

Shattered Hearts, Broken Vessels: Community and Compassion in Devastation's Wake

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Joy Harjo, "Speaking Tree"

I had a beautiful dream I was dancing with a tree.

—Sandra Cisneros

Some things on this earth are unspeakable:

Genealogy of the broken—

A shy wind threading leaves after a massacre,

Or the smell of coffee and no one there—

Some humans say trees are not sentient beings,

But they do not understand poetry—

Nor can they hear the singing of trees when they are fed by

Wind, or water music—

Or hear their cries of anguish when they are broken and bereft—

Now I am a woman longing to be a tree, planted in a moist, dark earth

Between sunrise and sunset—

I cannot walk through all realms—

I carry a yearning I cannot bear alone in the dark—

What shall I do with all this heartache?

The deepest-rooted dream of a tree is to walk

Even just a little ways, from the place next to the doorway—

To the edge of the river of life, and drink—

I have heard trees talking, long after the sun has gone down:

Imagine what would it be like to dance close together

In this land of water and knowledge. . .

To drink deep what is undrinkable.

Mishnah Ta'anit 2:1-2

What is the order of fast days? The ark is removed to the city square and burnt ashes are placed upon it, and upon the head of the leader, and upon the head of the vice-leader, and each and every person places them upon their head.

The elder recites teachings of reproof: "My friends, it is not stated with regard to the people of Nineveh: And God saw their sackcloth and their fasting. Rather: 'And God saw their deeds, that they had turned from their evil way' (Jonah 3:10). In the Prophets it says: "Rend your hearts

סֶדֶר תְּעִנּוֹת כִּיצַד, מוֹצִיאִין אֶת הַתְּבָה לְרוּחוֹבָה שֶׁל עֵיר, וְנוֹתְנִין אֶפְרַר מִקֶּלֶה עַל גְּבֵי הַתְּבָה, וּבְרֹאשׁ הַנְּשִׂיא וּבְרֹאשׁ אֵב בֵּית דִּין, וְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד נוֹתֵן בְּרֹאשׁוֹ. הַזֶּקֶן שֶׁבֵּהֶן אוֹמֵר לְפָנֵיהֶן דְּבָרֵי כְבוֹשִׁין, אַחֲיָנוּ, לֹא נֶאֱמַר בְּאֲנָשֵׁי יִינוּה, וַיֵּרָא הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת שָׂקֶם וְאֶת תְּעִנּוֹתָם, אֲלֵא (יוֹנָה ג) וַיֵּרָא הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם, כִּי שָׁבוּ מִדַּרְכֵם הָרָעָה. וּבִשְׂקָלָה הוּא אוֹמֵר (יוֹאֵל ב) וְקָרְעוּ לְבַבְכֶם וְאֵל בְּגָדֵיכֶם :

עֲמְדוּ בַתְּפִלָּה, מוֹרִידִין לְפָנֵי הַתְּבָה זֶקֶן וְרִגְלִי, וַיֵּשׁ לוֹ בָּנִים, וּבֵיתוֹ רִיקָם, כְּדֵי שְׂיִהָא לְבוֹ שְׁלָם בַּתְּפִלָּה, וְאוֹמֵר לְפָנֵיהֶם עֲשׂוּרִים וְאַרְבַּע בְּרָכוֹת, שְׁמֹנֶה עֶשְׂרֵה שְׁבָכָל יוֹם, וּמוֹסִיף עֲלֵיהֶן עוֹד שֵׁשׁ :

and not your garments [and return to the Lord your God” (Joel 2:13).

They stand for prayer. An elder, experienced in prayer, descends before the ark. This person must have children and an empty house, so that their heart will be full in the prayer...

b. Pesahim 117a

Rav Yehuda said that Shmuel said: Moses and the Jewish people recited Torah’s song [i.e., the Song of the Sea] as they ascended from the sea.

But who said the Hallel [i.e. Psalms 113–118]?

The Prophets among them established this for the Jewish people, for them to recite on every occasion, and during every trouble, may it not come upon them.

When they are redeemed, they will recite it over their redemption.

אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר שְׁמוּאֵל: שִׁיר שִׁבְתוֹרָה, מִשָּׁה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אָמְרוּהוּ בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁעָלוּ מִן הַיָּם.
וְהִלֵּל זֶה מִי אָמְרוּ? נְבִיאִים שֶׁבִּיְיָהוּן תִּקְנוּ לָהֶן לְיִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁיהוּ אוֹמְרִין אוֹתוֹ עַל כָּל פָּרֶק וּפָרֶק, וְעַל כָּל צָרָה וְצָרָה שֶׁלֹּא תֵבֵא עֲלֵיהֶן.
וְלִכְשֶׁנִּגְאָלוּ, אוֹמְרִים אוֹתוֹ עַל גְּאוּלְתָּן.

m. Berakhot 3:1

One whose deceased [relative] lies before them is exempt from the recitation of *Shema*, from the *amidah*, and from *tefillin*.

The pallbearers and their replacements and the replacements of their replacements, those in front of the bier and those after the bier: those who are needed for the bier are exempt [from *Shema*]; while those who are not needed for the bier are obligated.

Both these and those are exempt from the *amidah*.

מִי שֶׁמֵתוֹ מוּטָל לְפָנָיו, פְּטוּר מִקְרִיאַת שְׁמַע, מִן הַתְּפִלָּה וּמִן הַתְּפִלִּין. נוֹשְׂאֵי הַמִּטָּה וְחַלּוּפֵיהֶן וְחַלּוּפֵי חַלּוּפֵיהֶן, אֵת שֶׁלְפָנֵי הַמִּטָּה וְאֵת שֶׁלְאַחַר הַמִּטָּה, אֵת שֶׁלְמִטָּה צָרָף בָּהֶן פְּטוּרִים, וְאֵת שֶׁאִין לְמִטָּה צָרָף בָּהֶן חַיִּבִין. אֵלוֹ וְאֵלוֹ פְּטוּרִים מִן הַתְּפִלָּה:

Maimonides on m. Berakhot 3:1

All are exempt from the *amidah* because their hearts are so troubled.

