

**JOAN FRIEDMAN**

***Dayenu* for the CBST Psalms Class**

If this class had 'only' the beautiful music singing us in and out – *Dayenu!*

If this class had 'only' the slow exploration of each Psalm in Hebrew and translations – *Dayenu*

If this class had 'only' Rabbi Kleinbaum's depth of commentary – *Dayenu!*

If this class had 'only' the profound poetry and artwork of the offerings – *Dayenu!*

If this class had 'only' the intimacy and depth of people sharing of themselves – *Dayenu!*

If this class had 'only' the absolute kindness of all responses – *Dayenu!*

Blessed be the Holy One, and all Her assistants, who bring us all of this and more four days a week,  
who during these times of trouble and isolation bring us connection and hope.

**IRA ROSENBLUM** *after Psalm 11*

**Trust: Seven Verses in Haiku Format**

How can I trust God  
When wickedness surrounds me  
And holds me hostage?

How can I trust God  
When the foundation crumbles  
And the walls collapse?

How can I trust God  
When furious infernos  
Are burning my soul?

Can I trust myself  
To cultivate righteousness  
And deep compassion?

Can I trust myself  
To be fearless and loving,  
To open my heart?

Can I trust myself  
To see God's face before me  
Blazing like the sun?

And can God trust me  
Not to flee to the mountains  
Like a frightened bird?

**ORA EZRACHI** *after Psalm 11*

**Listen, God!**

I've always trusted in you  
And assumed you would protect me.  
So why do you tell me to run for the hills?

**Look, God!**

Those nasty folks are hiding in the dark  
And aiming their weapons at the nice folks.

**Tell me, God!**

All basic decency is gone.  
There's no safe place to stand.  
What can I do?  
Where do I go?  
Where is my safe house?

**Oh!**

It seems God's telescopic gaze has been activated from the Heavenly Throne,  
and is seeking out humanity.  
God looks for the good ones,  
And hatefully rejects the bullies and tyrants.  
God will hurl fire and brimstone upon them,  
And they will be scorched and shredded by the windstorm.

**So!**

It seems God is Goodness.  
Loving those who do Good.  
Therefore:  
When I stand up straight  
I will be held in God's loving gaze.

**SHERRI FELT DRATFIELD** *after Psalm 11*

**Winter Garden**

*Multitudes perish from plague; lynchings revive.  
Nowhere to flee; foundations crumble.*

Winter comes; recall Spring.  
In the quiet after the fall,  
dig the not yet frozen soil.

*A Celebration of Psalms*

Plant pansies on our path;  
Let them freeze solid, then  
emerge, grow, bloom purple, yellow, flame.

Bed nemesia, snapdragon, sweet alyssum and flowering stock.  
If steady deep freeze blankets our landscape,  
don't despair. Protected planting beds reap a crush of color.

Blend Helleborus niger (Lenten rose) among the ferns and sweet woodruff;  
These hardy perennials stand above snow, like arrows:  
dark leathery leaves and blooms in rainbow hues.

Learn from galanthus (snowdrops) — dainty, delicate,  
they bravely push through snow and ice  
to ring their dangling white bell blooms.

In sunlight, look into the face of a flower.  
In darkness, snow glows in star and moonlight so,  
even now, we can behold winter's garden while we wait.

**KOHENET JUDITH HOLLANDER** *after Psalm 11*

That I could see clearly like the Prophets  
To know righteousness

But I am a mere mortal  
God does not whisper in my ear

I can never know if I follow the upright path  
I do not see beyond now to the effect of my actions  
But I hope

I hope that those who are evil (those who disagree with me) are stopped  
May the vileness that they wrought on others land many-fold on them  
May the evil I wish on them not come back to haunt me

Allow me to luxuriate in thoughts of vengeance  
Knowing as a mere mortal I do not whisper in God's ear

Then may I soften my vengeful heart  
And get on with the business of undoing the evil that we all do

**KOL GOODSTEIN** *after Psalm 11*

***the foundations crumble***

the forest is burning  
the clouds themselves –  
burning

deer and coyote  
fox and rabbit  
all that can run –  
must run

rattler and salamander  
snail and groundhog  
all that can hide –  
retreat now

buckeye, elm  
walnut, redwood  
pitch crackling  
flee?

