

This psalm contains magnificent praises to God. David describes why it is proper for him to love God in light of all the miracles He performed for him. David does not know how to repay God, declaring it impossible to repay all that God has done for him.

116 **1** I have loved God because He listens to my voice and my supplications, **2** for He turns His ear to me on the days when I call. **3** When the pangs of death encompassed me, and the misery of the grave came upon me, when I encountered trouble and sorrow, **4** I invoked the Name of God, saying, “Please, O God, deliver my soul!” **5** For God is gracious and righteous; our God is compassionate. **6** God watches over the fools; I was brought low, and He saved me. **7** Therefore, O my soul, return to your tranquility, for God has bestowed goodness upon you. **8** For You have always saved my soul from death, my eye from tears, my foot from wandering. **9** I shall yet walk before God in the lands of the living—in the Holy Land. **10** I had faith—for I spoke, even when I was greatly oppressed, and **11** I said as I hurried to escape Saul, “All men who deny that I will be king are lying.” **12** With what sort of tribute can I repay God for all His beneficences to me! **13** I will raise the

PSALM 116

David recited this psalm in connection with the troubles he endured as he fled from one place to another in fear of Saul and of those who plotted against him. When God saved David from all of them, he recited this psalm (Meiri).

116:6

God watches over the fools. The fool, who cannot figure out how to save himself from trouble but trusts in God, receives His protection. The clever person should therefore not put his trust in his intelligence and machinations, since they are futile without God's blessing (*Radak*).

RABBI AKIVA'S LOVE

Rabbi Gamliel said, “The children of the wicked are not admitted into the World to Come.” But Rabbi Akiva disagreed, “Even the children of the wicked will merit to enter the World to Come—as it says, *God watches over the fools*. Now, I have traveled to the island cities, and there, the word for *fool* (פֶּתִי) is used to refer to children (פְּתִיָּא). Thus, the verse implies that God will protect the children of the wicked, ensuring that they too will merit the World to Come” (*Sanhedrin* 110b).

The above teaching alludes to the extent of Rabbi Akiva's love for others. It was worthwhile for him

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cup of deliverance and invoke the Name of God. **14** I will now pay my vows to God, in the presence of all His people. **15** Grievous in the eyes of God is the death of His pious ones. **16** I acknowledge, O God, the kindness You did because I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant—You have therefore loosened my bonds. **17** To You I will bring an offering of thanksgiving, and proclaim the Name of God. **18** I will now pay my vows to God, in the presence of all His people, **19** in the courtyards of the House of God, in the midst of Jerusalem—praise God!

A CUP OF PSALMS

The *cup of deliverance* alludes to the Jewish people who are a *cup*—a vessel—for God's *deliverance*. A cup cannot be filled if it is already full.⁷¹ If we are filled with our own desires and agendas, then God's blessings cannot rest in us. Only when we empty ourselves of ego and seek to align our will with God's will can we host the blessings He bestows upon us (*The Rebbe*).⁷²

David's *cup of deliverance* also alludes to this Book of Psalms. With it, we are *raised* aloft and *delivered*, i.e., draw blessings down below (*Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch*).⁷³

When we recite a blessing over a cup of wine, we lift the cup a handbreadth above the table. Similarly, the *cup of deliverance*, the Book of Psalms, raises us above our mundane existence and heightens our consciousness so we can appreciate the miraculous *deliverances* that God does for us (*The Rebbe*).⁷⁴

DAVID'S CUP

In the future, God will make a banquet for the righteous. At the meal's conclusion, the cup of wine, over which the blessing after meals is recited, will be offered to each participant. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Joshua will all decline the honor due to some shortcoming in their spiritual stature. David, however, will take the cup and declare, “I will say the blessing, and it is fitting for me

71. See *Berachot* 40a.

72. *Sefer Hamaamarim* 5713, p. 63.

73. Letters appended to *Tehillim Ohel Yosef Yitzchak*, p. 210. English ed., p. 255.

74. *Torat Menachem—Hitvaaduyot* 5714, vol. 1, p. 101.

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to travel great distances, to the island cities, to learn an alternative meaning of a word so that he could interpret this verse as a source of comfort to the children of the wicked (*The Rebbe*).⁶⁹

116:7

Therefore, O my soul, return to your tranquility, for God has bestowed goodness upon you. When I was in dire straits, I would tell my soul: “From the dire straits that you are in, return to God, for He will be a source of tranquility for you. Just as he bestowed goodness upon you many times in the past, so will He do now” (*Radak*).

116:9

I shall yet walk before God in the lands of the living—in the Holy Land. While hiding in exile among the Philistines, David spoke of returning to the Land of Israel, the home of God's presence. The *lands of the living* refer to the cities of the Holy Land, which is a land that supports life and good health (*Radak*).

In this verse, David alludes to the fact that in the future, he will walk before the righteous, before God, with the resurrection of the dead (*Pesachim* 118a).

69. *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 25, pp. 184-185.

