YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Before Sinai: Jewish Values and Jewish Law**

**By Rav Dr. Judah Goldberg**

**Shiur #48:**

**Spirituality (3):**

**Knowledge of God**

In the [previous *shiur*](https://www.etzion.org.il/en/shiur-47-spirituality-2-way-god), we discussed how *tzedaka u-mishpat* are identified as *derekh Hashem*, both in *Parashat Vayera* and throughout *Tanakh*. Avraham first recognizes these values as Divine and thus their performance as a spiritual gesture that trumps even communion with God. The Prophets and Sages carry this message forward, repeatedly stressing that *tzedaka u-mishpat* is more desirable to God than the Temple worship.

In this *shiur,* we will relate to one final concept that frequently arises in *Nevi’im* regarding *tzedaka u-mishpat*: knowledge of God. While this concept, like “*derekh Hashem*,” can carry multiple different meanings, at least some uses describe the embrace and performance of *tzedaka u-mishpat*. Incredibly, knowledge of God is not exclusively the result of contemplation but can actually spring from a life of action. Moreover, these two modes of spirituality are complementary, together yielding a more holistic, authentic apprehension of the Divine.

**The Prophets and the Knowledge of God**

Yirmeyahu, in particular, speaks repeatedly of knowledge of God (or its absence) in the context of ethical behavior.

In a blistering rebuke, Yirmeyahu recounts the degree of distrust and deceit that has taken hold in society. Twice, he laments the people’s “ignorance” of God:

They drew their tongues as their bow [to shoot] lies, and not for truth did they rule in the land; for they go from one evil to another, and **Me they did not know**, so says God.

Each man, be wary of one’s fellow, and do not trust in any brother; for every brother is deceitful, and every fellow will spread gossip. Each man ridicules his fellow and will not speak truth. They have trained their tongues to speak lies; they toil in their distortions. You dwell surrounded by deceit, and out of deceit they have refused **to know Me**, so says God.[[1]](#footnote-1) (9:2-5)

Several verses later, Yirmeyahu returns to the knowledge of God and its connection to ethical conduct:

Thus said God: Let not a scholar be praised for his wisdom, and let not the mighty one be praised for his might; let not one of means be praised for his wealth. But by this should one be praised — **discern** and **know** **Me**, that I am God, who **performs** ***chessed***, ***mishpat*** ***u-tzedaka*** in the land, for these I desire, so says God. (9:22-23)[[2]](#footnote-2)

Finally, in his rebuke of the kings of the House of David, Yirmeyahu is most explicit:

For your father ate and drank but performed ***mishpat u-tzdaka***, and therefore all was good for him. He adjudicated the cases of the poor and destitute, and therefore [it was] good, **for this is knowing Me**, so says God. (22:15-16)

Radak notes the connection to 9:23, as does Rabbeinu Yona. About the earlier verse, Rabbeinu Yona asks:

How can a person discern to know God? It is impossible! Rather, by this can he know Him — through **performance of** **justice and *mishpat***, for God performs these; and that is what it says, “He adjudicated the cases of the poor and destitute, and therefore [it was] good, **for this is knowing Me**, so says God.” (*Commentary on Avot*, 1:1)

In other contexts, when the meaning of “knowledge of God” is less obvious, the Sages or later commentaries interpret the phrase in light of *Yirmeyahu*. For instance, *Yeshayahu*, Chapter 11, anticipates the coming of the Messiah (verse 1), who will return justice to society and usher in an era of peace (verses 3-8). There will be no violence whatsoever “in all of God’s mountain, for the earth will be filled with **knowledge of God**, as the waters blanket the oceans” (verse 9).

On this final verse, the Sages comment:

“**Knowledge**” — this is ***mishpat***, for it says,[[3]](#footnote-3) “Will you reign because you compete with cedars? For your father ate and drank but **performed** ***mishpat u-tzdaka***, and therefore all was good for him. He adjudicated the cases of the poor and destitute, and therefore [it was] good, **for this is knowing Me**, so says God.” (*Mekhilta* *De-Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai*, *Shemot* 18:23)

Read this way, this anticipated wondrous day in which knowledge of God will be deep and ubiquitous does not refer to the flourishing of law or theology but to pervasive justice and harmony.[[4]](#footnote-4) Furthermore, the connection is not merely semantic, but thematic: the Messiah will lead humanity back to knowledge of God by restoring the *mishpat u-tzdaka* of his ancestors from the House of David (also see *Yirmeyahu* 23:5).

