

Nitzavim & Vayailech

בס"ד

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Dovid HaMelech said, "One thing I ask of God, that I seek...that I may dwell in the house of God all the days of my life" (Tehillim 27:4). These are such beautiful words and a profound sentiment, and they even made a song from it.

The question is, what did Dovid mean? Did he want to move into the *Bais HaMikdosh* on a permanent basis? How could he if the Temple wasn't even built in his day? The *Mishkan*? Perhaps, but there wouldn't have been much space to do much if he had to share his living quarters with the officiating *kohanim* and the Temple service.

The implication is that by "house," Dovid didn't necessarily mean a physical structure. He meant what the concept of house embodies, which is basically a safe enclosure from the outside world. That's what a house means to most people, a calm place of refuge from the dangers of the outside world, real or imagined.

But, even though Dovid had reason to be concerned about his security, that's not what bothered him. He wasn't pining for a physical fortress, which he could have built, but a spiritual fortress, one that would protect him from all the forces of the world distracting him away from his true desire, to think only

about God and to work on becoming increasingly closer to Him every moment he could.

And, he didn't mean in just one place. He knew he was king, and he knew as king he had national responsibilities and expectations. He knew that he had enemies, which also ended up including his own son. He had spent so much time fleeing the army of Shaul, his own king, and it forced his focus away from God in order to deal with his situation.

He also knew that none of it was accidental, but completely a function of *Hashgochah Pratis*—Divine Providence. People carried out what they did, but it was always by Divine design. He understood that no one could plan or do anything against him unless God sanctioned it.

So many people in life start off with admirable spiritual goals. But then life gets in the way, and it forces them to divide their attention between what they want to think about and what they'd prefer not to have to think about. For 63 years, Ya'akov Avinu barely ever stepped outside the Bais Midrash until Divine Providence decided otherwise, and he spent the next few decades distracted by this issue or that one.

So at first, people try to steal time away from their life responsibilities to continue pursuing their spiritual goals, having limited or no success. Then, as time goes on, some people get so worn out by life that they put their spiritual dreams on the back burner, where they boil out over the years and, eventually, disappear altogether.

That's what Dovid HaMelech was telling God. Despite all you have put me through, despite all that I have had to deal with, my desire to be close to you has not waned at all. Though life has done its best to wear me down and make me like everyone else, I refuse to go down. My center still remains You, and be-

ing as close to you as I can be...even if it takes years before I can.

This is what it means to "*Choose life that you may live*" at the end of the first of this week's *parshios*. It means stay focused on the real goal of life, and if you do, you will be able to live in the full sense of the word even before you reach it. God wants our hearts, and the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. It's nice when physical life can align with spiritual life, but even when they don't, they do if a person's heart is pointing in the right spiritual direction...at God.

We're going to have plenty of time to think about it come this Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, b"H. Make the best of the opportunity and do that. Make sure that when you step into *Shemonah Esrai* you're not actually stepping out of it by allowing yourself to walk a path that doesn't lead to God.

Have a great Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston