Mizmor Kaf Gimmel -
Studying Psalm 23 in Hebrew

The Hebrew title for the book of Psalms is called Tehillim, meaning “songs of praise.” Individual psalms are referred to as Mizmorim: Mizmor Aleph (Psalm 1), Mizmor Bet (Psalm 2), and so on. Mizmor Kaf Gimmel (Psalm 23) is one of the most comforting and well-known of all of the Tehillim, revealing the middot (attributes) of God as the Good Shepherd (ha-ro’eh ha-tov).

Notes:
Adonai Ro’i – “The LORD my shepherd,” hearkens to Gen 49:24, where God is described as ג‑ע‑א י‑ר‑ו‑י, “The Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.” If God is Israel’s Shepherd, then His followers are צ‑ו‑נ ת‑ו‑ר‑י (tzon mar’ito) - the sheep of His pasture (Psalm 100:3). Note that the word “shepherd” is thought to derive from ר‑א (re’a), meaning friend.

Lo echsar - “I shall not lack,” hearkens to Gen 22:14, where God is called א‑ר‑י‑ה, (Adonai Yireh), “The LORD will Provide (or will see).” Since the LORD is our Shepherd, we will not lack His provision. God will see and fully understand our needs.
Notes:

Menuchah means rest, quietness, and derives from נוח  (nachat), from which the name נوح (noach, meaning “rest”) comes. The phrase ‘al-mei menuchot refers to “still” or “comforting” waters. אלהי חולים (elohei khol-nechamah), the “God of all comfort” is the term the Apostle Paul uses in 2 Cor 1:3.

This image reminds us that God is יקר חלב (Adonai Shalom), the “God of peace” (Judg 6:24).

Notes:

The word yeshoveiv (“He restoreth”) comes from שיב (shuv), which means “to turn or return,” and is the root of the word תשובה (teshuvah), meaning turning back to God through repentance. As the Good Shepherd, ברא תמים (ha-ro’eh ha-tov), the LORD gives calls His sheep back to the right path. Ultimately, this turning of the soul is healing, and evokes the Name of God אדוניא רפאתך (Adonai Rof’ekha - The LORD your Healer (Ex 15:26)).

The phrase ומאגי תלמיד uses the construct form of מחיל (ma’gal), a sort of track or entrenchment created by cattle being driven by a shepherd. מácil תלמיד suggests that the Good Shepherd leads His sheep to tracks or pathways for His Name sake. Note further that this evokes the Name of God ירא תדוק (Adonai Tzidkeinu), the LORD our Righteousness (Jer 23:6, 33:16).
Evil I will fear no through the valley Yea, though I walk of the shadow of death

comfort me they and Your staff Your rod with me for Thou are

Gam ki-eilekh be-gei tzalmavet lo-‘ira ra, ki-attah immadi, shivtekha u-mish’antekha heimmah yenachamuni.

Notes:
Even though we might walk within be-gei tzalmavet, a death-like valley of shrouded darkness, God’s sheep can say, lo-‘ira ra, “I will fear no evil,” since the LORD is Adonai Tzeva’ot, the LORD of the armies of heaven, who is always present as Adonai Shammah, the “God who is there” (Ezekiel 48:35).

The Good Shepherd’s rod shevet and staff mish’net comforts nacham, indicating consolation over sorrow) His sheep. Like verse 2, elohei khol-nechamah, the “God of all comfort” is suggested (2 Cor 1:3).
Notes:

The LORD honors His followers by setting a shulchan - שלון - or table in front of their enemies (i.e., those who cause the followers of the LORD tzuris, or grief). This image suggests the idea of אֱֹדֹנַי נִסִי (Adonai nissi), the LORD my banner (or the LORD my miracle. The Hebrew word נֵס (nes) was a triangular banner of an army unit or tribe. Nes also can refer to a miracle, as in nes gadol hayah sham, “a great miracle occurred there.”

