֹתִיב (שְׁמוֹת כ יז) וּבִעֲבוּר תִּהְיֶה יִרְאָתוֹ עַל פְּנֵיכֶם לְבָלְתִּי תַחֲטְאוּ. Three good traits the Holy One gave the Jewish people: they are merciful, bashful, and doers of kindness. [Merciful,] as it says, “and He will give you mercy” (Devarim 13:18); [bashful,] as it is written, “so that His awe may be upon your faces, that you not sin” (Shemos 20:17). The Givonim are now contrasted with the three defining virtues of the Jewish people. מִכָּאֵן אָמְרוּ כָּל מִי שָׂאִין לוֹ בִּשְׁת פָּנִים בְּרִי לָנוּ שְׁלֹא. From here they said: Whoever has no sense of shame — it is clear to us that his ancestors did not stand at Mount Sinai. Bashfulness (shame before sin) is the mark of those whose forebears received the Torah. וְכֹתִיב (דְּבָרִים ז יב) וְשָׁמַר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לָךְ אֶת הַבְּרִית. וְאֶת הַחֶסֶד וְגו'. רָאָה דָּוִד בְּגֻבֻעוֹנִים שָׂאִין בָּהֶן אַחַד מִכָּל אֵלֶּה עֶמֶד וְרַחֲקָם. שְׁנֵאֲמַר (שְׁמוּאֵל-ב כא ב) וְהָיָה כֵּן וְהָיָה אֵלֶּיךָ אֲנִי וְהָיָה לְךָ אֲנִי וְהָיָה לְךָ אֲנִי. And it is written, “And Hashem your God will keep for you the covenant and the kindness” (Devarim 7:12). Dovid saw that the Givonim possessed none of these traits, so he arose and distanced them, as it says, “Now the Givonim were not of the children of Israel” (II Shmuel 21:2). Lacking mercy, shame, and kindness, the Givonim were set apart by Dovid. וְאֵף עֲזָרָא רַחֲמָם שְׁנֵאֲמַר (נחמיה יא כא) וְהַנְּתִינִים יוֹשְׁבִים בְּעַפְלָה. וְאֵף הַקֵּץ ה' מִרְחָק לְעֵתִיד לְבוֹא שְׁנֵאֲמַר (יְחִזְקֵאל מח יט) וְהָעוֹבֵד הָעִיר יַעֲבֹדוּהָ יִאֲבֹדוּהָ פְתִיב. שְׁהָעוֹבְדִים הֵם And Ezra too distanced them, as it says, “And the Nesinim dwelt in the Ofel” (Nechemiah 11:21). And the Holy One too will distance them in the time to come, as it says, “and the servants of the city shall serve it” — written “shall destroy it”; for the servants are the Givonim. “Shall serve it” in the time to come, as it says, “And Yehoshua made them hewers of wood...” (Yehoshua 9:27). Ezra likewise kept them apart, and Hashem will finally remove them — the Nesinim (Givonim)

⁷ The six commands given to Adam (Talmud, *Sanbedrin* 56b) are derived from the words of *Bereishis* 2:16; the Noahides’ seventh (the prohibition of a limb from a living animal) was added later.

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְלִמְדָּה וְיִזְעַד

אני מודה לך על כל מה שאת עושה בשבילי.
