**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.
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 is 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 shiminith. 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,
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
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
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.
A Celebration of Psalms

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’m’a 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.
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.
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!
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.
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 altar
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.
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.