

“I SHALL NOT WANT”

Jim Bearden, July 8, 2007



In my work, context is important to internalizing concepts: Retreats versus presentations allows participants to identify/create contexts for the concepts we discuss.

The same is true for spiritual concepts, and “I shall not want” is such a concept.

“I shall not want” is the 2nd line in the 23rd Psalm, and the 1st line, “The Lord is my shepherd,” creates the context.

It seems to me that there are 2 possible contexts, or 2 possible ways to interpret those lines.

FIRST: Since the Lord is my shepherd; I'll receive all the things I want.

All of my wants (for most of us that means the things we've decided we must have) will be provided

And many of our prayers are really pleas to the Lord (our “shepherd”) to provide the things we want

In such prayers, there is always an underlying invitation to the Lord to function as our “shepherd”. And it seems to me that the Lord always responds to that underlying prayer by giving us opportunities to awaken our spirituality.

God does not punish us by depriving us of what we “want.” God blesses us by providing us with exactly what we need as spiritual beings.

And so, there is a 2nd context or way to interpret “I shall not want.”

I have surrendered or relinquished—have recognized the truth about—all of my demands & expectations on life, the things I have established as the requirements for my peace.

I realize that happiness & peace based only on my demands being met are temporary & superficial. My ego will always demand more.

In this second context, “I shall not want” is both the outcome I'm seeking and the process for doing so. It is the means and the end.

And that makes it a great form of Spiritual Practice, a great way to Practice Spirituality.

A tale of an American Indian traveled the Internet after September 11th. In reaction to the terrorist tragedies, this man said, “I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf is the vengeful, angry, violent one. The other is the loving, compassionate one.” When his grandson asked which wolf will win, the grandfather answered, “The one I feed.”

My feelings are the emotional consequences of the mental choices I make, the “wolves I choose to feed.”

Two more “wolves fighting in our hearts”:

The materialistic, demanding, desperate one (fear)

The spiritual, giving, peaceful one (love)

We feed these wolves with our thoughts, and when our thoughts arise from a materialistic consciousness, we feed the “wrong wolf.”

2 steps for correcting our mistaken feeding choices:

- Treating symptoms of those choices
- Treating their cause

TREATING SYMPTOMS

- **Catch yourself angry, depressed, frightened, desperate** (the consequences of having fed the materialistic wolf)
- **Acknowledge your “I must have” thoughts** (the food)
- **Choose “I shall not want” alternatives and use them!** (feed the spiritual wolf) – affirmations & denials

➤ EXAMPLES

- “I always remember...” Ken Keyes Pathway
- “Not agitated by grief or hankering after pleasure, they live free from lust, fear & anger.”
- “Fettered no more by selfish attachments, they are not elated by good fortune or depressed by bad; such are the seers.”
- “When you keep thinking about sense objects, attachment comes. Attachment breeds desire, the lust of possession which, when thwarted, burns to anger. Anger clouds the judgment. You can no longer learn from past mistakes. Lost is the power to choose between the wise and the unwise, and your life is utter waste.”
- “But when you move, amidst the world of sense, from both attachment and aversion freed, there comes the peace in which all sorrows end and you live in the wisdom of the Self.”

TREATING CAUSE

- **Meditation/contemplation/quiet time**
- **Memorize and focus on a passage, e.g., the 23rd Psalm**
 - The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
When I know that the Lord is my provider, my protector, my way-shower, “I shall not want” becomes the truth about my life.
 - He maketh me lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters, He restoreth my soul.
Regardless of the circumstances in my life, my shepherd is my source of peace and sustenance. While my body may become weary, my soul—my spiritual essence—will remain invigorated and strong.
 - He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His Name’s sake.
When faced with challenging circumstances (“In this world you will have trouble”), my shepherd provides the guidance I need to express my spirituality, my oneness with Him

- Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou are with me. Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.
We are having a physical experience; we must confront the illusion of death, but we do not have to create fear, because we are forever one with our Lord. In the old covenant, “rod” & “staff” may have provided comfort as weapons. In the new covenant, “rod” & “staff” are unconditional love and forgiveness.

Comfort in knowing that our Lord always loves us unconditionally and always forgives us. Comfort in knowing that we can also express that same unconditional love & forgiveness. In fact, it is by doing so that we experience it for ourselves. It is in giving that we receive.

- Thou preparest a table before me, in the presence of my enemies. Thou annointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
The Lord has provided us with opportunities to awaken to our spirituality, and those opportunities are the temptations of the materialistic perspective. But we are the Lord’s chosen, we are one with Him in spirit, and we have been provided with everything we’ll ever need to prevail. We have dominion over our thoughts, and the Lord provides us with all the opportunities we need to acknowledge and exercise that dominion, to choose “I shall not want”, to choose the feed the Spiritual Wolf.
- Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
Goodness and mercy are there for us to choose, to draw on and to express. They are always there. And finally, since know that I am one with Spirit, one with God, I also know that I will be so forever.

And that bit of good news takes us back to the context, the objective and the process of achieving it:

**The Lord is my shepherd
I shall not want**