*keyn shvalbn zaynen mir nisht*

the vultures rest  
anywhere  
a pile of bodies  
is found

slight elevation –  
high enough ground  
to view the destruction

the lovers of havoc  
straighten their arms  
and arrows fill the air

bend yourself –  
lean away from them

even at the edge  
there is always  
something to hold

hold it

**LINDA SOLOMON** *after Psalm 11*

**A Story of Survival**

Mama says to me, "Go my feigeleh, fly to the mountainside!"

I say, "Mama, why are you sending me away? Where shall I go, who will save me?"

She says, "Go now. Do not look back. They will get you with their bayonets and bullets! They only want to hurt you. I cannot abide their evil ways. Look to the hills! Adonai will not abandon you, Adonai will go with you, my darling child."

She pushes me out the door and I run as fast as I can to the hilltop overlooking our village. I look down and see that our house – our house has crumbled! And the shul – it, too, is just stones laying on the ground. All of our village, my village, my home is no more. It is all destroyed by the evil ones. My tears flow. What can I do?

I look to the river near our village. There is a boat! I run down and grab the boat. I hide under a blanket and let the boat take me down the river. When I arrive at the sea, I am tired and hungry; but, I cannot stop to rest. I pray to Adonai, "Please save me!" Adonai sees me and I see Adonai, sitting in this palace looking down at me.

Adonai knows that I have been a good child, a righteous Jewish child who has learned the ways of good. Adonai looks angry. I think Adonai is angry because the wicked ones have destroyed my village and my Mama and my Rabbi and all the Righteous Jews of our village. I hear Adonai cry out, "I will not tolerate injustice brought against my people!"

Suddenly, all the land behind me is a blaze with terrible, scorching flames. I see people running to the river, but the river is also on fire! They try to save themselves by jumping in the river and drinking the water to no avail.

For Adonai is righteous and will not abide their wicked ways anymore. As I lie down in the boat and let it take me out to sea, I again look up and see the face of my beloved Adonai and know I will be saved.

**STEPHEN DAVID DYM** *after Psalm 11*

**My Beautiful *Feygele*: Reflections on Psalm 11 (an Odd Number)**

Fly away little bird with ruffled feathers  
to the end of the rainbow  
where the fairies and the leprechauns play.

Stix and stones  
break bones  
fling words

*A Celebration of Psalms*

designed to pierce  
the heart  
crush spirit &  
eliminate hope.

Go to the hills  
little *feygelleh*  
*faggot*  
*pueñeta maricon,*  
*feygelleh*  
you know who you are.

But

Oh my beautiful *feygelleh*  
perching  
high above the noise  
your feathers  
reflect the rainbow  
you know who you are.

Fly me to the hills  
escape  
slings  
arrows  
shadows  
let me jump on  
your feather-bed  
become gravity free  
and have a bird's-eye view  
of reality.

Take me  
pierce my heart  
with Your flame  
fill my cup  
with Your glow  
let me ride on Your back.

Fly me  
glide me  
on cumulus clouds  
surfing the wild winds  
of the gulf stream.

My beautiful *feygelleh*  
DIVINE.

I know who You are.

**JACK NIEMAN after Psalm 12**

*For the leader on the sheminith. A Psalm of David*

Save us Maestro!

For the once dedicated players are no longer following your baton,  
the fervent have vanished.

The orchestra is out of tune,  
their legato tone and timbre is *sempre cantabile*,  
but their false notes hang on lines from discordant scores.

May the Maestro cut off the *fortissimo* flutter-tongued flutes,  
every overblown embouchure,

They say “With our boisterous, brash and brassy blasts we’ll conquer,  
who can quell our cacophony?”

“Because I hear the whispering woodwinds and harmonious, haunting oboe,  
As Maestro, I will now take to the podium, tap my baton and bring harmony to this Babel.”

For the Maestro’s beat is practiced, pure, steady, sure.

You, our Maestro, will unify and keep the orchestra forever, focused on your score — no swirling,  
salacious and sinister solos—

Until the last note of your harmonious symphony sounds.

**RANDY AXELROD after Psalm 15**

Adonai,

I long to sojourn in Your tent atop the mountain;  
to touch, to see, commune with others.

I tire of my solitude, Adonai;  
Of the doubts and terrors that swirl, untethered, about me  
because there is no other to rein them in.

But, dear Father, am I welcome?  
For I am not blameless.

My heart, though tender, is stained by envy,  
not cool and sea green, but red-yellow and searing.  
And my tongue, sweet and honied when singing Your praises  
pronounces harsh judgment on those who wrong me.

And yet ...  
And yet  
my longing to be in Your presence abides.

Is it true that Your tent is open on all sides?

Adonai  
I stumble in.

**LEAH TRACHTEN AND REGINA LINDER** *after Psalm 8*

*The Prince (PH) and the Psalmist (P)*

- P        The psalmist invokes Creator's majesty, *Adir hu*
- PH      A Prince of Denmark warns of his dark mood.
- P        Infants recall their Creator; and admire his power.
- PH      Prince Hamlet smells bad air.
- P5      Humans are nearly angels, humbled by their status.
- PH      "What a piece of work is man", reasoned and full of promise.
- P        Mankind shares oversight of Creation.
- PH      But efforts fall short, quintessentially dusty.
- P & PH   Roughly 1700 years apart, still working it out.

**ALICE SAYLES** *after Psalm 14*

The Fool says in his heart: "I know God!"  
He fights anyone who is different, who doesn't believe  
In his God.

Crusades, battles, wars,  
Fear divides us.  
Jews know Arabs will destroy them.  
Arabs know the destroyer is Israel.  
Where is the meaning?

God looks down and sees us fight.  
Our practices are vile,  
No one does good.  
We destroy, we humiliate, we are not wise.

But also, also,  
We try to do good, to understand.  
We all seek the meaning..

Moses, Jesus, Krishna, Buddha,  
Mohammed, Confucius,

*A Celebration of Psalms*

Allah, Mystics, Idolaters.  
Quantum Theorists, Space explorers,  
Scientists with their microscopes,  
We are all searching.

God, whoever, wherever you are,  
Help us look to the Trees,  
to the Birds,  
to all God's world,

Help us be rescued!  
So that all can delight, all rejoice,  
All can find peace.

**SARA SLOAN** *after Psalm 13*

**For My Cousin**

Adonai, how long will I have to live in pain?  
How long will I be punished with agony?

I can't take it much longer; I long to feel your presence in my body  
Adonai, save me from the depths of despair which is my enemy

Grant me the ability to feel your nearness  
Please don't let others rejoice when despair engulfs me;

Despair and agony sever my connection with the world  
Please Adonai reveal yourself to me and let me be part of the world

Don't let the despair win

**SHEPPARD WAHNON** *after Psalm 13*

O Lord, when I was much younger and lying on a bed of pain and all hope seemed lost,  
I begged You day after day, week after week to rescue me.

I pleaded with You to spare me.  
But You hid yourself.  
I saw no future for me, only darkness.  
My time was running out.

Soon I would be consumed like so many other young men before me.

But I always trusted in the God of Israel and  
I maintained faith in You.  
I wrestled with Your Angel of Death.  
    And with Your help, Adonai,  
I did prevail.  
I overcame.  
I could breathe again.

You restored my soul;  
I was given a second chance.  
And how long did it take You ,God?

Just the right amount of time I needed.  
From that day to this,  
I have never forgotten the gift of life

You gave me twice.

**DOROTHY LELAND** *after Psalm 13*

### **A Journey Through the Wilderness**

Did you ignore me God?  
Who hid their face?

I was soul sick and angry.  
Who was the enemy?

I heard no answers from you,  
Were my questions loud enough?

My hope was almost gone  
when I heard a whisper.  
A murmur, a breath.

I began to sense your presence.  
Will I ever see your face?

**KRISTEN PLYLAR-MOORE** *after Psalm 1*

### **Wandering**

Gathered by the water  
Underneath the arms of trees  
That stretch across an endless sky  
The faithful hit their knees

*A Celebration of Psalms*

Rising up together  
As their hands reach through the wind  
Ready for a summer storm  
With a prayer out on their limbs

And they're strong like the roots of  
The sky-scraping trees  
Steady hands through the seasons  
What's in store for me

I watch from a distance  
Broken branches on the ground  
Listening to the fallen drifting  
Leaves all around

I search for a cover  
As the clouds start rolling in  
I don't see a shelter  
In the place I've always been

So I turn from the water  
And the people standing there  
And I walk to the open  
Far away, don't know where

I want to know where the end of the sky begins  
and every shade of blue that it can be  
I've traveled a thousand miles in my mind I've wandered from  
a mountain to the bottom of the sea  
I'm still wandering

Somewhere in the wild  
Time gets lost along the way  
Sun goes up and down around  
A carousel of days

