PSALM 16: True Jewish Faith

שויתי ה ’ לנגדי תמיד

In this beautiful Mizmor, King David describes his faith in HaShem. In verse 5 he explains that if we really want to achieve the right level of faith we need to reeducate ourselves in terms of what is and what is not our goal in life; our mission statement.

Then, in pasuq 8, he describes the real Jewish faith. This verse is so important that it is written in most Synagogues, above the Hekhal, the Tora Ark, visible to all those presents at the time of prayers.

In the last pasuq, verse 11, David concludes his idea. His connection to God is the source of happiness and pleasure in this world and beyond.

Les us see now in depth these three verses.

David asserts that HaShem is his ultimate Protector and Savior. He knows that all the good things that happened to him, have come from God. The King of Israel rejects all form of idol worshipping, and any other service except serving the true God.

ה’ מנת חלקי וכוסי

In verse 5 he expresses a very profound idea “HaShem, you are my possession and my cup”. Radaq (Rabbi David Qimhi, Spain 1160-1235) explains the meaning of these words. While for most people their main goal in life (ultimate “possession”) and their deepest desire is to gain money and possess riches, so they can satisfy all their desires and instincts (“cup”), for the King of Israel, his main aspiration is connecting to God. Feeling close to HaShem satisfies all of the King’s desires and ambitions. He also hints that if we really want to feel God’s presence, we should first unfocus ourselves from the pursuit of pure material goals.

אתה תומיך גורלי

“You sustain my destiny”. For King David is not necessary to resort to oracles, fortune tellers of psychics, like idol-worshippers do, when they are fearful about the future. If I’m close to HaShem, David haMelekh reasons, He will guide my destiny, and I will have nothing to fear. For even when things do not go my way, I know and believe that HaShem is sustaining and guiding my destiny.

שויתי ה ' לנגדי תמיד

In verse 8, David writes what is considered the maximum expression of Jewish faith “I have set HaShem continuously in front of me, on my right side, so I will not stumble” . For David haMelekh “emuna” (Jewish faith) is not just a matter of belief. The true “emuna” obviously begins with the element of belief, but it goes way beyond belief. Emuna means to visualize (=”set”) and feel that HaShem is present. The key word is the hebrew word “tamid”, always, continuously. My Emuna grows when I have a more and continuous awareness of HaShem’s presence. And vice-versa. If my awareness of HaShem presence is sporadic, and it awakes almost exclusively in times of need, then my Emuná is far from perfect, even if I do declare that I believe in God. The mission statement of a Jew is to develop an awareness of God’s presence that stays with him or her, as much time as possible.

כי מימיני בל אמוט

“Because when He is at my right side, I will not stumble” .

What is the consequence of having a permanent awareness of HaShem? When I set HaShem’s Presence as the main guideline of my life, when I live a life “under His sight”, then I will live a life of righteousness . I will not stumble, morally speaking.

Alternatively: what is the way to maintain a continuous consciousness of HaShem’s presence?

Living a righteous life, a life guided by His Tora, will help me to have HaShem always in front o me, and will prevent me from deviating from the path of righteousness.

תודיעני אורח חיים שובע שמחות את פניך נעימות מימינך נצח

In the last pasuq (verse 11) David haMelekh concludes:

תודיעני אורח חיים “Keep teaching me the ways of life”, Your Tora. in doing so שובע שמחות את פניך I will find everlasting happiness, coming from living in Your presence; נעימות מימינך נצח and while other pleasures in life are just temporary, limited gratifications, I surely declare that the pleasure and enjoyment that comes from being connected with You, is unlimited and eternal.