

## ***Erev Rosh Hashanah, 5778: What Shall I Ask For?***

*Rabbi Esther Adler, Mount Zion Temple*

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*L'Shannah Tovah tikateivu*, I wish you all a good new year. And this year, more than any in recent memory, we need all the good wishes we can get. It has been a tough year - globally, nationally, for some of us personally. There are things to be grateful for, to be sure, and it is so very important to acknowledge them and count our blessings every day. But you have to admit, it has been a tough year.

What shall we pray for as we gather here in the synagogue on these Holy Days? What do we wish for? I would love to tell a genie and three wishes joke here - A guy was wandering the beach and found a magic lamp...but unfortunately, there are none that can be told in polite company.

In the absence of a good joke, I'll go straight to our sacred texts. There is a tradition during this season of reading Psalm 27 daily - from the beginning of the month of Elul, through Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur till the end of Sukkot, sort of a unifying refrain carrying us through this whole season. I think it has something to offer us as we try to make sense of everything going on around us, as we try to cope with a world that seems to be spinning out of control.

We don't know the exact historical context for Psalm 27, but commentators suggest that King David is reaching out to God in a time of crisis, expressing both trepidation and hope. After establishing that *Adonai ori v'yishi* - God is my light and my Salvation, David shares his most heartfelt wish; *Achat Sha'alti me'et Adonai* - One thing I ask of God. One thing...

I invite you to explore this with me for the next few moments, not in the prayer book or a study sheet, but as a guided meditation.<sup>1</sup> So sit as comfortably as you can, perhaps close your eyes, Settle yourself, and take a few slow, deep breaths.

With each breath, invite yourself to relax.  
Inhale...exhale.

*CANTOR: Achat Sha'alti me'et Adonai otah avakesh.*

One thing I ask of Adonai, only this I seek.  
Breathe. Slowly, in and out.

Imagine if you could ask one thing of God.  
Imagine if reality, life,  
all the power and resources in existence  
could grant you one thing and one thing alone.

What would it be?

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As you continue to breathe,  
let your imagination float.  
Just for now, open your mind  
to the endless possibilities  
of this singular ask.  
Would you ask for some thing? Some person?  
Health? Wealth? Power? An Experience?  
Or would you ask for qualities of heart and mind?  
Intelligence... Skill... Courage...Patience...  
Honor...Freedom...Well-being...Love?  
This is a time of seeking. It is a time to get clear.  
What do I really want? What do I really seek?  
The psalmist answered like this:

*Cantor: Shivti b'veit Adonai kol Yimei Chayai*

To live in God's house all the days of my life  
Breathe. Imagine.  
Where is God's house?  
Has it a roof, walls, and a door?  
Is it a way of being?  
A way of feeling?  
What would it feel like to live there?  
Would you feel Safe?  
Whole? Loved? Free?  
Do you feel at home with God?  
If not, what would it take  
To feel at home with God?

Breathe, relax, imagine.

*Cantor: Lachzot b'noam Adonai ul'vakeir b'heichalo. [2x]*

To gaze upon God's beauty, and to visit God's palace

What would it mean to gaze upon God's beauty?  
Is that everywhere or somewhere special?  
What kind of eyes can see the beauty of Adonai?  
And now, imagine God's palace.

Is it a place?  
A synagogue, church, mosque, or zendo?

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A mountain peak or jungle or a rushing river?  
Perhaps an orphanage or hospital?  
Or is it a time?  
Is it Shabbat, Rosh Hashannah, Yom Kippur?  
Is it here and now—  
in services at Mount Zion Temple  
on Summit Avenue?

Is it the whole world? The universe?

Or is in deep inside of you, in your heart,  
Your soul

You can visit there, in God's palace.  
What will you do there?  
Take the guided tour?  
Have a cup of coffee and chat about your day?  
will you pour out your heart?  
Cry on God's shoulder?

The word for "visit"—*l'vaker*—  
can also mean to criticize.  
Perhaps you would like to offer God  
A few well-placed words of criticism  
As you visit God's palace  
As you dwell in God's house.  
Share your concerns about your loved ones  
Your world.  
God's world.

Is God's house in need of repair?  
Do you have a hammer? Will you lend a hand?  
They say that the past month - Elul  
Is an acronym for *Ani L'dodi v'dodi Li*  
I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine  
And that all during Elul God was close at hand  
Seeking us out, inviting us in.

And now, on Rosh Hashanah,  
God returns to the Throne of Glory.  
There is awe now,  
We stand at the open gates  
The palace is before us

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Beckoning us to enter.  
We are standing at the gates.

*Cantor: Achat Sha'alti me'et Adonai otah avakesh.*

If you could ask one thing of God  
What would it be?

*Cantor: Achat Sha'alti me'et Adonai otah avakesh.  
Shivti b'veit Adonai kol Yimei Chayai  
Lachzot b'noam Adonai ul'vakeir b'heichalo.*

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Rabbi Sheila Peltz Weinberg, *What Are You Asking For? A Meditation on Psalm 27* in God Loves the Stranger: Stories, Poems, Prayers, White River Press, 2017