

Psalms

Debbie Perlman

Thirty-Seven

When I turn away from You, O Eternal,
I turn from myself.
I revolve back and back, never forth,
Stuck in this half circle of unhappiness.

Reach Your Hand to me.
Push me away from my despair
With Your steady Hand.

Like a branch snagged in the rushing waters,
I beat against my fate, tiring my heart,
Wounding my spirit.
Yet I will not be moved.

Reach Your Hand to me.
Lift me beyond the sticking place
To shoot through the rapids.

Before me looms uncertainty,
But behind me, desperation.
Birth me into the void
With a strong Hand.

There will I reach for You
And begin the long revolution home.

Thirty-Nine

Twine my life to life, O Eternal,
Plied strength on strength,
to nurture my heart and renew my soul.

Join me in a partnership with You.
Tightly wrap my days in duties for Your sake.

Spin around me the words of Your sages
And the dreams of Your children.
Rub my face with the rough weave of women's stories
To awaken my faint pulse.

Bind me to Your Torah,
Four bright blue corners
Knotted together with Your Glory.

You are the warp and the weft;
Braid in this slender thread upon Your loom.
You are the texture and the smooth cloth;
Form me in a running stitch to You.

Seventy-One

A SONG OF INTENTION

In the worn smooth motions of prayer,
I will come before the Eternal;
For You will even out my ragged breathing,
Comforting my soul.

With confusion of spirit, I search for You;
Yet I cannot find the proper intention,
And my mind grows numb as my voice whispers,

Stuttering over ancient words.
 As I stumble along, I grow mute,
 Forgetting the prayers of childhood,
 The psalms learned in maturity,
 The ringing hymns.

All around me, seekers pray;
 All around me, prayers seek You,
 Harmonizing their souls, lost in the whole.
 Yet, I stand alone.

Return me to remembered devotions,
 Words that have entered my being,
 As much a part as my handedness,
 My breathing, my eye blink.

Restore me to the songs of my fathers and mothers,
 The joy and longing of my people
 As they sat and wept for Jerusalem,
 As they danced in the harvested fields.

Then, with a resolution of chords,
 A restoring sigh will calm me,
 A cool deep breath will flow in and out,
 And my words once more will rise to You.

Eighty-Five

IN IYAR: ANI ADONAI ROFEKHA

A SONG OF HEALING

After this long night of weakness,
 I wake again in the morning of return;
 Shaking off the terrors and the dreams,
 I open my lips to the Eternal.

You are my Strength and my Hope,
 The Author of my healing;
 You are my Promise and my Courage
 Guiding the steps I take toward healing.

After the winter's darkness and biting cold,
 The hidden awayness of my illness,
 The isolation and the fear that settled upon me,
 I rise with renewed strength to praise You.

You are the Wonder of new life,
 Warming, healing sun upon my head;
 You restore my concern for others,
 As I relinquish my constant self-inventory.

You come to me as spring comes,
 Circling back to heal the ravaged earth;
 You rest Your Hand of blessing on my shoulder
 And I sigh with relief at Your concern.

I look for You, Divine Physician,
 Even as I begin again to take up my life;
 I look for You, Complete Healer,
 As I begin again.

One Hundred

A SONG OF HEALING AND PRAISE

Sing praises to the Eternal!
 Sing songs for a new day!

You draw around me the warmth of sleep;
 Yet I am stirred to restlessness by my songs.

Dreaming, longing, I rouse and Sing to You.
In the murmuring hours of darkness, I praise You.

You awaken me to morning brilliance;
Moving with pain I rise to greet You.
Yet You continuously restore me
As I push forward and greet this day.

I will praise You, O Eternal,
Not in my infirmities, but in my life;
You do not harm me in anger,
But preserve me with challenges.

I will sing new songs as I gather my strength;
I will sing Your praise as I gasp in wonder
At this sweetness of light, the kind hands
That are Your Hand to ease my days.

I will sing You the song that dampens my eyes,
The song of tears and pain and rage
That releases to You and then is healed
As I learn my adaptations of living.

I will sing You praises with perfect surety,
For I trust in You with all my heart.
I will sing You a song for a new day,
A song to the Eternal God.

Debbie Perlman is a poet and cancer survivor who lives with her husband in Wilmette, Illinois. These poems are excerpted from "T'hilim shel Yom Chadash," a larger collection of contemporary psalms, to be published in 1995.