

Lech Lecha

Laurie L. Patton

And [Abram] said: "Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? And he said to him, "Take to me a heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle dove, and a young pigeon." And he took him all of these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each half over against the other; but the birds he did not divide. And the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away. And it came to pass that, when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and lo, a dread, even a great darkness, fell upon him. And it came to pass that the when the sun went down, and there was thick darkness, behold a smoking furnace, and a flaming torch that passed between these pieces. In that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "Unto thy seed have I given this land...."

– Genesis 15: 8-13; 17-18

I had known
the pattern of pieces:
placing a ram's leg
next to the heifer's,
and the goat shank,
bursting with muscle,
over these again.

My ancestors taught
that each part
called to a god:
an ear for the god
who gives hearing,
and a tongue for the one
who grants speech;
and we could tell

from the way
the pieces fell
against each other,
what would happen
in our father's house;

But I was far
from my father's house,
and I could not hear
the talk of the gods
they way we used to,
even though I strained —

I strained so hard
I slept
from the struggle
and the despair of it;

And yet a flame woke me,
and that fire blew
between the pieces,
brought them together
one by one
like a red vein;

there was a holiness
in that fusing flame,
making
one beast
one fire
one peace

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