

Let the Land Unburden you
A Yizkor Drash and Poem
By Sally Churgel

Those who sow with tears will reap with song. They will go along weeping, carrying the valuable seeds;
they will come back with song, carrying their sheaves. (Psalm 126)

When the land is parched and your heart is flooded
When remembering them again makes you gasp
 like a trout caught in the mouth of a heron
When their soft song awakens you in the middle of the night
When you reach for your phone to tell them some
 secret that only they would understand
When you see that stranger out of the corner of your eye -
 For one moment your beloved is here again
When some long-ago offense still festers beneath your skin
 and you want to forgive and you want to be forgiven
When your unshed tears lie fallow within and you are embittered or lost
When your tears fall but are not planted and you know only longing
Then
Then - in the seventh year the land will beckon you
Rest, she will say, beneath my sylvan canopy of green and gold and listen
 to the cries of the red shoulder hawk lift your sorrow

Then the land will say, give me your sorrow to soothe my parched skin,
 refill my dried lakebeds with the river of your tears
Then the land will say, give me your tears and I will rinse away the
 debts of your heart so you may fill your cup with forgiveness
Then the land will say, these tears are seeds of possibility
 from which I will plant hope and grow strength and abundance
Then the land will say, give me your tears and I will yield a crop of nurturance, fruit of
compassion and the nutrients of love
Then the land will say, refill your cup with the peace of my knowing
Then she will say, refill your cup with the song of your joy

This psalm begins with our exile in Babylon and shows us how the tearful times will be turned to times of joy. After I wrote this poem a memory came back to me.

Maybe two decades ago in a guided experience, I had a profound and life changing vision. I saw myself marched through the cold Eastern European forests to the edge of a gigantic pit,

terrified and naked. The image came from actual footage I had seen when I was nine years old. I was lined up with others in front of the pit. I saw the soldiers raise their guns and fire. I knew I was to fall backward into the pit onto the bodies below. My body began to fall...

But, I remained standing. I remained standing.

And I saw behind the line of Nazi soldiers, out of a mist, that a row of people had appeared. Our people. And then another row and another until the forest behind the soldiers filled with Jewish people of all ages and walks of life. They represented who died during the holocaust.

And they were smiling.

They conveyed to me that it was not my job to weep for them. Or to carry the burden of the six million. They conveyed to me that the best revenge they could get on their murderers was for their offspring, us, to find satisfaction in our contributions and creativity and in finding joy in the many small moments of our lives.

As is my way of healing, visions appear to me from time to time to show me their/my progression. Last night during the Amidah, the last part of the vision came to me again. This time I was in the crowd of Jews. In the present time. With you. With all of us. Being with our many ways of sorrow, healing and joy.

And there was no pit. There was no pit.

Sometimes our griefs are so immediate. A hand we held last year is not here with us to hold now. Or to drink a cup of coffee with, or even to be cranky at. Sometimes our griefs are older than us and the people we loved.

In this year ahead, I encourage you to let yourself see if any part of your grief contains a burden you can lay down.

That let it go - in this Shmitah** year.

And if you have already let go, you will know by the joy you may experience.

I encourage you to enter this year with curiosity and openness and knowing that the God of your heart has your back.