

"THE ONE THING I REALLY WANT"

Psalms 26, which we read twice daily during this season, is full of military metaphors. The two sentences that are most famous are, ... *hoke hoke*

These two verses have always been regarded as a kind of pious digression.

However, this does not seem likely to me. David was a holy man, not a man of mere superficial pieties.

What David had in mind, I believe, was something somewhat different. He expresses all along his confidence and faith in God despite fear of what the enemy may bring upon him. These two verses, I suggest, are not so much a part of his faith, as an account of his woes! What he is saying is that despite his victories and triumphs, his successes and prosperities, what he really wants is something quite different: The one thing I really want, that which I desire, is -- to dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of my life...

If I had to date this psalm then, in addition to the historical and biographical evidence, I would find psychological proof that this was written in David's middle years.

Most young men usually are unaware of anything but their careers. The blandishment of great success and fame and wealth, and the immediate challenge of the initial promotions that come in any career, overwhelm all else, and a young man usually fails to ponder about and consider the dimensions of life that transcend career and success but that which really gives it permanent and enduring meaning. Perhaps that is the way it should be. At any rate, the blandishments of temporal success banish any thought of eternity.

Most old men too do not think about or act upon this urge of the eternal. They are caught up in quite a different lie: not by the illusion of forthcoming successes, but by the falsehood of past failures. They are convinced that they are beyond redemption, that they have spent their lives too much in achieving

their present ~~conditio~~ positions, they bear the scars of many battles for fame and success and wealth, scars of failures as well. They believe that a turn to religion or Torah or the House of the Lord is simply beyond their ken at this point.

David's plaint, however, sounds like that of a middle-aged man, who first meets with the magnificent pains of frustration and questioning that come during these middle years. This is the time when a man realizes he is not going to achieve all that he dreamt of as a youth, and that what he had achieved, through much effort and talent and pain, may simply not have been all that he thought it would be... The bitter taste of failure to achieve the great eminence he had once dreamt of, is compounded by a greater frustration: the awareness that the successes he has chalked up may not have been worth it.

**This is the** thinking that I see in David's rumination: God is my fortress, and I have found protection in Him. I am a general who has been victorious, for God has been with me. I have been a successful and prosperous king. I have administered a great kingdom, I have proven to be an adroit diplomat, a wise statesman, and I have maneuvered into my own possession much power. And yet... yet, despite all these that I have achieved, I am unhappy. Why? Because, "One thing I ask, one thing I desire, that I dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of my life..."

It is worth thinking about this meditation of King David. For he is right. He has great achievements to his credit in the diplomatic and political sphere. He united the kingdom, and Jewish history is eternally grateful to him for it. But when you and I are in trouble, we do not read the Chronicles for the recounting of his political acumen, but we turn to his Psalms, whose words re-echo and resound in the House of the Lord all the days of <sup>our</sup> ~~his~~ existence...

So perhaps the elderly amongst will take courage from King David. Perhaps the young men and young women will remember, before they are blinded by the