The Tosafist R. Moshe of Coucy also harnesses *Yirmeyahu*, in order to explain King David’s charge to his son Shlomo:

And so did I explain to the sages of Spain the meaning of this verse: “**Know the God** of your father and worship him” (*I Divrei Ha-yamim* 28:9); that just as He is ***Chanun ve-Rachum***, and “**performs *chessed*, *mishpat u-tzdaka*** in the land,” so should you do. And these are your two witnesses: with Yoshiyahu, about whom it says that he “ate and drank but **performed** ***mishpat u-tzdaka***, and therefore all was good for him. He adjudicated the cases of the poor and destitute, and therefore [it was] good, **for this is knowing Me**, so says God”; and it also says, “Let not a scholar be praised for his wisdom, etc., but by this should one be praised — **discern** and **know** **Me**, that I am God, who performs ***chessed***, ***mishpat*** and ***tzedaka*** in the land, for these I desire, so says God.” (*Sefer Mitzvot Gadol*, Positive Commandment #7)

In *Divrei Ha-yamim*, then, King David is obliquely commanding Shlomo to follow in his own path of *tzedaka u-mishpat*, couching them in terms of knowing God.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Notably, R. Moshe of Coucy also includes the traits of being compassionate (*rachum*) and favoring (*chanun*) along with *tzedaka u-mishpat* within knowledge of God, thus creating a certain parallel to the “way of God.” Just as the ways of God combine the values discovered by Avraham with the attributes revealed to Moshe, so too does knowledge of God encompass all of these characteristics.

Supporting evidence for R. Moshe may be adduced from the following rabbinic interpretation of familiar verses from *Hoshea* (2:21-22):

Seven attributes serve before the Throne of Glory: wisdom (*chokhma*),[[6]](#footnote-6) ***tzedek***, ***mishpat***, ***chessed***, ***rachamim***, truth (*emet*), and peace (*shalom*), as it says, “And I will betroth you forever; and I will betroth you with ***tzedek[[7]](#footnote-7)*** and with ***mishpat*** and with ***chessed*** and with ***rachamim***; and I will betroth you with loyalty, and you will **know God**.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

R. Meir said: What does it mean, “And you will **know God**?” It teaches that anyone who possesses all these attributes **knows God’s thinking**. (*Avot De-Rabbi Natan*, A, 37)

As with the verses from *Tehillim* (103:6-8) that we cited in the conclusion to the previous *shiur*, Hoshea blends together the Divine attributes learned from our *Avot* with those learned from Sinai. Through all of them together, R. Meir explains, one penetrates the thinking of God.

Finally, the various verses we have cited may shed light on other verses in *Hoshea*. Hoshea laments that “there is no truth and no ***chessed*** and no **knowledge of God** on earth” (4:1); Radak explains, in one interpretation, that there is no knowledge “to **perform *mishpat u-tzdaka***,” citing *Yirmeyahu* 22:15-16.

One day, the Jewish people will say, “Let us go and return to God… and we will conclude, let us run to **know God**” )6:1-3); again, Radak explains “to **perform *mishpat u-tzdaka***,” based on *Yirmeyahu*.

And when God declares a few verses later, “For I desire ***chessed*** and not sacrifice, and **knowledge of God** more than burnt offerings” (verse 6), Radak explains that “performance of ***chessed*** is primary, as well as **knowledge of God**, which is to **perform *mishpat u-tzdaka***.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

**Knowledge-in-Wisdom vs. Knowledge-in-Action**

Importantly, the knowledge of God that Yirmeyahu and other prophets describe does not seem to be rooted in cognition, but in action. To be sure, deep reflection upon Divine attributes also affords knowledge of God; thus, in reference to Moshe’s request, “Make known to me, please, Your ways” (*Shemot* 33:13), Rabbeinu Bechaye cites *Yirmeyahu* 9:23, explaining that “**knowledge of God** is **knowledge of His attributes**.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Practically, the Sages recommend diversity in study material as a path towards character refinement:

Expositors of the Written Word say: If you want to get to know “He Who spoke, and the universe was,” study *aggada*, for through this you will get to know “He Who spoke, and the universe was” and cling to **His ways** (***derakhav***). (*Sifrei,* *Devarim* 11:22)[[11]](#footnote-11)

Here, too, familiarity with God develops through study, albeit of a non-legal curriculum.

Still, I don’t think this is what Yirmeyahu intends when he speaks of an earlier Davidic king knowing God by performing *mishpat u-tzdaka* and defending the underprivileged. Performance of *mishpat u-tzdaka* there is juxtaposed with eating and drinking; it is part of the bustling, material life of a monarch, rather than the intellectual world of a sage. For the House of David, I think, knowledge of God stems mainly from concrete action, rather than from contemplation.

Following our schematic from the previous *shiur*, we might differentiate here between the mode of *berit Avot* and that of *berit Sinai*. Perhaps knowledge of God in *berit Sinai*, like knowledge of the law, is primarily cognitive and formal, while in *berit Avot* it is more intuitive and experiential.

At Sinai, Moshe teaches us to seek deep understanding of God’s attributes and then mold our own character and conduct after them. But Yirmeyahu, I think, calls for the opposite: to roll up our sleeves, to get engaged, and to perform *tzedaka u-mishpat*; and from that involvement will naturally emerge intimate perception of God’s essence and goodness. Parallel to Avraham’s insight that he will find God more through welcoming guests than through spiritual communion, knowledge of God in *Yirmeyahu* comes mainly from practicing truth and kindness in the marketplace and from maintaining an open and just royal court, rather than from hours of meditation in the study hall.

**Eitan Ha-Ezrachi and “*Haskala*”**

So far, we have seen Yirmeyahu’s linkage *of tzedaka u-mishpat* to knowledge of God and commentaries’ interpretations of other verses in the Prophets through it. But, as with the way of God, can we trace this idea back to Avraham himself? Perhaps, if not in *Torah She-bikhtav*, then in *Torah She-be’al Peh*.

In yet another context, the Midrash interprets a passage through the prism of *Yirmeyahu* 9:23, relating to the parallel use not of the verb “to know” (*y-d-a*), but of the accompanying verb “to discern” (*s-k-l*):

“Wisdom (***maskil***) to Eitan Ha-Ezrachi: God’s ***chassadim*** I will forever sing”: This is what Scripture says, “But by this should one be praised — discern (***haskeil***) and know Me [, that I am God, who **performs** ***chessed***, ***mishpat*** and ***tzedaka*** in the land] (*Yirmeyahu* 9:23).

Eitan said: “I have discerned!” — “***Maskil*** to Eitan Ha-Ezrachi.”

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: “You have discerned (***hiskalta***)? ‘For these I desire’ (*Yirmeyahu*, ibid.)! Anyone who wishes to praise Me should only praise Me by these [traits].” And so it says, “For I desire ***chessed*** and not sacrifice” (*Hoshea* 6:6).

[Eitan] said to Him: “You desire ***chessed***; then through ***chessed*** I will praise you!” As it says, “To you, God, is ***chessed***” (*Tehillim* 62:13), and not just a single ***chessed***, but a multitude of ***chassadim***. And so did Yeshayahu say, “I will recount God’s ***chassadim***” (63:7). (*Midrash Tehillim* 89:1)[[12]](#footnote-12)

Given the similarity in language, the Midrash compares the opening of *Tehillim* 89 to *Yirmeyahu*. According to this reading, Eitan Ha-Ezrachi has a great epiphany about God: His deepest attribute, and thus His greatest source of praise, is *chessed*. So Eitan praises God’s *chassadim*, continuing that God, whose own throne rests upon “*tzedek u-mishpat*” (verse 15), will establish the throne of King David forever (verses 4-5).[[13]](#footnote-13)

But who is this mysterious Eitan Ha-Ezrachi? Based on *I Melakhim* 5:11 and *I Divrei Ha-Yamim* 2:6, Rashi and Radak identify him as an early figure from the tribe of Yehuda.[[14]](#footnote-14) However, they also cite a rabbinic tradition that identifies Eitan as Avraham Avinu:

Rav said: Eitan Ha-Ezrachi is Avraham; it says here, “Eitan Ha-**Ezrachi**,” and it says there, “Who awoke from the East (***Mizrach***) [he who would proclaim ***tzedek*** wherever he went]” (*Yeshayahu* 41:2).[[15]](#footnote-15) (*Bava Batra* 15a)[[16]](#footnote-16)

