

VISIO



DIVINA

The Wisdom of Contemplative Vision

DOOM!

Psalm 1B

Western religion is saturated with metaphors of doom, apocalypse and hell. These images have shaped our perceptions about God and the universe. We project them onto the future and into eternity. Apocalyptic images fill our modern movies and our literature. Visions of hell in a future beyond this lifetime have been a central theme of sermons for generations. These are the antecedents to the horror movies that many people are fascinated by today.

So why do we see life and the future this way? Why does the psalmist see it so starkly? We have all known that such scenarios exist in our world. We have each touched and tasted our own personal hells, our experience of dramatic endings and apocalyptic-like changes in life. Human beings know these for a fact. The question is are these thrust upon us by higher powers, or are they the inevitable law of cause and effect unfolding in a world of duality?

The psalmist sees that humans have freedom, and that in their freedom they make wrong choices. Wrong choices lead to terrible consequences—so its injunction is to choose wisely. Trouble comes to us, however, when we see all choices as either/or, black and white with no shades of grey. Most choices are not this stark or easy. Sometimes we cannot clearly see what the consequence of some action to be. Will the effects be negative or positive, we do not know—but we must make a choice nonetheless, and without prior knowledge of the outcome. Choices such as this may be the majority of those that we make—and so we watch the uncertain outcomes unfold around us as a result of this uncertainty.

Later psalms will explore these ambiguous experiences, but here at the beginning, we are presented with stark choices. Perhaps this is a beginner's point—the same choices we give to small children who are just learning to make their way through the world. Typically at the beginning of life's journey, we give children two choices (an either/or) making it a bit easier for them. It gets complicated after that.

Reflections on Image and Text:

1. *We have all seen images of devastation and apocalypse. Does this image frighten you? Does it make you feel uncomfortable?*
2. *Have you had life experience that are like this image? What does it feel like?*
3. *What is the experience of devastation? Why is it so important to know and experience? Why must it be an inevitable part of human experience?*
4. *What does this psalm point to as the causes of such devastation?*
5. *Do you agree with Psalm 1 about this point--about these causes? Would you add any?*
6. *In our world what are the things that cause devastation and heart-breaking loss or destruction?*
7. *Have you ever been the source of such loss and heartbreak? Does it feel like this image portrays it correctly. In what ways is your experience different?*
8. *Is there a middle path between these extremes? Describe it.*
9. *Do we need images like this to guide us? Do those just beginning need both encouragement and warnings? What role do these play in spiritual pilgrimage?*

LECTIO DIVINA

The Contemplative Reading of a Sapiential Text

PSALM 1

Doom

*While on the other path there is no shade or water near,
and all life withers quickly in the winds
that blow across the grass.*

*So when the sad results of wickedness give witness to their lives
they fall away and have no place
in your eternal circle of the wise.*

*You guard and guide the path that leads to life
and those who walk in right-relationship to all.
But those who choose the other path?
Their steps lead surely into doom.*

*—translated by
Lynn C. Bauman
Ancient Songs Sung Anew*

*—This reflection, text and its
illumination
have been provided
by Alison Hine
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Contemplating
THE ILLUMINATION

