

Psalm 27 (*LeDavid Hashem Ori*)

This psalm is recited twice daily at the end of the morning and evening services during the month of Ellul and until *Shemini Atzeret* (with its reference to God as protecting us within His ‘Sukkah’ (v.5). It is a demonstration of the psalmist’s absolute faith that God would vindicate him even under the most dire of circumstances and give him victory over even the strongest and most numerous of enemies. He then looks forward to offering thanksgiving songs and sacrifices in celebration of his victory, and views that experience as his chiefest joy (vv.1-6). He pleads with God to respond to his every need, given his heart’s constant desire for God’s Presence.

He alludes to the fact that, at some time in the future, it is inevitable that parents must depart the scene. In giving expression to this thought he employs the strong term עֲזַבְנִי (v.10), literally ‘they forsake me’ reminiscent of the same term used to describe the very opposite, most joyous, act of a young man ‘forsaking’ his parents to marry (Gen. 2:24). The psalmist might have wished to convey thereby the notion that, however sad is the loss of parents, the person of faith is never left unprotected because God, our ultimate Protector, surrounds us with a symbolic impregnable Sukkah, ensuring that we move forward and affirm life (vv.7-10). He concludes with the plea for God to ‘teach him His ways,’ to enable him ever to choose the upright path. That, he is convinced, is his guarantee of safety from the manifold dangers that surround us (11-13). The psalm concludes with his issuing of a call to all who hear (or read) his psalm to have faith and believe implicitly in God’s protection (v.14).

The recitation of this psalm during this period is a late addition to our liturgy, appearing for the first time in a Siddur published by Rabbi Shabtai of Rashkov (1655-1745), a disciple of the illustrious Baal Shem Tov. The practice received the later imprimatur of R. Ephraim

Zalman Margulies (1762-1828) in his *Mattei Ephraim*. He refers to its recitation only until Yom Kippur, but continues, ‘Our custom, however, is to recite it until, and including, *Shemini Atzeret*.’ The former, shorter, recitation period is based on the fact that the Midrash on this psalm relates its opening verse exclusively with that period:

The Lord is my light – on Rosh Hashanah, when we are vindicated, as it says,
‘He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light and your judgment as the
noonday’ (Ps. 37:6).

And my salvation – on Yom Kippur, when He exonerates us for all our sins.

Later expositors picked up on the psalmist’s reference to God ‘concealing me in his pavilion’ (*b’sukkah*) and used this as a recommendation that the recitation of this psalm should be extended throughout the festival of Sukkot.

This explains the variety of practice between Israel and the Diaspora regarding when to conclude its recitation. In Israel, where they exit the Sukkah on *Hosha’na Rabba*, its recitation concludes on that day, whereas in the Diaspora, where we still sit (albeit without the blessing of *leishev basukkah*) on *Shemini Atzeret*, we do not conclude until then.

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Sephardim recite Selichot each day from the beginning of the month of Ellul, the kernel of the Selichot being the recitation of ‘The Thirteen Attributes of God’ (compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and truth...: Ex. 34:6-7). Corresponding with this there are thirteen occurrences of God’s name in our psalm 27! The Talmud states that, ‘God says, “whenever Israel sins, let them recite this formula and I shall

forgive them” (Tal. *R.H.* 17b). Thus, the inclusion of Ps.27 by Ashkenazim during this period is also tantamount to the recitation of the Selichot.

Imaginative expounders also noticed a further reference to Ellul nestling within our psalm: Verse 13 commences לֹלֵא הָאֱמִנִי לְרֹאוֹת , and the interchange of the letters of the first word, לֹלֵא, yields – yes, you’ve guessed! – Ellul

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We conclude, first with a literal translation of the psalm, followed by a poetic free rendering from my *The Book of Psalms: Poetry in Poetry*, Publ. by Wipf & Stock, Oregon, USA, © 2018

א לְדָוִד:	1 [A Psalm] of David. The LORD
ה' אֹרִי וְיִשְׁעִי	is my light and my salvation;
מִמִּי אִירָא.	whom shall I fear?
ה' מַעְוֹז חַיִּי	The Lord is the stronghold of
מִמִּי אֶפְחָד.	my life; of whom shall I be
	afraid?

ב בְּקָרַב עָלַי מְרַעִים	2 When evildoers came upon
לֵאכֹל אֶת בְּשָׁרִי,	me to eat my flesh,
צָרִי וְאֹיְבֵי לִי,	even my adversaries and my
הִמָּה כָּשְׁלוּ וַנִּפְּלוּ.	foes, they stumbled and fell.

ג אִם תִּחְנֶה עָלַי מַחֲנֶה	3 Though a host should
לֹא יִירָא לְבִי:	encamp against me, my heart
אִם-תִּקְוֶם עָלַי מִלְחָמָה	shall not fear;
בְּזֹאת אֲנִי בֹטֵחַ.	though war should be waged

against me, even then will I be confident.

ד אחת שאלתי מאת ה'
אותה אבקש:
שבתי בבית ה'
כל ימי חיי,
לחזות בנעם ה'
ולבקר ביהיכלו.