And though I see some others  
Just beyond, they're out of reach

We're scattered all around among  
The hills and all the streams

So the time and the distance  
Have become a sacred grove  
Has this wilderness of longing  
Now become a new home

*A Celebration of Psalms*

I want to know where the end of the sky begins  
and every shade of blue that it can be  
I've traveled a thousand miles in my mind I've wandered from  
a mountain to the bottom of the sea  
I'm still wandering

I wonder how much further we will go  
Along a path without an edge, what's that ahead, just more road

And the lonely city stands  
By the waters of the sea  
With no shelter from the storm  
That keeps raging through the trees  
I'm on a limb without a prayer  
But on my knees

I want to know where the end of the sky begins  
and every shade of blue that it can be  
I've traveled a thousand miles in my mind I've wandered from  
a mountain to the bottom of the sea  
I'm still wandering  
Still wandering

**DONNA GRAY** *after Psalm 13*

How long will this go on, God?  
How long before I know what normal will be when I finally try to go back there?  
Will anything be the same?  
For what feels like forever I barricade myself in my bubble.  
When invisible droplets fraught with danger lurk in the air, nothing seems safe.  
I stick my head out but quickly retreat back inside my turtle shell.  
How does a nervous system endlessly reverberating on high alert learn to trust again?  
Beam me up, God, up beyond the part of myself that cowers in fear.  
Beam me up to a higher knowing that all will be well.  
All will be well, won't it?  
A vaccine is on the horizon.  
Hope is on the horizon, with new stewards promising to lead us to the Promised Land.  
But who will I be when I get there, if I get there?  
And what will I find?  
God only knows.  
Help me, my God. Help me to have faith when nothing is certain.  
Help me to know that I can and will always adapt to whatever comes.  
Help me to embrace what is and what will be with an open heart.  
I place my trust in your hands,  
and I put on my mask.

**RANDI SAROKOFF**

**A Celebration of Psalms In the Time of COVID**

For the leader, a song of David, written during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I cry out in isolation, waiting for freedom.

In distress and with despair, I wait to be set free.

Sh'ma Yisra'el ADONAI Eloheinu ADONAI echad.

Many attack me, darkness falls upon me.

How long until the light will pierce through the darkness of vanity and fake news? Selah.

Somehow, I know, that the Holy One will provide light for the faithful.

Hear my prayers, as I look up to Your Holy Mountain for guidance.

Listen, hear truth, recognize facts, become the light with all your heart.

Know truth in your heart as you lie down to search for the comfort of sleep. Make it so.

With an open heart, offer justice and truth

and with spirituality trust in SH'CHINAH.

Many attacks on facts saying, "Who will teach us what is good, what is true?"

With your presence, ADONAI, there will be light in this world of darkness.

Still isolated at home, I have love in my heart

greater than those who refuse to wear masks or practice social distancing and

congregate in groups, in bars and restaurants, putting us all at risk.

Hashkivenu ADONAI Eloheinu l'shalom.

Spread over us the shelter of Your peace.

Safe and sound at home, I lie down to find sleep waiting for me.

For HASHEM let me dwell in safety.

Amen!

**REGINA LINDER** after Psalm 3

**Kol Ha Covid, A Psalm of Flight**

We flee from a crown, so numerous we cannot count.

No help arrives from sources royal or divine.

Is protection as a shield/Magain?

Our voices rise from rectangles.

We lie down exhausted, awake Thankful for another day,

And pledge not to fear the numberless crowns.

Save us as You have from other foes.

Salvation comes as our Knowledge grows.

**BARBARA GRINDELL** *after Psalm 27*

Adonai is my beacon  
My helper through the darkness  
Whom shall I fear?  
Adonai is the serenity in my life  
Whom shall I dread?

Should cancer try to devour me again  
Inside and out  
It is the illness that is defeated

Though an enemy is near  
My heart fears not  
Should a plague rage against me  
I shall trust in Adonai

Only this I ask  
Only this I desire  
That I might live in your house, Adonai  
All of my days  
To behold your presence  
From the beacon of your shelter

**SUZAN E. LIPSON** *after Psalm 13*

*To the leader, a Re-dedication (jumbled convergence)*

Miketz/Chanukah in the time of Covid

How long, O Lord; will You ignore us, allow us to suffer at the hands of the betrayers?  
How long will You hide Your face from me as I languish in the pit?  
How long will I watch the people's civic house (temple) be defamed/defiled, mourning for our  
tarnished democracy:  
How long will our resentful, radicalized sisters and brothers have the upper hand?  
Na, Look at me, answer me, O Lord, My God! Please, Restore the light of righteousness to the  
menorah of our Temple,  
lest I reach my end – stop, finish, death – miketz.  
Without Your restoring hand we will be overcome by sickness/death, fear, injustice;  
the enemies of the Republic will prevail with exultation and gloating.  
But my faith in Your Plan, strengthens my heart for Your deliverance.  
I will not gloat, but praise You Lord in song as I am witness to Your miraculous outcome of  
righteous healing.

