

**Pardes from Jerusalem - Parshat Nitzavim/Rosh HaShanah**  
**“את שאלתי מאת ה' – את שאלתי מאת ה'”**  
**Only ONE thing? How can that be?**

“אחת שאלתי מאת ה', אותה אבקש; שבת בבית ה' כל ימי חיי...”  
(תהלים כז,ד)

“One thing I have asked of HaShem, THAT is what I shall seek:  
that I dwell in the House of Shem all the days of my life...(Psalms 27:4)

In the Jewish tradition, from *Rosh Chodesh Elul* through *Hoshanah Rabbah*, many have adopted the practice of reciting Chapter 27 in Psalms either once or twice a day. Currently, we are in the middle of this period. Through exploring verse four, I will share the spiritual practice of becoming at home with oneself and of sensing inner harmony, alignment and equanimity. Cultivating this practice is essential when one values being true to oneself. Feeling as if one is a stranger to oneself, feeling disconnected with oneself and feeling alienated from one's own inner being severely reduces the likelihood of living a life of truth and authenticity.

1 - I would like to suggest that the phrase in the verse “*Beit HaShem* - House of HaShem” actually has two meanings: 1) the actual physical *Beit HaMikdash* – the Holy Temple that was built on *Har HaBayit* – the Temple Mount - in Yerushalayim and 2) the spiritual, emotional and mental space, awareness, consciousness of “*Beit HaShem*” within the individual, meaning our soul, our spiritual center, the place within from where the *kol da'ma'mah daka* – the still small voice – speaks to us. In either case, *Beit HaShem* is the place/space, physical or spiritual, where HaShem's Divine Presence (as compared with HaShem's Existence) is revealed through the *Shechinah*.

2 – The *Malbim*, Rav Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser, who lived 1809-1879 in the Ukraine, a master of Hebrew grammar and renown Biblical commentator explains the emphasis on “one thing.” He teaches, “Man's desires always change. Each moment breeds new whims and fresh wants. However, King David (who is considered to have authored most of the Psalms) is saying that he has had only one consistent request of God. Further, THIS in fact is what he constantly seeks: to dwell in *Beit HaShem*, as this embodies all of King David's desires --- the all-encompassing practice of being in relationship with God and always trying to understand His ways.”

*We are compelled to believe that King David must be referring to the spiritual understanding of Beit HaShem, since the physical Temple was not yet built.*

3 – Rav Adin Even-Yisrael Steinsaltz, who recently passed, may his memory be for a blessing, scholar, teacher, scientist, writer, mystic and social critic, offers a different understanding of this verse. Regarded as one of the most brilliant and influential rabbis of our time it behooves us to pause and consider his interpretation. He is not as concerned with the phrase “one thing I have asked of HaShem” as much as the actual request, “that I dwell in *Beit HaShem* all the days of my life.”

Rav Steinsaltz teaches in his commentary on the Book of Psalms, “King David is earnestly beseeching, entreating and seeking, in a state of *deveikut*, (a deep, trance-like meditative state when sensing closeness to HaShem) one thing and one thing only: it is NOT for his safety or to be rescued from those that are pursuing him, rather to dwell and live in the House of God every day, all the days of his life. This request, especially since it’s from someone who is neither a *Cohen* or *Levi*, cannot refer to actually serving in the *Beit HaMikdash*, the Holy Temple, in the physical ritualistic manner (notwithstanding that the Temple was not yet built, it could refer to King David’s aspirations). Rather, in its very essence, this is an expression of attachment a person experiences when feeling that he or she is **spiritually** dwelling in the house of God, meaning the sheer pleasure one experiences when encountering the Divine in one’s life.”