The phrase דַּשְׁתִּי וַּשְּׁמֵן רְשֵׁי (dashanti va-shemen roshi) means “you fatten my head with oil.” Since fat animals were considered the healthiest, and fat was regarded as the best part of the sacrifice (Psalm 20:3), the head of the follower of the LORD is said to be "anointed with oil" as a poetic description of the blessing of God. The overflowing cup also suggests the image of אֱֹדֹנַי יִירֶה (Adonai Yireh), “The LORD will Provide.”

Notes:

Goodness (tov) and unfailing love (chesed) are said to “pursue me” (yirdefuni) all the days of my life. The verb used here, רָדַּף (radaf), means to run after, to track (as a hunter might track his prey), to pursue and take captive, suggesting that the Good Shepherd is relentless in His care and love for His sheep. God will haunt His followers with the truth of His goodness and unfailing love all the days of their lives. Yielding to the love of God causes you to return to the “house of the LORD” (the verb ve-shavti comes from השב (shuv), which means “to turn or return,” and is the root of the word תְשׁוּבָה (teshuvah).
The first part of Shelosh Esrei Middot (Ex. 34:6), the listing of the thirteen attributes (middot) of God’s mercy, reads: ־נהי, הנהי אל רוחם ופשע, ידיה עלייה עצמה ומעלות (Adonai, Adonai, El Rachum ve-chanun, Erekh apayim, ve-rav-chesed ve-emet), “The LORD, the LORD God of compassion and grace, slow to anger, and abundant in love and truth.” Psalm 23 is a picture of what these attributes of mercy mean to those who follow the LORD and are under His care.

Psalm 23 in Hebrew

נְמוֹת לְדוֹרֵי יְהוָה רַעְלְא אֶל שָׁחֵר;
בַּכַּל עָנָי תְּרֵסָא עַל-פְּעַמּוֹן עַד לְבָנֵי;
נֹכֵשׁ יָשְׁבֵב נְתַנִּי בָּנַעְלוֹנִי יְשַׁמּוֹן;
וּמַכְרַי לָבָנֶה בְּן אֲלָבָנֶה לְאַחְיָא רֹעִי;
כִּרְאָתְא תְּפֹרֵת שְׁבָמָה וְמְשַׁעְנְתָה שְׁחוֹת לְבָנֶה;
תְּפֹרֵת לְפַרְעֹה שְׁלַחְתָה נֹכְדָא יְרֵרִי;
בְּשָׁמַא רַאֵשׁ כּוֹס קְרַבָּה;
אֲלָה שְׁמוֹ שְׁרַפְּרָה וְרַפְּרָה נְפֹרְמָה תִּתְיָה רָשָׁה;
בְּכַּוָיָיו לְאָלָה לְמֵי:

Psalm 23 (KJV)

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.
Shelosh Esreh Middot

After the Jews had committed the grievous sin with the golden calf, Moses despaired of the Jews ever being able to find favor in God’s eyes again. God, however (as explained in the Talmud (Tractate Rosh Hashanah 17b)) donned a tallit, and, in the role of a chazzan, showed Moses the order of the thirteen attributes of mercy. God proclaims thirty-two words (Exod. 34:6-7) that have become known in Jewish tradition as the Shelosh Esrei Middot, the Thirteen Attributes of God:

"And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." (KJV)

According to traditional interpretations, the thirteen attributes are articulated as follows:

1. The LORD (YHVH)
2. The LORD (the repetition of God's name indicates that God is merciful to one who has not yet sinned and also to one who has sinned but has repented)
3. El - God the Mighty
4. Rachum: God the compassionate;
5. Vechanun: God is gracious;
6. Erech Apayim: God is slow to anger, patient in waiting for our repentance;
7. Verav Chesed: God is abundant in kindness to both the righteous and the wicked;
8. Ve'emet: God is truthful and faithful in carrying out promises;
9. Notzer Chesed La'alafim: God extends kindness for a thousand generations, taking into account the merit of our worthy ancestors (Zechut Avot);
10. Nosei Avon: God forgives iniquity, defined in the tradition as wrongful deeds committed with premeditation;
11. Vafesha: God forgives transgression, defined as wrongful deeds committed in a rebellious spirit;
12. Vechata'ah: God forgives sin, those wrongful deeds that were inadvertent;
13. Venakeh: God will not cancel all punishment, only for those who are repentent.