4 One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the graciousness of the Lord, and to visit early in His temple.

ה כי יצפני בסכה
ביום רעה:
יסתרני בסתר אהלו
בצור ירומני.

5 For He will conceal me in His pavilion in the day of evil. He will hide me in the fastness of His tent, And raise me upon a rock.

ו ועתה ירום ראשי
על איבי סביבותי,
ואזבחה באהלו
זבחי תרועה;
אשירה ואזמרה לה'.

6 And now shall my head be lifted above my enemies around me; and I will offer in His tabernacle sacrifices with trumpet-sound. I will sing. I will offer praises unto the Lord.

ז שמע ה' קולי אקרא
והגני וענני.

7 Hear, O Lord, when I call out, and be gracious unto me, and answer.

ח לה אמר לבי
בקשו פני.
את פני ה' אבקש.

8 To commune with You, my heart says, "Seek out My Presence." Hence, will I seek Your Presence, Lord.

ט אל תסתר פניך ממני.
אל תט באף עבדך.

9 Hide not Your Presence from me. Do not banish Your servant angrily.

עֲזַרְתִּי הָיִיתָ. אֶל תִּטְשֵׁנִי
וְאַל תַּעֲזֹבֵנִי,
אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעֵי.
You have been my help, so do
not cast me off
nor forsake me, O God of my
salvation.

י כִּי אָבִי וְאִמִּי עֲזֹבוּנִי
וְה' יֶאֱסָפֵנִי.
10 For though my father and
mother must leave me, the
Lord will take me up.

יֵא הוֹרֵנִי ה' דֶּרֶכְךָ
וְנַחֲנִי בְּאֵרֶחַ מִישׁוֹר
לְמַעַן שׁוֹרְרֵי.
11 Teach me Your way, O Lord,
and lead me in an upright path,
because of them that lie in wait
for me.

יב אֶל-תִּתְּנֵנִי
בְּנֶפֶשׁ צָרִי
כִּי קָמוּ בִי עֲדֵי שָׁקֶר
וַיִּפֹּחַ חָמָס.
12 Abandon me not to the will
of my adversaries, for false
witnesses have appeared
against me, spouting violence.

יג לוֹלֵא הָאֲמָנֹתִי לִרְאוֹת
בְּטוֹב ה'
בְּאֶרֶץ חַיִּים.
13 Had I not believed I'd enjoy
the goodness of the Lord in the
land of the living [I'd be
undone].

יד קוּה אֶל ה'. חֲזַק
וַיֵּאֱמַץ לִבִּי,
וְקוּה אֶל ה'.
14 Wait on the Lord. Be strong
and let thy heart take courage.
Ever wait for the Lord.

Psalm 27

A psalm of David

With the Lord as my light
And my salvation,
Of whom shall I be afraid?
When He is the stronghold
Of my life,
Before whom
Shall I be dismayed?

When evil men lay into me
To destroy my life —
Enemies and adversaries
Everywhere rife —
It is they that shall end up
Stumbling and prostrate,
*Gaining no advantage
By their jealousy and hate.*

So even when surrounded
By a host of hostile foes,
I worry not *that they might
Be added to my woes.*
And even should war
Loom large ahead,
Even then I'll remain
Devoid of dread!

One request
I make of God —
That alone I seek —
To live out my life

In His sacred house
*With the pious
And the meek,*
Gazing out on the beauty
Of His majesty,
Each Temple visit deepening
The sense of intimacy.

For, when He hides me
In His booth
I'm well out of
Harm's way.
In the secret fastness
Of His tent,
Raised high above
The fray.

Then I'll enjoy victory
Over foes around,
With festive offerings
In His tent
Amid song and joyful sound.

Lord, hear me
When I cry
And graciously respond.
When I'm prompted
To seek Your face
Let us renew our bond.

You who've been
Your servant's help
Hide not Your face from me.

Do not abandon or forsake —
A Saviour ever be.

Though father and mother
Abandon me,
The Lord will take me in.
Lead me along Your straightest path
That my enemies won't win.

Subject me not
To the whims of my foes,
To false and violent witnesses
To their lies and blows.

Did I not indeed believe
That one day I'd be blessed
To enjoy the Lord's bounty
And a lifelong rest?

Put your faith
In the Lord Above.
Let your heart be brave
And strong.
Look to the Lord
To grant you days,
Happy, good, and long.

WISHING YOU AND ALL YOUR DEAR
FAMILIES A *SHANAH TOVAH*
UMETUKAH, AND MAY IT USHER IN
FOR MEDINAT YISRAEL AND ALL HER
CITIZENS A VICTORY THAT WILL BE
PERMANENT, BRINGING AN END TO
SORROW, COMFORT FOR THE
BEREAVED, HEALING FOR THE
WOUNDED AND NO FURTHER LOSS OF
LIFE.

תְּכַלֶּה שָׁנָה וְקִלְלוֹתֶיהָ,
תַּחֲלֵל שָׁנָה וּבִרְכוּתֶיהָ

RABBI JEFFREY AND GLORIA