**Laurie Krotman** *after Psalm 6*

*For my sister, an Octave with Disconnected vibration and frequency.*

Don't yell at me for all the awful things I did to you when we were little.  
    Don't be mad at me for not protecting you.  
Forgive me. I am so, so sad.  
    My heart is broken and needs mending.  
My whole life I have felt responsible for your misery.  
    How long will I remain stuck in this place now that you are gone?  
Release me from this place of remorse,  
    Free me from the guilt I feel because I did not offer you enough kindness.  
You are dead and I cannot hear you anymore,  
    Dead from the hell of Covid-19.  
I am so tired of wishing things were not as they were.  
    I cannot rest at night.  
        I cry myself to sleep.  
My eyes are red from weeping,  
    I am exhausted from rethinking the past and imagining I could have been a better sister.  
Go away, you vain, self-pitying, useless thoughts,  
    Something bigger than my little self hears my cries.  
I love you – that was the last thing I said to you.  
    I have always loved you.  
I was just too busy protecting myself to protect you.  
    Underneath it all, I know you loved me and you know I loved you.     Sigh ...

**Andrea Katz** *after Psalm 4*

**Living in the Age of COVID-19**

Isolated in my room  
Mourning the loss of my mother  
Drowning in my own secretions  
Stunned by a visual hallucination  
Neither smelling or tasting my coffee  
Lying in sweaty sheets

Who shall live and who shall die  
There is no reason

Living with fear and sadness  
Eventually, I fall asleep  
Trusting in Your presence

**GOLDALEE KATSANIS-SEMEL** *after Psalm 14*

**A Psalm 14, and “O Come O Come Emanuel” Reply**

Is YHVH with us?  
Are we with YHVH?

Come on. Come on! O, Israel.  
You know there's no Emmanuel.

Come on; the con man's everywhere,  
their evil: your breath's only air.

Recoil! Recoil! Emmanuel  
shan't come to thee, O, Israel!

Not One who sees, nor hears your kind,  
and patient, flailing, pious cries.

Nor one who's witnessed from above,  
save scoundrels, who prey on fool's Love.

Recoil! Recoil! Emmanuel  
can't come to thee, O, Israel.

How come? Oh, God, I feel you're there!  
Your Love is real, and melts despair.

Though “power over” caused strife, our  
empowered, active prayers unite!

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Be Here with Us, Thine Israel!

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Is Here with Thee, We, Israel!

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel,  
You're Here with All, with Israel!

*A Celebration of Psalms*

**SALLY KOPSTEIN** *after Psalm 9:10*

*The Lord is a haven for the oppressed, a haven in times of trouble. (Ps 9:10)*

A SOLITARY CHORUS

**Hashkiveinu** – *Shelter us beneath thy wings, Oh Adonai. Guard us from all harmful things, Oh Adonai.*

*Oh Adonai heal us from Covid 19*

**Achat Sha'alti** – *One thing I desire is to dwell in your house all the days of my life*

*Oh Adonai bring justice to the world*

**V'shamru** – *Let the people Israel keep Shabbat, making Shabbat throughout all their generations, as an eternal covenant*

*Oh Adonai give rest and respite*

**Enosh** – *Man, his days are like those of grass; he blooms like a flower of the field; a wind passes by and it is no more, its own place no longer knows it. But the Lord's steadfast love is for all eternity ...*

*Oh Adonai remember us with love that is forever*

**Neilah** – Adonai, Adonai, G-D, merciful and compassionate, patient, abounding in love and faithfulness, assuring love for thousands of generations, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and granting pardon.

*Oh Adonai bless us with compassion, strength and hope*

**JUDY FRANK** *after Psalm 15*

Adonai,  
How can a woman dwell in your holiest resting places?  
How can a woman who raises twelve children live without blame?  
How can a woman loan money to anyone because her husband controls her money?