אֶהְבֶּתִּי כִּי־שָׁמַעַ | יְהוָה אֶת־קוֹלִי תַחֲנוּנִי: ב כִּי־הִטָּה אָזְנוֹ לִי וּבִימֵי אַקְרָא: ג אֶפְפוּנִי | חֲבַל־מָוֶת וּמַצְרֵי שָׁאוֹל מִצְאֹנִי צָרָה וַיִּגְזֹן אִמְצֵא: ד וּבְשֵׁם־יְהוָה אַקְרָא אֲנִי יְהוָה מִלְּטָה נַפְשִׁי: ה חָנּוּן יְהוָה וְצֹדִיק וְאֱלֹהֵינוּ מֵרַחֵם: ו שֹׁמֵר פְּתָאִים יְהוָה דָּלַתִּי וְלִי יְהוֹשִׁיעַ: ז שׁוּבִי נַפְשִׁי לְמִנוּחַיִכִּי כִּי־יְהוָה גָּמַל עָלַיִכִּי: ח כִּי חֲלָצַתָּ נַפְשִׁי מִמָּוֶת אֶת־עֵינִי מִן־דַּמְעָה אֶת־רַגְלִי מִדָּחִי: ט אֲתַהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה בְּאַרְצוֹת הַחַיִּים: י הֶאֱמַנְתִּי כִּי אֲדַבֵּר אֲנִי עֲנִיתִי מֵאֵד: יא אֲנִי אִמְרַתִּי בַּחֲפוּי פֶל־הָאָדָם כָּזָב: יב מִה־אֲשִׁיב לַיהוָה כָּל־תַּגְמוּלוֹהִי עָלַי: יג כּוֹס־יִשְׁוּעוֹת אֶשָּׂא

DIVINE SILENCE

The Psalmist uses the plural—*lands of the living*—because the Land of Israel supports two modes of spiritual life. When the Temple stood in Jerusalem, Godliness was overt and obvious. The spirit of prophecy pervaded the land, and the nation as a whole lived a holy and spiritual life. After the Temple's destruction, God's presence receded. His influence no longer directly uplifts those living there.

And yet, God's presence is potentially more potent in the Holy Land now than it was in the times of the Temple. To illustrate: An idea, while still in the mind of its thinker, is inaccessible to others. Yet it is precisely then that it is most pure. The spoken idea, by contrast, is accessible to others, but it does not represent the purest form of the idea. Similarly, during Temple times, God's presence in the Holy Land was as if He were speaking, whereas now, it is as if He were thinking. In Temple times, He was more perceptible, but one could only perceive His “spoken” self. Today, God is less perceptible in the Holy Land—He no longer “speaks.” But those righteous individuals, such as the Arizal, who manage to perceive God through the darkness, are perceiving God in His state of “thought.” Their Divine perception is therefore even greater than the prophets of old (*Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi*).⁷⁰

70. *Torah Or*, *Vayeitzei* 224-23a.

וּבְשֵׁם יְהוָה אַקְרָא: יד גִּדְרֵי לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁלָּם נִגְדָה־נָּא לְכָל־עַמּוֹ: טו יָקָר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה הַמּוֹתָה לְחַסִּידָיו: טז אֲנִי יְהוָה כִּי־אֲנִי עֹבֶדְךָ אֲנִי עֹבֶדְךָ בְּנ־אִמְתָּךְ פִּתְחַת לְמוֹסְרִי: יז לֹךְ אֲזַבֵּחַ וַיָּבַח תוֹדָה וּבְשֵׁם יְהוָה אַקְרָא: יח גִּדְרֵי לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁלָּם נִגְדָה־נָּא לְכָל־עַמּוֹ: יט בְּחַצְרוֹת | בֵּית יְהוָה בְּתוֹכְכִי יְרוּשָׁלַם הִלְלוּהָ:

116:14

I will now pay my vows to God. While fleeing from his enemies, David would say, “If God will return me to my home, I pledge to do such-and-such.” David now declares that he will fulfill those vows (*Radak*).

116:15

Grievous in the eyes of God is the death of His pious ones. God is loath to see His pious ones die before their time. He therefore rescued me from death, since I am one of His pious ones (*Radak*).

PRECIOUS PIETY

The word for *grievous* (יָקָר) also means “precious.” Hence, a homiletical reading of the verse: “Precious” in the eyes of God is the death of His pious ones. When we suppress our drives and urges, we “kill” our animalistic, selfish soul. God cherishes this sacrifice. Thus, the *death of His pious ones is precious in the eyes of God* (*Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch*).⁷⁶

116:16

I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant. I am Your servant (a) because I have accustomed myself to serving You, and (b) because it was in my nature from birth, since my mother was Your maidservant. The nature of a person is influenced primarily by the mother, who carries the fetus in her womb and then nurses the baby once it is born (*Radak*).

76. *Sefer Hamaamarim* 5688, p. 101.

Psalms in Practice

**ובימי אַקְרָא
On the days when I call (116:2).**

Days of Hallel. There are eighteen days when the complete Hallel is recited (in the Holy Land): (1) the first day of Pesach; (2) Shavuot; (3-10) the eight days of Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret; (11-18) the eight days of Chanukah. This is alluded to in the *gematria* of the first and last letters of the words for *on the days when I call*—אֲקָרָא, which equals 18 (*Rokeach*). (Outside of the Holy Land, the Hallel is completed on three additional days: the second days of Pesach and Shavuot respectively, and on Simchat Torah.) That Hallel is recited on Chanukah is alluded to below, 118:27: *God is Almighty, and He has illuminated for us* (*Pesikta Rabbati* 2:1).

**כּוֹס־יִשְׁוּעוֹת אֲשָׂא וּבְשֵׁם יְהוָה אַקְרָא
I will raise the cup of deliverance and invoke the Name of God (116:13).**

Raising the Cup. The cup of wine over which the blessing after meals is recited should be raised one handbreadth from the ground—as it is written: *I will raise the cup of deliverance and invoke the Name of God* (*Berachot* 51b). The Talmud is referring to one who is sitting on the ground. One who is sitting at a table raises the cup one handbreadth above the table. We raise the cup so that all present should gaze upon it (*Shulchan Aruch Harav, Orach Chaim* 183:8). According to Chabad custom, the cup is raised three handbreadths above the table (*Sefer Haminhagim—Chabad*, p. 28).

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