If we stitch these two rabbinic teachings together, then it is Avraham who is being identified as first discerning God! Avraham not only recognizes God as Creator and thus Master of the Universe, but also perceives His nature as one who “loves *tzedaka u-mishpat*” and fills the world with *chessed* (*Tehillim* 33:5).[[17]](#footnote-17) Avraham passes this knowledge down to his progeny and disciples and, in *Tehillim* 89, anticipates a future monarchy for the Jewish people that will embody God’s “governing” principles.[[18]](#footnote-18)

**Knowledge of God and the Study of Torah**

As we noted, the phrases “knowledge of God” and “way of God” in *Tanakh* are admittedly ambiguous, and they can alternatively refer to the Torah and its way of life, respectively.

For example, while the passage from *Avot De-Rabbi Natan* we cited earlier asserts, based on *Hoshea*, that one can “know God’s thinking” by embracing all of His attributes, a different passage identifies another route to “God’s thinking”:

“For I desire *chessed* and not sacrifice, **knowledge of God** more than burnt offerings” (*Hoshea* 6:6) …. The study of Torah is more beloved to God than burnt offerings, for if a person studies Torah, he **knows God’s thinking**, as it says, “Then you will understand the fear of God, and **knowledge of God** will you find” (*Mishlei* 2:5).

From here [we learn] that a scholar who sits and expounds in public is considered by Scripture as if he offered fat and blood on the altar. (*Avot De-Rabbi Natan*, A, 4)

*Avot De-Rabbi Natan* does not equate the two halves of *Hoshea* 6:6, as Radak does, but interprets them separately: *chessed*, on the one hand, and “knowledge of God” = Torah study, on the other, are two distinct endeavors that are each more spiritually rewarding than ritual sacrifice.[[19]](#footnote-19) One who studies God’s revealed wisdom “knows God’s thinking,” just like one who shares His values.

In other words, *berit Avot* and *berit Sinai* present two different paths towards apprehending God:

1. Careful, reflective contemplation of His will (as well as of His attributes);
2. Direct, raw apprehension and absorption of His values.

The two are complementary. The *berit Avot* encounter with God is intense, experiential, and unfiltered, but it necessarily lacks depth. Like the jogging partner (or *chessed* buddy) of a great philosopher, one knows God intimately through direct engagement and active partnership but cannot necessarily articulate His doctrines. The *berit Sinai* encounter, by contrast, is cognitive, analytic, and comparatively cold, but at the same time sophisticated, illuminating, and intellectually enthralling. It is like reading the same philosopher’s great works or even hearing her voice, but not knowing what she looks like.

In our quest for God, we seek both dimensions. We don’t want to have to choose, metaphorically, between sitting in His classroom and venturing out to feed the poor by His side. They are different windows into the grand Divine essence, each view enhancing the other.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Forced to choose though, we must recognize that the potential costs involved are not symmetric. For a Jew can live with partial knowledge of God that reveals His ways — His personality, so to speak — but not so much of His wisdom. As R. Ya’akov Tzvi Mecklenburg comments, after citing *Yirmeyahu* 22:15-16 and other verses:

It is apparent from here that one does not so much need analysis of the wonders of [God’s] singularity and His existence, as just observance of His ways, for one who knows them, is called knowledge of God. (*Ha-ketav Ve-hakabbala,* *Bereishit* 18:19)

Extensive Torah study neither is mandatory for all Jews, nor was it widely accessible for much of history. With just imitation of God’s attributes, one’s apprehension of the Divine may not be as refined or detailed as it could be, but the general outline is at least accurate.

The opposite, though, is not true. Knowing God through His Torah but not through *tzedaka u-mishpat* is not merely imperfect; it is a distortion:

Rav Huna said: One who engages only in Torah is like one who does not have a God, as it says, “For a long time the Jewish people have been without a true God” (*II Divrei Ha-yamim* 15:3). (*Avoda Zara* 17b)

About whom is Rav Huna speaking? We might imagine that he is addressing someone who studies but does not observe Jewish law.[[21]](#footnote-21) However, the Gemara applies his statement to the righteous R. Chanina ben Teradyon, who criticizes himself that he only engaged in Torah study but not in *chessed*. The Gemara continues that R. Chanina ben Teradyon ran a charity fund and gave *tzedaka* himself; still, though “he indeed did do [*chessed*], he did not do as much as he should have.” Apparently, even a relative imbalance between Torah and *chessed* warps one’s perception so much that it leaves one “without a true God”!