Is she righteous nonetheless?

She gives clothes and food to her neighbors by leaving them at their doorstep,  
never seeking acknowledgement for her actions  
She never gossips or she tries not to,  
which is harder than ever when others come to her to talk about people she knows.

*A Celebration of Psalms*

Or if she sees something  
on the Internet about an old friend.  
She keeps her word, even if she will suffer as a result.

How long must you be righteous;  
Can you do Teshuvah the last year of your life,  
and dwell on your mountain?

The last ten or twenty or one day of Complete Teshuvah?  
How can I know if I am always doing the right things for you ...

Adonai?

**ALLISON DREW KLEIN** *after Psalm 4*

Hello Universe. Wait, what am I doing speaking/praying/calling out to technically nothing, an idea, a self-proclaimed prophet, a rumor? Sing! (Hear me!)

Me, a nobody, should I even expect a response when I have yet to see any evidence of Your existence. They attack me and where are You? Sing! (Hear me!)

Where's the comfort that You allegedly provide, where's the great leader's guidance I seek? Sing! (Hear me!)

And why even bother to try to appease You minus any evidence of so-called Almightyness? Sing! (Hear me!)

You are jealous and cruel; You've lied, manipulated, teased, threatened and tormented. This is how You teach us? Sing! (Hear me!)

How much attention You demand. The arrogance, ceaselessly testing our loyalty. Sing! (Hear me!)

You have swayed the masses, even Your children, pitting one against the other. Unjustly. Heartlessly leaving no path to joy. Sing! (Hear me!)

Who will show us, if not You? Sing! (Hear me!)

Where is that peaceful dwelling? What have I learned? Where am I safe? When can I rest? I yearn for the comfort of the lyre. And to sing. And to sleep.

**BENJAMIN SHAFRAN** *after Psalms 9 and 10*

**WHO ARE YOU?**

Who are you? LORD  
Who are You that  
He was so sure  
(9:11) you LORD  
Will not abandon those  
Who seek You, trust in You,  
Who believe that  
You are (9:10) the fortress  
Of the downtrodden  
In times of trouble.

Who are you? LORD  
Who are You that  
You allow yourself  
(10:1) the luxury of distance,  
Even disappearance  
In times of trouble?  
Where did You hide when  
Auschwitz was burning?  
To where did You disappear  
In Fourteen Ninety-Two?  
And on 9/11  
Where in the cosmos  
Did You shroud yourself?

Who are you? LORD  
Who are You that  
You give credence  
To the malefactors' creed:  
(10:11) The LORD  
Has forgotten, His face  
Is averted, He  
Will nevermore see  
Nor (10:13) demand account?  
When was the last time  
The meek were exalted  
Or the wicked laid low?  
Forget laid low,  
How about just  
Did not succeed?

Who are you LORD?  
Where are you LORD?  
What are you LORD?  
What shall we, mere humans,  
Make of You in Your  
Distant vastness?

**DARINA IVANOVA** *after Psalm 1*

**And I Shall Be Like a Tree**

With each tree coming into bloom, I feel a little more alive;  
With each tree coming into bloom, I'm less afraid of death  
For I have seen a wish come true.

It was a nasty winter – cold, dark and depressing;  
I waited and I waited to see the trees in bloom,  
To see new leaves emerge and cover their bare branches,  
To see the migratory birds' return.

I was that child who tried to talk to trees,  
To somehow make them understand my words;  
I tried so hard to learn to understand them  
But never learned the language that they spoke.

I'm like a tree, I'm so much like a tree,  
So deeply rooted in my native ground,  
That I was never brave enough to leave  
The place that my beloved trees call home  
In search of better fortune.

I'm like a tree awaking back to life  
In spite of all my worries, all my fears;  
I'm like a tree reviving every spring,  
Content with where I'm planted.

**ROBIN BASLAW** *after Psalm 9*

**Oyvai Nishmateinu – The Enemies of Our Soul**

The nations sink in the pit they have made; their own foot is caught in the net they have hidden.  
(*Psalm 9:16*)

A shameful nation poisons my soul.  
Blind to Your light, I forget eternal truths:  
Compassionate paths exist. Courage is a choice. You give  
Direction for righteous response.

Expanding and constraining nets of my design drive me to despair.  
False gods inhabit my soul, the enemy within,  
Giving rise to fear and resentment.  
Habitually entrapped by bondage to self,  
I make everything personal except You,  
Juxtapose a pit and a gateway.

