

Standing at the Gates

Twin Cities Jewish Artist Lab

11/7/18 18 Cheshvan 5778

Rabbi Alexander Davis

Psalm 24

פרק כד

Of David. A Psalm.

א לְדוֹד מִזְמוֹר לַה' הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָתָהּ תִּבְּל וַיִּשְׁבֵי בָהּ:

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness there of,
the world and those who dwell in it.

For He has founded it upon the seas,
and established it upon the floods.

ב כִּי הוּא עַל-יַמִּים יִסְדָּהּ וְעַל-נְהָרוֹת יִכּוֹנְנָהּ:

Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord
and who shall stand in His holy place?

ג מִי-יַעֲלֶה בְּהַר ה' וּמִי-יָקוּם בְּמִקְוֹם קֹדֶשׁוֹ:

He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who has not sworn in vain "by my soul," and has not sworn deceitfully

ד נְקִי כַפַּיִם וַיִּבֶר לִבָּב אֲשֶׁר לֹא-נִשְׂאָ לִשְׂוֹא נַפְשִׁי וְלֹא נִשְׁבַּע לְמַרְמָה:

He shall receive a blessing from the Lord
and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

ה יֵשֵׂא בְרַכָּה מֵאֵת ה' וַיִּצְדָּקָה מֵאֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעוֹ:

This is the company of those who seek Him
who seek Your face, Jacob. Selah.

ו זֶה דֹּוֹר דֹּוֹר דִּרְשׁוּ [דִּרְשׁוּ] מִבְּקִשֵׁי פְנֵיךָ יַעֲקֹב סֵלָה:

Lift up your heads, O Gates,
and be lifted up, O everlasting doors, so that the King of glory may come in.

ז שִׂאוּ שַׁעֲרֵיכֶם וְהִנְשִׂאוּ פִתְחֵי עוֹלָם וַיָּבֹא מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד:

Who is this king of glory?
The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.

ח מִי זֶה מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד ה' עֲזוֹז וְגִבּוֹר ה' גִּבּוֹר מִלְחָמָה:

Lift up your heads, O gates,
and lift them up, O everlasting doors, so that the King of glory may come in.

ט שִׂאוּ שַׁעֲרֵיכֶם וְשִׂאוּ פִתְחֵי עוֹלָם וַיָּבֹא מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד:

Who is he, this king of glory?
The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah.

י מִי הוּא זֶה מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד ה' צְבָאוֹת הוּא מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד סֵלָה:

s'u sha'arim rasheikhem, u-se'u pitchei olam

Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, pp. 10, 24-25, 136

Literature, let me suggest, from the simplest folktale to the most sophisticated poetry and fiction and drama, thrives on parallelism, both stylistic and structural, on small scale and large, and could not give its creations satisfying shape without it. But it is equally important to recognize that literary expression abhors complete parallelism, just as language resists true synonymity, usage always introducing small wedges of difference between closely akin terms. This general principle was nicely formulated early in the century by the Russian Formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky in "Art as a Technique," an essay that has proved to be one of the seminal texts of modern literary theory: "The perception of disharmony in a harmonious context is important in parallelism. The purpose of parallelism, like the general purpose of imagery, is to transfer the usual perception of an object into the sphere of a new perception- that is, to make a unique semantic modification."

Every literary tradition converts the formal limitations of its own medium into an occasion for artistic expression: the artist, in fact, might be defined as a person who thrives on realizing new possibilities within formal limitations. In a system of semantically corresponding versets, it is understandable that quite frequently a single verb or noun would do double duty for two parallel utterances. But from the viewpoint of the poet, what is accomplished through this simple syntactic maneuver is a freeing of space in the second verset which can then be used to elaborate or sharpen meaning. This freeing of space, moreover, nicely accords with the formal focusing effect of the absence of the verb in the second verset, which has the consequence of isolating for attention this second object of the verb. Often what happens is that the second term, where the poet has room for introducing a compound form or a compact cluster of nouns or nouns and qualifiers, is an elaboration of the first term that makes its meaning more vividly present to the imagination...

Within the formal limits of a poem the poet can take advantage of the emphatic repetitions dictated by the particular prosodic system, the symmetries and antitheses and internal echoes intensified by a closed verbal structure, the fine intertwining's of sound and image and reported act, the modulated shifts in grammatical voice and object of address, to give coherence and authority to his perceptions of the world. The psalmist's delight in the suppleness and serendipities of poetic form is not a distraction from the spiritual seriousness of the poems but his chief means of realizing his spiritual vision, and it is one source of the power these poems continue to have not only to excite our imaginations but also to engage our lives.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

A psalm of joyous procession to the Temple. It begins with creation, "the earth is the Lord's," and moves directly to the moral requirements of the religious life: "Who may climb the mountain of the Lord?" Just as God created an orderly universe, so we are commanded to create an orderly society. Worshiping God at the Temple may not be divorced from honesty and integrity in everyday life.

3 Mosad Harav Kook

Those asking the question in our psalm want to know who has been given permission to ascend to the Temple, and whether such permission was granted on the basis of the number of sacrifices brought, or on the basis of fasting and other physical mortifications. The answer to this question is that he who ascends God's mountain is received with a blessing if he is a man of truth and is pure in mind, in speech and in action.

It should be noted that it does not state: "he who has clean hands shall ascend" which would have implied that he who has unclean hands is forbidden to ascend. Rather, "he who has clean hands shall receive a blessing." In other words, he who has clean hands and ascends God's mountain will be received with a blessing when he comes before God.

Shabbat 30a

כשבנה שלמה את בית המקדש ביקש להכניס ארון לבית קדשי הקדשים, דבקו שערים זה בזה. אמר שלמה עשרים וארבעה רננות ולא נענה. פתח ואמר: (תהלים כד) שאו שערים ראשיכם והנשאו פתחי עולם ויבא מלך הכבוד, רהטו בתריה למיבלעיה, אמרו: (תהלים כד) מי הוא זה מלך הכבוד? אמר לה: ה' עוזו וגבור. חזר ואמר: שאו שערים ראשיכם ונשאו פתחי עולם ויבא מלך הכבוד. מי הוא זה מלך הכבוד ה' צבאות הוא מלך הכבוד סלה ולא נענה. כיון שאמר (דברי הימים ב' ו) ה' אלהים אל תשב פני משיחך זכרה לחסדי דוד עבדך - מיד נענה.

After Solomon built the Temple, he attempted to bring the Ark into the Holy of Holies, but the gates held fast one to the other. And although Solomon cried out twenty-four songs of prayer, he was not answered. Then, he opened his mouth and said, "O Gates, lift up your heads that the King may come in." Immediately, the gates rushed at him to swallow him up thinking that by "king" he was referring to himself. And they said to him, "Who did you say is the King?" Solomon replied, "The Lord strong and mighty." Then he repeated the plea: "O gates, lift up your heads that the King of glory may come in." The gates asked again, "Who is the King of glory?" And Solomon answered, "The Lord of hosts." And still he was given no response. But when he said, "O God, turn not away the face of Your anointed. Remember the good deeds of David, Your servant," he was given a response immediately.

Rabbi Shefa Gold

We are the gates: we are the doorways. God enters the World through us when we "lift up our heads," when we raise our consciousness. We begin the week with an intention to listen for the call to awareness that lifts us up out of our small concerns into a wide perspective and compassionate responsiveness. By answering that call, we become everlasting doorways between the finite and infinite realms.