Even more chilling is Yirmeyahu’s rebuke:

The guardians of the Torah did not **know Me**. (2:8)

At the very least, Yirmeyahu is telling us that it is possible to be an accomplished scholar of Torah and yet not know God! Moreover, if we interpret this verse in light of Yirmeyahu’s other statements about “knowledge of God,” we might conclude that the scholars of his time were erudite but morally lacking. They might have known the entire Jewish library by heart but still not have known the first thing about the God of Avraham.

**Do’eg and David**

Sadly, one can be knowledgeable and unvirtuous, a phenomenon that played a role in bringing down both of our Temples. Yirmeyahu’s rebuke of his generation’s scholars is echoed by R. Yochanan ben Torta’s familiar comment about the last days of the Second Temple:

We know of them that they toiled in Torah and were careful about tithes; why were they exiled? Because they were infatuated with money and despised one another. (*Tosefta*, *Menachot* 13:4 [Vilna ed.])[[22]](#footnote-22)

Moreover, as Yirmeyahu hints, one can be knowledgeable and wholly ignorant at the same time. For *Chazal*, the epitome of this absurdity is Do’eg Ha-Adomi, who, according to tradition, is a leading Torah scholar (see *Sanhedrin* 106b and *Midrash Tehillim* 3:4) but betrays David to King Shaul and slaughters the priests of Nov (*I Shmuel* 22:9-19). So bitter is David about Do’eg’s conduct that he devotes an entire psalm (52) to the subject. The Midrash links David’s rhetorical question towards Do’eg – “Why do you, **the mighty one** (***ha-gibbor***), seek praise (***tithalel***) through evil?” (verse 2) — to verses from *Yirmeyahu*:

David said to Do’eg… “You are a Torah scholar, mighty and wealthy, and head of the Sanhedrin. Why did you do this?!”

“Let not a scholar be praised (***yithalel***) for his wisdom, and let not the mighty one (***ha-gibbor***) be praised (***yithalel***) for his might; let not one of means be praised (***yithalel***) for his wealth. But by this should one be praised (***yithalel ha-mithalel***) — ***haskeil* and know** **Me** [, that I am God, who performs ***chessed***, ***mishpat*** ***u-tzedaka*** in the land, for these I desire, so says God].” (*Midrash Tehillim* 52:7)

“Do’eg’s Torah,” R. Ami says, “was from the lips outward” (*Sanhedrin* 106b); it did not penetrate any further. In the ritual realm, too, we find that he is outwardly pious: We first encounter Do’eg as he is lingering before God at the Tabernacle (*I Shmuel* 21:8). Little does he understand, though, that this God desires “*chessed* and not sacrifice.”

In light of the verses from *Yirmeyahu*, the Midrash then contrasts Do’eg with David himself:

And so does it say, “David would **perform** ***mishpat u-tzdaka*** for his whole nation” (*II Shmuel* 8:15); and it says, “David was ***maskil***(successful) in all his ways, and God was with him” (*I Shmuel* 18:14).

The Midrash pits Do’eg opposite David. Both are recognized by *Chazal* as Torah scholars, even intellectual rivals (see *Zevachim* 54b). Do’eg, however, is cruel and thus knows nothing of God. David, on the other hand, through “***mishpat u-tzdaka***,” is indeed “***maskil***,” exactly as Yirmeyahu exhorts. Do’eg is erased from history, while David rises to the throne and, like Avraham,[[23]](#footnote-23) passes on his profound “*haskala*” to his descendants: King Chizkiyahu, whom Yeshayahu says will perform *mishpat u-tzdaka* (9:6), is also “***yaskil***” (*II Melakhim* 18:7); and the Messiah, who will fill the earth with knowledge of God, will “***hiskil*** **and perform *mishpat u-tzdaka*** in the land” (*Yirmeyahu* 23:5).[[24]](#footnote-24)

**“*Torat Chessed*” (*Mishlei* 31:26)**

Ethical behavior without Torah is like a foundation without upper floors, but Torah without ethical behavior is like a palace without any foundation.[[25]](#footnote-25) Thus, the Rambam writes, “the true religion is upheld only through *tzedaka*” (*Hilkhot Mattenot Aniyim* 10:1).[[26]](#footnote-26)