To see light, I must look beyond myself,  
to the world of Your creation,  
ever changing, life-giving.

Revolve my soul, broaden my orbit.  
I will sing Your Praise.

**RUTH PLAVE** *after Psalm 14*

**Living a Life without God**

Living a life without God is living life on a battlefield  
Dark, desolate, pocked with craters, strewn with barbed wire  
The dead hanging in bizarre and unnatural angles  
Mouths agape in an everlasting scream

Shelter is found in the mud  
Burrowing beneath the earth  
Shells land above and about me  
Dirt rains down until I cannot breathe

There is not even one of us worth saving  
Certainly not I  
And we, all of us, will surely die  
As surely as Adam and every human since

There is a dead body lying nearby  
I pull off the helmet and mask  
Is it someone I know?  
Someone made in the image of God?

She looks serene  
Sleeping but for the grey pallor of death  
I look for a wound, but none is visible  
Arms, legs intact, the heart motionless

I sit back and lean into the earth  
Coffee in hand, smoking a cigarette  
The aroma of food wafting through the air  
Relieved to be alive, to fight another day

God! Look down and see me  
Part fool/part scoundrel/part doer of good  
Help me to stop the gunfire, to leave the battlefield behind  
Grant me, in Your mercy, a modicum of peace

**LIN ROSENBLUTH** *after Psalm 8*

**Partners**

A speck of sand anchors the wave  
A grain of salt preserves the world  
A drop of blood seasons the soldier  
A lone tear unveils the heart  
A tiny step propels the journey  
A quiet sigh rattles the heavens  
A whispered plea parts the sea  
A speck of dust frees the sneeze  
A fleeting spark ignites the fire that extinguishes the forest  
A single cell gives breath or takes life

I am humbled by the trust YOU place in me  
I am strengthened by the trust I place in YOU

When YOU look in the mirror I am the reflection in YOUR eyes

**LINDA WATSKIN** *after Psalm 12*

**Two Sides to Words**

Two sides to Words  
When lies intrude  
displacing truths  
with fabrications  
a collision exists  
between words  
that ferment unease  
and words that cross boundaries  
to smooth rough places  
to offer hope  
When people speak with hollow words  
with words of derision  
with words that spew unrest  
Adonai looks upon his gift  
of language—mangled, distorted  
by supple tongues and shorn of love  
and seeks those who use words  
to bless, to love  
to embrace

**SCOTT SOLOWAY** *after Psalm 12*

**Salvation through Breath**

I keep talking and saying nothing  
As if all that mattered was to flatter  
As if the wetness of my lips could slake the encroaching emptiness  
As if the smoothness of snaking tongue over lips  
Undid those many words  
Until I bite my tongue  
And groan  
Then breathe  
Breath in  
Breath out  
Refine  
Breath in  
Breath out  
Pure  
Breath in  
Breath out  
Held

Breath in  
Breath out  
Surrounded by the walking dead  
Breath in

**MONICA RAYMOND** *after Psalm 15*

**Prayer**

Not on your windy mountain, but maybe for few days, sojourn in your tent –

remote and impartial one. To be blameless, Prince-Myshkin-innocent, simpleton of kindness, it's too late for that.

My bitter tongue, I'm not going to give that up – cursing the Proud Boys in their Camp Auschwitz sweatshirts ("I'll show you Camp Auschwitz!")

devising eye-for-an-eye torments. I was a lousy landlord. I don't have a chance at infinity, and anyway, maybe it's better to stay

on the step-by-step ground. Mountain air thin, from which commandments and edicts eject, lightning arrows – that's for mountain goats, balancing rocky battlements, not

human. But still I would rest a few nights in your tents to shelter from the cold wind.

**SARAH SIEGEL** *after Psalm 12*

**David 2.0**

*For Meshell Ndegeocello, singing her "Sensitivity" cover. A psalm of David, the son my parents never had.*

My parents (z"l) prayed for a boy to name David after my grandfather (z"l). Instead, they got me minus the absent Y chromosome, a lesbian who others too often read as male.

God, deliver a new kind of man, I say, with tongue in cheek. Then, Meshell's gorgeous female voice sings, also with tongue in cheek, "You need a man, not any man, warm and sensitive, that's what I can give."

