

Tehilim Perek 23

Welcome to NachDaily, covering the entire TANACH one perek at a time. I'm Rabbi Shaya Sussman, and today we'll be discussing Tehilim, chapter 23. This short chapter corresponds to Shmuel Aleph, perek twenty-two. For more information, check out the NachDaily archives found at the bottom of the email.

This is arguably the most famous chapter in all Tehilim. Although relatively small in size, it carries a deep message.

Dovid begins by comparing himself to God's sheep. As a shepherd takes care of everything that his flock needs, so too God took care of all Dovid's needs.

Rashi and others explain that Dovid said this perek when he ran away from Shaul to the Forest of Cheres. The Medresh Tehilim tells us that this forest was barren as cheres- earthenware. Dovid found himself in a dangerous place, exposed to the elements, with no water.

Dovid was in the "valley of the shadow of death," yet Hashem in His kindness provided him with fresh water and protection. The Medresh Tehilim adds that God gave him a taste of the World to Come, which lifted Dovid's spirits.

Dovid relates feeling comforted by the fact Hashem is his "shivetecha u'meshant'echa – rod and staff." The perek ends with Dovid thanking Hashem for anointing him with the Shemen Hamishicha, special oil that was used to anoint a king's head. Dovid asks for goodness to follow him, and the ability to dwell in the house of God for his entire life.

In passuk aleph, Dovid starts with the words :

מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד יְהוָה רֹעִי לֹא אֶחָסֵר:

A psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd; I lack nothing.

The Malbim explains that Dovid said this part of the Tehilim when he was a young shepherd. Dovid would regularly engage in hisbodedus, which comes from the

word “boded,” meaning isolation or being alone. Dovid spent all day in the fields taking care of the sheep in isolation. He would speak to Hashem about whatever was in his mind and heart. In so doing, his mind, thoughts and heart would be completely isolated and set aside for God. All of Tehilim relate the conversations between Dovid and his Creator.

The practice of hisbodedus is essential to Judaism. Take time every day to sit alone, undistracted by the outside world, and just simply speak with Hashem as did Dovid.

Our lives are so full of distractions. When was the last time that you sat alone with no cell phone, no sefer, or anything else? Just you and God?

There is no wrong way to do this. I would recommend taking five minutes every day to sit by yourself with no distractions, no cell phone. Speak with God even if you find yourself with nothing to say. The mere fact that you prepared yourself to sit in front of God for 5 minutes is valuable in His eyes.

Try it! What are you waiting for?

The Medresh Tehilim explains that Dovid was the shepherd of Am Yisrael, yet who was his Shepherd? Only Hashem!

In other words, Dovid is our shepherd because he taught all of us how pray for all of the generations! And Hashem is Dovid’s Shepherd because through personal prayer a person develops an intimate connection with the Almighty.

I want to end with a story that I once heard about this perek:

There was once an international Bible competition. People were tested in a public setting, and asked to read different verses from Tanach. For one part of the competition, a contestant was to read this perek out loud in front of the audience.

As soon as he finished reading it, there was an elderly man in the audience who interrupted and asked permission to come on stage to read this specific perek out loud.

The audience was taken aback, but given the man's age and persistence they allowed him to do so.

When he reached the words

גַּם כִּי־אֵלֶךְ בְּגֵיא צִלְמוֹת לֹא־אֵירָא רָע כִּי־אַתָּה עִמָּדִי שִׁבְטְךָ וּמִשְׁעַנְתְּךָ הֵמָּה יְבַרְכֵנִי:

Though I walk through a valley of Shadow of death, I fear no harm, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff—they comfort me.

The entire audience was in tears. The contestant who previously read the perek asked the elderly man, in front of everyone, "How come when I read it no one cried, but when you read it the room was awash in tears?"

"I survived World War 2," the elderly man answered. "I was zocheh to personally know the Shepherd that Dovid is talking about."

May we all merit to know the Shepherd of Dovid Hamelech, to come close to God, the infinite Source of all life.

Thank you for listening and have a wonderful day.