

One Thing I Ask

The Hasidic master Levi Yitzhak said: I and my quest are one.

To Behold

God's Beauty

The Hasidic master Yehudah Aryeh Leib of Gur commented on the dual request expressed in a single verse in this psalm, first to behold God's beauty and then to pray in God's sanctuary: On Shabbat, I behold God's beauty; in the week, as I enter the world, I pray in God's sanctuary.

From the first day of the month of Elul until Yom Kippur (or in some communities through the seventh day of Sukkot, Hoshana Rabbah), we recite:

A Psalm for the Season of Repentance: Psalm 27

A PSALM OF DAVID

ADONAI is my light and my help. Whom shall I fear?

ADONAI is the stronghold of my life. Whom shall I dread?

When evil people assail me to devour my flesh, my enemies and those who besiege me, it is they who stumble and fall.

Should an armed camp be arrayed against me, my heart would show no fear; if they were to go to war against me, of this I would be sure.

One thing I ask of ADONAI—this is what I seek:

to dwell in the House of God all the days of my life, to behold God's peacefulness and to pray in God's sanctuary.

Ahat sha-alti mei-et Adonai, otah avakesh:
shivti b'veit Adonai, kol y'mei hayai,
lahazot b'no-am Adonai u-l'vakeir b'heikhalo.

In a time of calamity, You would hide me in Your *sukkah*, enfold me in the secret recesses of Your tent, and You raise me up to a stronghold.

Now my head is raised high above my enemies round about, and I come with offerings, amidst trumpet blasts, to God's tent, chanting and singing praise to ADONAI.

ADONAI, hear my voice as I cry out;
be gracious to me, and answer me.

It is You of whom my heart said, "Seek my face!"

It is Your presence I seek, ADONAI.

Do not hide Your face from me; do not act with anger toward me.
You have always been my help; do not forsake me;
do not abandon me, my God, my deliverer.

Though my father and mother abandon me,
ADONAI will gather me in.

Show me Your way, ADONAI, and lead me on a straight path despite those arrayed against me.

Do not hand me over to those who besiege me;

for false witnesses who breathe hatred have risen against me.

► If only I could trust that I would see God's goodness in the land of the living . . .

Place your hope in ADONAI.

Be strong and take courage and place your hope in ADONAI.

From the first day of the month of Elul until Yom Kippur (or in some communities through the seventh day of Sukkot, Hoshana Rabbah), we recite:

לְדוֹד

יְהוָה אֱוֹרִי וַיִּשְׁעֵי מִמִּי אֵירָא,

יְהוָה מַעֲזוֹ חַיִּי מִמִּי אֶפְחָד.

בְּקָרֵב עָלַי מְרַעִים לֶאֱכֹל אֶת־בְּשָׁרִי,

צָרִי וְאֵיבִי לִי, הִמָּה כְּשֵׁלוֹ וְנִפְלֹו.

אִם תַּחֲנֶנּוּ עָלַי מַחֲנֶנָּה לֹא יִירָא לְבִי,

אִם תִּקְוֶים עָלַי מִלַּחֲמָה בְּזֹאת אֲנִי בּוֹטָח.

אֶחָת שְׁאֵלָתִי מֵאֵת יְהוָה, אוֹתָהּ אֲבַקֵּשׁ,

שְׁבִתִּי בְּבֵית יְהוָה כָּל־יְמֵי חַיִּי

לְחַזוֹת בְּנֹעַם יְהוָה וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהִיכָלוֹ.

כִּי יִצְפְּנֵנִי בְּסֻכָּה בְּיוֹם רָעָה,

יִסְתַּרְנִי בְּסֹתֵר אֶהְלֹו, בְּצוּר יְרוּמָמִנִי.

וְעֵתָהּ יָרוּם רֹאשִׁי עַל אֵיבֵי סְבִיבוֹתַי

וְאֶזְבְּחָהּ בְּאֶהְלֹו זִבְחֵי תְרוּעָה,

אֲשִׁירָה וְאֶזְמְרָה לַיהוָה.

שְׁמַע יְהוָה קוֹלִי אֶקְרָא, וְחַנּוּנִי וַעֲנֵנִי.

לֵךְ אָמַר לְבִי בִקְשׁוּ פָנַי, אֶת־פְּנֵיךְ יְהוָה אֲבַקֵּשׁ.

אַל תִּסְתֵּר פְּנֶיךָ מִמֶּנִּי,

אַל תֵּט בְּאָף עֲבָדֶךָ, עֲזַרְתִּי הָיִיתִי,

אַל תִּטְשֵׁנִי וְאַל תַּעֲזֹבֵנִי אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁרָאֵל.

כִּי אָבִי וְאִמִּי עֲזָבוּנִי, וַיהוָה יִאֲסָפֵנִי.

הוֹרֵנִי יְהוָה דֶּרֶכְךָ, וְנִחַנִּי בְּאַרְחַת מִישׁוֹר, לְמַעַן שְׂרָרִי.

אַל תִּתְּנֵנִי בְּנֶפֶשׁ צָרִי,

כִּי קָמוּ בִי עֲדֵי שָׂקָר וַיִּפַּח חֲמָם.

◀ לֹוֵא הָאֶמְנָתִי, לְרֹאוֹת בְּטוֹב יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ חַיִּים.

קִנְיָה אֶל יְהוָה, חֲזֹק וַיֶּאֱמַן לְפָנַי וְקִנְיָה אֶל יְהוָה.

תהלים כז

PSALM 27 expresses two opposite feelings, each of which may be felt on these days. From the beginning, the psalmist expresses absolute faith in God, culminating in this striking sentence: "Though my father and mother abandon me, Adonai will gather me in." But at the same time, the psalmist experiences God's absence—the speaker longs to "see God," yet receives no response to this longing. The poem's last line leaves us with a thin, consoling thread of hope, making us realize, perhaps, how much our lives depend on faith.

The psalm, with its themes of hope and faith in God, along with its expression of a powerful sense of yearning, was thought to be appropriate for the days leading up to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and the days that followed.

DO NOT HIDE YOUR FACE

אל תסתיר פניך FROM ME ממני. The contemporary literary critic Robert Alter writes, "'Face' suggests 'presence,' the concrete metaphor serving the poet more than the abstract sense behind it." When God is with us, we are protected, sheltered. Other psalmists similarly use concrete metaphors to the same effect, such as being cradled in God's wings. As Alter further remarks, God's

turning away results in the supplicant's being left unprotected.

IF ONLY I COULD TRUST לֹוֵא הָאֶמְנָתִי. This is the only verse in the psalm that has no parallel. It is as if the speaker's voice simply trails off and then hears an inner voice calling: *kaveih el Adonai*, "place your hope in Adonai." Or, perhaps someone else, in turn, urges the despairing supplicant to continue trusting that God will respond—and asks that the person not lose faith.