*What I sense so strongly in Rav Steinsaltz’s teaching is the apparent connection between dwelling in the house of God and closeness. So ultimately, perhaps Rav Steinsaltz is suggesting that the place we feel most at home with ourselves, where we feel the closest with ourselves, is in fact where we feel the closest with the Divine. In fact, he may be suggesting that they may actually be one of the same. So logically then, if one is not feeling at home with one’s self it could be indicative of feeling spiritually blocked or distant from encountering the Divine Presence within. Perhaps the quest, the hunger, and the drive to feel comfortable with oneself is actually manifesting the need to feel God’s presence within.*

4 – Reb Shlomo Carlebach, spiritual teacher, composer and singer, who passed in 1994, offers a more intimate, subjective and emotionally imbued understanding of this verse. He speaks to both phrases, “ONE thing I have asked of HaShem” and “that I dwell in the House of HaShem all the days of my life.” In fact, according to Reb Shlomo one can view this verse in two different ways:

- one request, and only one, **I ask of God every day**, “**כָּל יְמֵי חַיֵּי**” - all the days of my life -” and that is “to dwell in the House of God. The emphasis here is that while King David may be requesting various things of God each day, there is only one thing he consistently asks of God each day.

- one request, and only one, I ask of God **to receive every day of my life** and that is “to dwell in the House of God “**כָּל יְמֵי חַיֵּי**” - all the days of my life” – meaning every day. The emphasis here is that while King David may be requesting various *brachot* to receive from God each day, he is requesting only one thing that He seeks to be blessed with every day - to dwell in the House of God --- every day of his life.

Reb Shlomo’s teaching actually threads these two views into one incredible spiritual practice:

“We are asking a lot of things of God, but obviously there really is only one thing. Let’s put it this way: Our thoughts are on all kinds of levels. Let’s say that every few months I have to get a haircut. I am only thinking of it when I have to go and only then. It’s external, outside of my thoughts. Now let’s say that every day I put on *tefillin*. So, this thought is already closer to me - it is more regular in my head. Then there is a kind of thought which I am always thinking about even if I am unaware that I am thinking about it.

When you eat something that is spoiled, it's not so good and you may have to vomit it out. You may get a little sick, but you don't lose your mind over it. However, when you live in the wrong place it can absolutely drive you out of your mind, because the connection of the house to your soul is the deepest, deepest, deepest connection.

For instance, when you are walking into somebody's **house you are literally walking into somebody's soul**, even if their soul is not revealed, which is possible. I mean, while of course they have a soul, it's as if they are keeping it elsewhere and not in their home. Regretfully, there are too many people like this. For example, there are some who have their soul in their business and not in their home. So, you can walk into someone's home and it's like a cemetery, and yet, you don't know why. It's beautiful, it's clean, but there is no soul there.

Basically, we are all living in two worlds. On a certain level we are living in a world where I have to do what everybody else is doing. Most people go to sleep, I go to sleep, most wake up, hopefully I will wake up. Most derive some sort of financial sustenance, I also do the same.

But then there is something else, the deepest, deepest depths of me --- where it's just 'I' and nobody else in the world. And you see, the deepest secret of life is to know exactly when I have to do what everybody else is doing and when I have to be just 'I.'

In a general way, the difference is between the street and the house.

**On the street** I am like everybody else. **The home** is the one place where it's just 'I.' When you love somebody very much you want to go to their home. When two people love each other they build a home. What does that mean? The more you love somebody the more my special 'I' connects with your special 'I', so we can build a home together.

So, this passage in Psalms says there is one thing I am asking of God and I am asking for it all the time. Please God, let my home be Your home, the house of God. The question is, where am I most Godlike, where am I most infinite? The most Godlike part of me is that part which is just 'I.'

So, I say please God, let my home be the house of God. You know friends, I have seen a lot of people, young and old. The moment many young people come into their parents' home they begin to shrink --- they become so small. I have seen older people, husbands and wives coming home to each other and they shrink. Do you know what that means? It's NOT the house of God. I cannot be infinite in this place; I'm a slave in this place.

Today the world really wants to be infinite in their homes and if I fear the place I live in and fear the person I am living with, I cannot be infinite. One thing I am asking of you God, because otherwise I cannot live in this world.

I can cut my wings off and still be on the street. There has to be though one place where I can fly. There has to be somewhere, a little place in this world --- my home, let it be *Beit HaShem*."

*Let's bless each other to trust each other enough, to be infinite enough, to be big enough --- to give each other space to be Godly --- to be a true "I" --- to dwell in Beit HaShem within each one of us individually and among all of us collectively. Being Godly means trusting that there is enough space for everyone to build their own home.*