Gathering us in … A Meditation on Psalm 27 … for Elul
Joseph G. Rosenstein

The month of Elul is a month of reflection and introspection, in preparation for the high holy days. Elul is traditionally observed by reading Psalm 27 each morning. The following meditation focuses on some of the themes of this psalm. Before reading the meditation, take a few slow, deep breaths, then read the meditation slowly, pausing after each paragraph to close your eyes and breathe slowly two or three times, repeating to yourself “breathe in … breathe out”.

Adonai o-ri v’yi-shi,
mi-mi i-ra;
Adonai ma-oz chay-yei,
mi-mi ef-chad.
Adonai is my light and my help,
whom should I fear;
Adonai is the strength of my life,
what should I be afraid of.

We all find ourselves in tight spots
armies are encamped all around us
armies are encamped within us
our lives sometimes feel like battlegrounds.

We all have our personal concerns
we are concerned about
health … family …
relationships … careers

We all have our personal fears
sometimes we are afraid of death
sometimes we are afraid of life
Sometimes we are afraid of the past
sometimes of the future
and often of the present.

But You, Rib-bo-no shel o-lam,
You know our fears
You are aware of our concerns
and You hear us when we call out to You.

Ka-rov Adonai l’chol ko-rav,
L’chol a-sher yik-ra-u-hu b’e-met
You are close to all of us …
when we call out to You
when we call upon you sincerely and honestly

Your house is always open to us
You are always prepared to accept us
to gather us in
for Your love for us
is unconditional.
When we look to You
when we seek Your presence
when we turn to Your face
we see the hope,
the strength
the courage
that You provide
Ka-vei el Adonai
Put your hope in Adonai
Cha-zak v’-a-meitz li-be-cha
v’-ka-vei el Adonai.
You strengthen and fortify your heart
when you hope in Adonai
Ka-vei el Adonai.
Hope in Adonai
Ka-vei el Adonai.

As the high holy days approach
a time we look more closely at ourselves
We see ourselves as we are
we see ourselves as we could be
and we see the gap between the two
We know that we fall short in many ways
We can hide our deeds … our failings …
our fantasies … our feelings
We can hide them from other people
but we cannot hide them from You
You know us inside out
You know our sitting down and our rising up
You know every word that our souls utter.

You know every word that our souls utter
to You our lives are an open book
If others knew us as well,
we might well expect them to reject us
Even those who love us the most
might well turn away from us
but You, God,
will not.
A-vi v’-i-mi a-za-vu-ni,
Though even my parents abandon me
You, Adonai, You gather me in
You gather me close to You
You are always nearby
always waiting for me
always ready to provide me …
with hope, with strength.
You are always there for me
gathering me in
caring for me
loving me
providing me a home.
Take a moment to imagine
the feeling of unconditional acceptance
of being welcomed by God
welcomed with open arms
of being gathered in …
to God’s presence.

Being welcomed into Your presence is all I really need.
A-chat sha-al-ti mei-eit Adonai,
only one thing have I asked of Adonai
o-to a-va-keish
this I ask most urgently
shif-ti b’veit Adonai
to dwell in the house of Adonai
kol y’mei cha-yai
all the days of my life
la-cha-zot b’no-am Adonai
to experience the sweetness of Adonai
u-l’va-keir b’heir cha-lo
to dwell in Your presence.

How can we find this place?
How can we dwell in Your presence?
We may be able to find Your presence
to feel Your presence
beside a pool of still waters
or on a majestic mountain top
listening to the roaring waves of the ocean
or smelling the fragrance of an orange grove
Your house may be a glittering palace
the synagogue of our childhood
a secluded spot in our own house or garden
or a sacred place deep within ourselves.

For our ancestor Jacob,
Beth-El, the house of God,
was a rocky place
where he encountered God in a dream
after a hasty departure from home.
“Surely God is in this place,”
Yaakov said
afterwards
“but I didn’t know it.”
God is everyplace
   God is ha-Ma-kom
the place
every place
all place.
How can we find Your house?
   It is wherever we look.

Each of us
   each day
has the opportunity
to dwell in God’s house
to feel the showering of God’s blessings
to feel completely at home with Adonai.
Whenever we are afraid
   whenever we are in narrow straits
   whenever we feel pain or aloneness
   whenever our lives feel overwhelming
We can draw a few deep breaths
   and visualize ourselves as dwelling in Your house
   as the recipients of Your blessings
      of Your hope
      of Your strength
      of Your courage
Take a moment to imagine the feeling
   of dwelling in God’s house
   of feeling the hope and strength
that God provides.

“Kol ha-o-lam ku-lo ge-sher tzar m’od”
   The whole world is a narrow bridge
   says Rabbi Nachman
“v’ha-i-kar lo l’fa-cheid k’lal”
   but the most important thing to know
   the essence of the situation
   is that we need not fear at all.
Adonai o-ri v’yi-shi
   mi-mi i-ra
Adonai is my light and my help
   who should I fear
Im ta-cha-neh a-lai ma-cha-neh
   lo yi-ra li-bi
Through trouble surround me
   my heart will not fear
Though battles rage around me
   and within me
I will trust in Your presence
   and Your assistance.
For we are in the house of Adonai
and You will always gather us in
will always provide for our needs
will always provide us with care
with love
with hope
with strength.

As we embark on our Elul journey of introspection
we remind ourselves
that even while we are on this journey
we are still in Your house
that even when things look the darkest
we can turn toward You
with hope and with courage

Ka-vei el Adonai
Hope in Adonai

Cha-zak v’a-meitz li-be-cha

Ka-vei el Adonai
strengthen your heart
hope in Adonai
turn to Adonai

Ka-vei el Adonai.