Furthermore, perhaps this is what *Mishlei* intends when, in the voice of wisdom (*chokhma*)/ Torah, it says:

On the path of ***tzedaka*** I will walk, within trails of ***mishpat***. (8:20)[[27]](#footnote-27)

On one level, Torah can only thrive when it is situated in the midst of *tzedaka u-mishpat* and on the shoulders of the *Avot* and their covenant. But more than that, perhaps Torah is declaring that this is where she is most comfortable: her true radiance will only shine when her elaborate, towering structures are encircled by winding paths; when her rigid laws are infused with a deep spirit; and when her program for halakhic living is coupled with a transcendent vision for ethics and godliness.

Indeed, how affirming and utterly enchanting is the fusion of Torah and moral excellence, of knowledge-in-wisdom and knowledge-in-action, to those who are privy to behold it. They can but say: “Praiseworthy is the nation for whom it is such; praiseworthy is the nation for whom Hashem is its God” (*Tehillim* 144:15).[[28]](#footnote-28)

**For Further Thought:**

1. Are there other figures in *Tanakh* who gain wisdom but lack concomitant ethical insight? Consider the following examples:
2. According to the Sages, Bilam is granted prophecy that parallels that of Moshe (*Bamidbar Rabba* 20:1) and even surpasses it in some ways. *Tanna De-vei Eliyahu Zuta* (10), for instance, contrasts the language that appears by each:

Regarding Moshe, it says, “**Make known** to me, please, Your ways” (*Shemot* 33:13), but regarding Bilam, it says, “And who **knows the thinking of the Most High** (***yode’a da’at Elyon***)” (*Bamidbar* 24:16).

Still, the passage continues, Bilam’s extraordinary knowledge does not translate into virtue:

A good ***derekh*** was not found in him, and he never engaged in any ***tzedaka***, but rather in gossip, and sought to destroy the entire world.

1. My father-in-law and teacher R. Yaacov Lerner once noted that the generation that leaves Egypt, on the one hand, is called “all ***dei’a***” (*Vayikra Rabba* 9:1), yet about them *Tehillim* says, “They **did not know My ways** (***lo yadeu derakhai***)” (95:10). Similarly, “in Egypt they **did not discern** (***hiskilu***) Your wonders” (106:7). Apparently, despite learning the entirety of Torah at Sinai, literally, something is lacking in their apprehension of God.
2. Achitofel, King David’s adviser, is a brilliant strategist (*II Shmuel* 16:23) and, like Do’eg, a Torah scholar (see, for example, *Midrash Tehillim* 3:4). His behavior also falls short: when King David’s son Avshalom rebels against him, Achitofel joins Avshalom and even advises Avshalom to humiliate David by seizing the king’s concubines in public (*II Shmuel* 16:20-22). The Sages often lump Do’eg and Achitofel together, even though they never overlap (see, for instance, *Sanhedrin* 106b). Could it be that they suffer from a common character flaw? See also *Chagiga* 15b.
3. Do’eg, Bilam, and Achitofel are three of the “four commoners” who have no share in the World to Come (*Sanhedrin* 90a). According to R. Akiva, the generation that leaves Egypt, too, has no share (*Sanhedrin* 110b). The fourth commoner is Geichazi, servant to Elisha the Prophet; what does he have in common with the rest? See Yerushalmi, *Sanhedrin* 10:2 and the Rambam’s Commentary on the Mishna, as well as *Berakhot* 17b.
4. My teacher R. Menachem Leibtag observes that the verbs “*y-d-a*” and “*s-k-l*” also appear regarding the Tree of **Knowledge** in Gan Eden (*Bereishit* 3:5-7). Can the parallel language in *Yirmeyahu* 9:23 shed light on the Gan Eden narrative?

**Questions or Comments?**

Please email me directly with your feedback at [judahlgoldberg@gmail.com](mailto:judahlgoldberg@gmail.com)!

