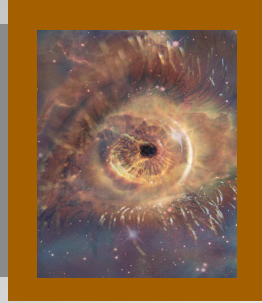


VISIO



DIVINA

The Wisdom of Contemplative Vision

REFUGEES IN A STRANGE, STRANGE LAND

Psalm 16 (Version I)

This early psalm is full of sudden awarenesses and deep human experiences. If you step back and look at human history upon the earth from a Jewish point of view, it is clear, as Issac Asimov said, we appear to be “strangers in a strange strange land.” The psalmist calls his people “refugees” from elsewhere.

Throughout the history of the Jewish people, being a refugee from the homeland and finding oneself in strange, foreign territory has been a constant motif. The Hebrew people were always moving from one land to another and this has been true through their long and complex history. In a certain way it was their fate to be refugees, even to this very day. So the question is, what did they learn and how did they see the world? It can be said that their form of wisdom that was gained from this long protracted experience, which is the central subject of this psalm.

Being a refugee forces one to see the world in a particular way. It makes an individual perhaps more clear-eyed about the true nature of the world. If we experienced the world in this manner, we too might begin to see what is more and less real.

One of the difficulties of modern life for many of us is that we try to insulate ourselves from the realities of the outside world. We build gated communities where we can keep the chaos at bay. It sneaks in, however, no matter what we but, but we have wanted our creature comfort as at all costs—even at the cost of knowing how the world works for the rest of the world.

The result, as this psalm suggests, is that we lose touch with reality and create a fantasy of our own making (our own made-up “gods”)—a virtual reality. In the process we lose our souls and the depths of compassion. The results of this are evident all around us. Modern, western humanity in particular has taken advantage of the world to secure its prosperity. The cost of our creature-comforts is a warming planet, melting ice-caps and rising sea-levels.

The psalmist sees differently. Being a refugee (and perhaps even an outcast) has sensitized his or her spirit. It has put the poet on the keen edge of spiritual awareness, not only about the way the world works, but concerning the inner workings of the soul. What does the human soul actually need? What inner attitude of spirit do humans require to navigate the troubled landscape of the earth?

This psalm distills the gleanings of this wisdom. The psalmist has gained a new sensitivity to the divine Presence. He or she has learned to value the world in a different way. Life on this planet is seen to be a precious and perhaps even a rare gift. The earth and all life is to be cherished and the path across its terrain is a pilgrimage of the heart, being guided by Spirit. These are part of its powerful, sapiential seeings.

Reflections on Image and Text:

1. *In your view, what is the emotional and psychological starting point for this psalm? In what emotional space is the psalmist at the beginning of the poem? How is that different from the way it ends? Notice its spiritual evolution as it unfolds.*
2. *What do you imagine to be the physical and social circumstances of the poet?*
3. *What is the poet's perspective on the society in which he or she lives? What does the poet see going on in the surrounding world?*
4. *How does being in a cultural and racial diaspora change the thought processes of a people? You might want to read a brief history of the Jewish people.*
5. *Reflect on your own understanding of a society that is scattered and dispersed by history or circumstance. What are the differences that develop in a people, a culture, or even in an individual who is forced to move and change its homeland over and over again in order to survive?*
6. *If you have ever had to leave a familiar place and move away, what have you experienced in similar circumstances? How has that experience changed you? What lessons have you learned as a result?*
7. *What have been your own feelings of estrangement and being alone in this world?*
8. *Look through this psalm to see what kind of wisdom has been gleaned from having to deal with an unstable or unsteady world. Make a list for yourself based on the psalm.*
9. *What would you add to this list that is the gift of your own experience? What have you deposited in your own "sapiential bank" that no one now can take away from you?*
10. *What kind of guidance does the psalmist-poet expect from God (from the divine Source)? Do you think that such guidance is still available or possible? Or is this some form of magical thinking to you?*

A Place for Notes and Reflection.

—This reflection, text and its
illuminations
have been provided by
Alison Hine and Lynn Bauman
as a means of
contemplative
prayer

LECTIO DIVINA

The Contemplative Reading of a Sapiential Text

PSALM 16 (1ST VERSION)

A Song of the Refugee

1. *Protect me Lord,
for I have fled, a refugee, to you,*
2. *And as I fled, I said, "Lord you are my God,
I have no other good but you.*
3. *But there are other refugees like me,
and these I love as well; though poor,
they are the noble-wise, and rich upon the earth.*
4. *And yet so many simply love and multiply their made-up gods,
which only complicate their troubled lives.*
5. *So let me never sacrifice my life to these,
nor offer them the flattery of empty praise.*
6. *But let me offer up the cup of life for you to fill,
and hold my life in yours as I hold you.*
7. *For I live this life you've made as your own land in which I dwell.
It is inheritance for me, a gift from you that I may use,*
8. *And I am here to listen to your counsel, Lord,
your inner teachings of the heart.
Day after day, night after night, you speak through everything.*
9. *You are the prize of life, the goal, the hidden good.
You take my hand in yours and hold me up,*
10. *And fill my heart to overflowing.
This body-mind, this spirit, all are yours,
and each part finds a place to rest in you.*
11. *And even at the grave, I am not abandoned there,
nor ever left alone.*
12. *From birth to death you are the path I walk upon,
and you're the guide who leads me through and far beyond,
into your Presence, Lord, right next to you, which fills me full,
my highest joy, my purest good.*

—translated by
Lynn C. Bauman
Ancient Songs Sung Anew
2000

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