In 1990, it seemed that Ralph Tresvant's original version, with the same lyrics, played daily on WGCI-FM. I would sing along alone, swaggering in the privacy of my Little Vietnam apartment in Chicago. Mine was a shy sort of swagger that I didn't dare display publicly.

*A Celebration of Psalms*

Sometimes, I even put on a peacock-navy-blue-magenta-marigold Liberty of London tie and button-down shirt. I had splurged and bought both when I earned only \$18,000 in '88. God had begun the process of helping me by then.

God, I prayed successfully, deliver me. Please let a woman be attracted to me even though I didn't fulfill my parents' dream of being David.

God refined me and helped me be silver-tongued enough to win a woman's love.

Since '88, God has kept me safe whenever I wear clothes that many would say are better-suited to someone named David.

God, please keep shielding me from anyone who would want to knock down my presence, stature, and style.

**PETER KLEIN** *after Psalm 9*

**Amalek**

Run, Dovid, run  
through orchards and fields  
past barns, over tracks  
down byways and alleys  
to the marketplace  
and cry out:

*Amalek iz kumendik!*

*with names  
scraped from wind-wrecked stele-  
warlords from old  
fell and failed.*

Keep low, Dovid,  
keep low and run fast:  
bullets aim high.  
the ghetto walls keep  
yid and goy apart

*Amalek kumt!*

slam the gates,  
the shul, our fortress  
everyone inside  
barricade the doors

seal the windows  
children to the cellar  
lookouts to the attic

*Amalek iz do!*

Our Rav unrolls the scrolls  
searching for words  
to calm the crying  
and curse the invaders

Scroll after scroll  
paper the walls  
with ancient charms  
promising us a land of milk and honey  
bracing us with ancient hope  
now as before  
that we will be remembered  
when Amalek falls

***Amalek iz aroys!***

*[They slosh the bricks  
with oil and joy,  
their laughter  
turning brittle and sharp  
as smoke breathes into our sanctified hall]*

*we hear their shouts  
giving thanks  
at some high alter  
as the first flame roars,  
shattering glass  
igniting the eternal scrolls \**

Hold me, Dovid,  
Here in our holy of holies  
And know that I will always be with you  
Here and in the next life.

*Amalek iz shtendik mit aundz.  
Gat! Ton nit farlozn aundz!*

Dovid, *meyn kind*,  
know that the Holy One  
neither slumbers nor sleeps

(Psalm 121)

that He will comfort us  
when we tremble  
in the dark place  
that we will laugh when our foes  
perish from memory  
in times beyond time  
when we His children  
continue to sing His praise,  
grateful for His endless love

*Meyn Gat!  
Farlozn audz nisht!*

**MARSHA MELNICK**

**In Honor of the Pandemic Psalms Class, May 2020**

I woke up this morning thinking of all Your names...

Adonai, YHVH, YAH, El, Elohim...  
I know, there are many more.  
I'm wondering, do You have a preference or are all Your names equal?  
Or doesn't it matter as long as I call?

By the way, I've had many names in my life too,  
childhood names inspired by my initials ...  
Marshmallow Mickey Mouse Marilyn Monroe  
Plus affectionate adult names– Maaaash, Shash,  
and Moishe Pupik – a story for another day.  
And of course, Marsha, a name I alternately like but don't always love.  
I've come to know it's a journey less about my name but more about self-love.  
So let's get back to You.  
My SOURCE.

I'll never forget the first time I met You.  
I was twelve and had just chanted my haftarah, Shabbat HaGadol.  
I stood before the ark as the rabbi  
deliberately placed his hands on my shoulders  
to intone the priestly blessing.  
You were definitely YHVH then and I felt Your presence,

I didn't know then what I know now.  
I was craving unconditional love, self-love  
and You.

*A Celebration of Psalms*

To this day, I am still moved to tears whenever I receive that prayer,

So here I am, more than sixty years later in the midst of a pandemic, finding Your presence everywhere –

parsing Psalms in community,  
letter by letter,  
word by word,  
seeing You in the faces of my teachers,  
my classmates and their myriad creations,  
feeling You near.

Spring is unfolding – the daffodils, grape hyacinth, moss softening the rocks. Turkeys bathing, goofy gophers burrowing everywhere. And oh, Your mesmerizing skies.

I thank You, however You prefer to be called.  
I'm guessing You don't have a preference  
Infinite One.  
I know how to reach You.  
And You answer me.

Let's keep talking.