1. Rabbeinu Yona links this verse to 22:16, which will be discussed below (*Sha’arei Teshuva* 4:5). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. On the translation of verse 23, see *mori ve-rabbi* Ha-Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, “Does Judaism Recognize an Ethic Independent of Halakhah?” *Leaves of Faith: The World of Jewish Living*, 37-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The word “*le-shalom*” appears here in the text, but it seems out of place and is therefore removed by the R. David Tzvi Hoffman edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Contrast, for instance, with the conclusion of the Rambam’s *Mishneh Torah* (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 12:4-5). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. As such, this verse parallels *Tehillim* 72 (see *Shiur* #39). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Vilna Gaon replaces this term with “*emuna*” (faith/ loyalty). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Devarim Rabba* 3:9 interprets “*tzedek*” here as *tzedaka*; see *Shiur* #41. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Vilna Gaon adds: “And it says, ‘*chessed* and *emet* met, *tzedek* and *shalom* kissed’ (*Tehillim* 85:11).” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. On knowledge of God as ethics, also see *Yeshayahu* 58:2 and Radak and Malbim; *Yirmeyahu* 31:33 and Radak (who links to 22:16; also see Radak on *Hoshea* 2:22); *Tehillim* 67:3 and Radak and Malbim; and *Iyov* 21:14 and Malbim. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Also see R. Ovadya of Seforno, as well as the conclusion of the Rambam’s *Moreh Nevukhim* (3:54). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Also see the Ramban’s gloss to the Rambam’s *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*, Positive Commandment #7. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The Midrash continues, “Therefore, it says, ‘[about] ***chessed*** and ***mishpat*** I will sing’ (101:1)” (*Midrash Tehillim* 89:1). However, the Buber edition emends this. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Amos Hakham notes that a parallel develops in this psalm between God’s throne (verse 15) and that of David (verses 5, 30, and 37); also see *I Divrei Ha-yamim* 29:23 (*Da’at Mikra* on verse 15). Also see *Shir Ha-shirim Rabba* 1:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Also see *Tehillim* 88:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Also see *Yeshayahu* 46:11 (according to *Bereishit Rabba* 15:4 and 54:1). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Also see *Vayikra Rabba* 9:1, *Bamidbar Rabba* 19:3, *Kohelet Rabba* 7:1, and *Midrash Mishlei* 1:1. The listing of Avraham among the authors of *Tehillim* also appears in *Midrash Tehillim* itself (1:6). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Also see Rashi on *Yeshayahu* 40:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See *Yad Rama* on *Bava Batr*a 14b (#189): “Even though it is written there, ‘I swore to My servant, David’ (89:4) and other subjects that did not exist in the days of Avraham, it is Avraham who is prophesying about the future.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For *Avot De-Rabbi Natan*’s commentary on the first half of the verse, see *Shiur* #46. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Also see *Tana De-vei Eliyahu Zuta* 1, which highlights Biblical parallels between Torah and *tzedaka*. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Compare, for instance, to *Yevamot* 109b. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Regarding the Tabernacle at Shilo, *s*ee *I Shmuel* 2:12 and Radak, as well as the Tosefta, *Yoma* 9a-b, and *Shabbat* 55b. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Regarding the verb *s-k-l* and the *Avot*, also see *Sifrei* (Finkelstein ed.) on *Devarim* 32:29; *Midrash Tehillim* on *Tehillim* 53:3; and *Midrash Tanchuma*, *Vayera*, 5. Also see *Iyov* 34:27. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Malbim references *Yeshayahu* 52:13; also see *Midrash Tanchuma*, *Toledot*, 14. In the context of the kings of the House of David, also see *I Melakhim* 2:3, *Yirmeyahu* 10:21, and *Tehillim* 101:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Thus, according to the Sages, Do’eg’s Torah is not “grounded”: He is able to list “300 clear rulings about a tower that flies through the air” and even more insoluble questions about it, but he cannot steer his analyses towards actual halakhic practice (*Sanhedrin* 106b). David, however, prides himself that “my hands are dirty with blood and sacs and placentas in order to permit a woman to her husband” (*Berakhot* 4a); coincidentally, “the *halakha* follows him in all areas” (*Sanhedrin* 93b; also see *Eruvin* 53a and Rashi). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “*Tzedakah*: Brotherhood and Fellowship,” in *Halakhic Morality: Essays on Ethics and Masorah*, 126-127. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Also see *Shemot Rabba* 30:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. For a personal account of my own encounter with such greatness, see “Who Prop, Thou Ask’st, In These Bad Days, My Mind?” in *A Life Steady and Whole: Recollections and Appreciations of Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, zt”l* (New York: 2018), 163-174. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)