

PSALM 143

11. "For the sake of your name, O LORD, preserve me; as You are beneficent, free me from distress."

Our distress was caused 20 years ago by a negligent junior doctor at a London teaching hospital and his/her consultant who made a terrible mistake so as to possibly hasten our beloved daughter's Ruth Picardie's preventable death from breast cancer which metastasised and which could have been treated in good time if the consultant and the registrar had only read their own cytology department's report on the malignant cells in a biopsy. This was established in a meeting with a consultant geneticist who looked at our family histories and found that Ruth had no background of BRCA1 and BRCA 2 genes for breast cancer. Negligence admitted by the NHS trust covering that hospital after an internal enquiry led to damages being awarded out of court to Matt, Ruth's husband, part of which were to be held in trust for Lola and Joe, 2 years old when she died in September 1997.

Ruth was joyous, talented, kind, funny, good and beautiful, expressive of the Shekhina. Her loss was and is irreparable. She continues to live in me and in others who loved her. But in the meantime:

4. My spirit failed within me; my mind was numbed with horror.

5. Then I thought of the days of old; I rehearsed all Your deeds, recounted the work of your hands.

6. I stretched out my hands to You, longing for You like thirsty earth.

Ruth to us was like water flowing into the thirsty earth of our environment. When her *yahrzeit* occurs on the 22nd September (the 20th anniversary of which was this year - she died in 1997) for me this psalm rehearses an existential horror and a longing to have her back that is unbearable. In Kabbalah the Shekhina is conceived of as the earth, the ground of being-in-the-world. As well the Shekhina is expressed in the "sefirah" of Binah, Understanding. Ancestors are conceived of in Judaism (actually in our unconscious minds) as participating in the Shekhina if we loved them. But also Ruth did try to actually understand the complex interactions of the nuclear family. Ruth, then, is in my head, brain, mind in the form of Understanding (Binah). I exercise the body which in Kabbalah is identified with the sefirot, the emanations and the extra-emanations of the Holy One, Blessed be S/He and the ancestors. So the head is the centre of the mind which directs attention to Ayn Sof (Being as such Without End present-to-hand cosmologically,) Kether (will, ready-at-hand psychologically) crowning mind, and on the right side of the brain/mind Hokhma (wisdom), on the left Binah (understanding).

In understanding herself the seed of Hokhma enters the womb of Binah when, in yoga I stand up straight, one foot and leg behind the other and stretch my interlaced fingers upside down with straight arms towards the sky and think Ayn Sof. This is the Tree. I conceive of Ruth as just a memory now which is introjected into my mind which, through the Tree expresses the Understanding that was in her being-in-the-world.

And so on through other asanas such as the Cobra. The serpent itself facilitates the hidden sefirah Da' at, knowledge (the philosophical knowledge-base behind Hokhma and Binah). Ruth did an anthropology and archaeology degree at King's College, Cambridge in the mid-eighties. Her Binah is expressed introjectively through me when I realise that the Cobra is not sinister and menacing but, as in the biblical myth of Adam Kadmon and Chavva Kadmona, brings about the disobedience which entails that "your eyes will be opened."

When I do the Cobra pose - legs straight, together and flat on the mat, torso lifted up till the arms are straight, head looking straight out horizontally - I bring into play the right shoulder and arm and the left shoulder and arm supporting the torso. In Adam/Chavva Kadmon(a) the right arm symbolises Hesed and is personified by Abraham, and the left by Isaac who is submitted by his father to the Akedah which is an expression of Gevurah / Din - power and an aberrant "justice" - God orders it, but YHVH the LORD in his mercy stops the ordeal as a test of faith.

God veiled His face and allowed Ruth's death most cruelly, but God as YHVH, Adonai, showed us, Ruth's family, something of Abraham's Hesed in allowing us her parents, and her children Lola and Joe, and their cousins, Jamie and Tom, Justine her sister's children, to live productive lives and to keep remembering Ruth even if in an idealised preconscious and unconscious figuration. Lola and Joe were only 2 years old when Ruth died but their stepmother Anna and their father Matt kept all the tokens Ruth made for the children in the form of "memory boxes" collected when she knew she was dying.

Whilst we do this and other yoga poses we enact the myths of other figures located in Adam/Chavva Kadmon(a) - Jacob and the other patriarchs and matriarchs (expressed through Tiferet - yoga breathing), Joseph (Yesod/Phallus), Moses (Netsah right leg), Aaron (Hod left leg) and David (feet on Malkhut—kingdom of earth and expressive of Shekhina). We internalise our Torah and Talmudic tradition. When I say the kaddish prayer for Ruth on 22nd September every year I do not find it bizarre or undignified to say it sub vocally whilst doing, say, the Bow. Why should we not think that the sanctification of God and YHVH who is hallowed, blessed, in the kaddish is not also present in all the sefirot?

I cannot see that in connecting the kaddish and the sefirot I am practising a form of idolatry - turning mythical or real Biblical figures into the form of the One God who, I maintain remains the One God. If I were a Hindu I would indeed see Brahma the Preserver, Shiva the Destroyer and Vishnu the Creator - all visually expressive in Lord Krishna's yogic dance. But even so I could choose to withdraw my ultimate devotion from the gods and the hero. Does it matter that Brahma is called Brahma and Elohim/Adonai has another name? Does it matter that Buddha and Jesus and the Christian saints and God the father and the holy spirit are given physical representation in their respective religions but are entirely absent in pictorial form in Judaism? Yes, it does matter to the Orthodox. But in Liberal Judaism am I not allowed to realise in rather than alienate my body from the divine through the legendary heroes and God's or Being's qualities? After all in the Amidah we bless God as "the owner of all" (koneh haKol). Our bodies are owned by Him/Her and are returned into the earth as flesh, blood, bone, muscle, or ash in a tribute to the Eternal. Who truly has no name, being HaShem - s/he is all the names there could possibly be - Tree, Cobra, Star, Bow, Warrior, as well as Shaddai, El Elyon and even Ish HaMilchamah. Ultimately we should follow Moshe ben Maimon to an conclusion and simply meditate on Mind who contains not Nothing but is (implicitly) All (Ayn Sof).

Insofar as Ruth and the others are in our memories and in the books they wrote or inspired in others they are also Without End.**



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