וְהַכֹּל פְּטוּרִים מִן הַתְּפִלָּה וְהַטַּעַם מִפְּנֵי טְרַדַת הַלֵּב

b. Mo’ed Katan 21a

The Sages taught: These are the activities that a mourner is prohibited from: they are prohibited from working, and from bathing, and from

תֵּנוּ רַבָּנָן, וְאֵלוֹ דְּבָרִים שֶׁאֵבֵל אָסוּר בָּהֶן: אָסוּר בְּמַלְאָכָה וּבְרַחֲיָצָה וּבְסִיכָה וּבִתְשׁוּמֵיֵשׁ הַמִּטָּה וּבְנִעִילַת הַסֵּנְדָּל. וְאָסוּר לְקָרוֹת בְּתוֹרָה וּבְנִבְיָאִים וּבְכַתוּבִים, וְלִשְׁנוֹת בְּמִשְׁנָה, בְּמִדְרָשׁ וּבְהִלְכוֹת,

anointing, and from engaging in sexual relations, and from wearing shoes. They are prohibited from reading the Torah, and the Prophets, and the Writings, and from studying the Mishnah, in the midrash, and in the *halakbot*, and the Talmud, and the *aggadot*. But if the public needs one [to teach] one need not refrain. It happened that the son of Rabbi Yosei died in Tzipori, and Rabbi Yosei entered the study hall and taught there for the entire day.

ובתלמוד ובאגדות. ואם היו רבים צריכין לו — אינו נמנע. ומעשה ומת בנו של רבי יוסי בצ'פורי, ונכנס לבית המדרש, ודרש כל היום כולו.

b. Mo'ed Katan 21b

The Sages taught: A mourner, during the first three days, is prohibited from extending greetings. From the third to the seventh, one may respond but may not extend greetings. From this point forward, one may extend greetings and respond in the manner.

תנו רבנן: אבל, שלשה ימים הראשונים אסור בשאלת שלום. משלשה ועד שבעה — משיב ואינו שואל. מכאן ואילך, שואל ומשיב כדרכו.

Mishneh Torah, hilkebot avel 13:2

The mourner sits at the head of the company. The comforters are permitted to sit only on the ground, as it says: “And they sat with him on the ground” (Job 2:13).

האבל מסב בראש. ואין המנחמין רשאים לישב אלא על גבי קרקע. שניאמר (איוב ב ג) “וישבו אתו לארץ”.

They are not permitted to say anything until the mourner opens his mouth first, as it says, “And no one spoke anything to him” (Job 3:1) And it says, “And then Job held forth.... And Eliphaz responded” (Job. 3:1, 4:1).

ואין רשאים לומר דבר עד שיפתח האבל את פיו ותחלה. שניאמר (איוב ב ג) “ואין דבר אלו דבר” וכתוב (איוב ג א) “אחרי כן פתח איוב את פיהו” וגו' (איוב ד א) “ויען אליפז”.

Once the mourner shakes their head, the comforters are no longer permitted to sit with them, so that they do not trouble him overly so.

וכיון שנגנע בראשו שוב אין המנחמין רשאים לישב אצלו. שלא יטריחוהו יותר מדאי:

When a deceased person has no mourners who must be comforted, ten upright individuals from the community at large come and sit in the deceased's place throughout the seven days of mourning. Others gather around them. If there are not ten fixed people who remain throughout the seven days, each day, ten other people are selected and they sit in that place.

מת שאין לו אבלים להתנחם. באים עשרה בני אדם כשרין ויושבים במקומו כל שבעת ימי האבלות. ושאר העם מתקבצין עליהן. ואם לא היו שם עשרה קבועין בכל יום ויום מתקבצין עשרה משאר העם ויושבים במקומו:

[The angels are described] as “receiving one from the other” (*mekablin dein min dein*). We receive from one another not only when we give *tsedakah* or other kinds of love to each other, but also when one listens to the suffering of another person and does all that can be done to help, if one’s heart is shattered within and the blood freezes up in their veins, and if from this broken heart one returns to God and prays to the blessed One on behalf of the people. This, too, is a kind of receiving “one from the other.” You receive their brokenheartedness and repentance, and they, from you, [receive] compassion, good deeds and prayer performed on their behalf. This causes [the angels] on high to receive from one another.

עוד אפשר כי 'וקרא זה אל זה' ומתרגמינן
'ומקבלין דין מן דין', כמו שאומרים ב'ובא
לציון... ולא רק כשנותנין זה לזה צדקה
וגמילות חסדים מקבלין דין מן דין, רק גם
כששומע איש מצרות ישראל ועושה כל מה
שיכול לעשות לטובתם, ובכלל לבו נשבר
בקרבו והדם נקפא בגידיו. ומלב נשבר עושה
תשובה לד' וגם מתפלל אליו יתברך בעד
ישראל, גם זאת קבלה הי שמקבלין דין מן
דין, שהוא מקבל מהסביבת הלב והתשובה,
והם ממנו רחמנות ופעולות טובות שעושה
להם, וגם תפלה מתפלל בעדים, וגורם בזה
למעלה מקבלין דין מן דין.

T. S. Eliot, “The Four Quartets”

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.
Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden. My words echo
Thus, in your mind.
But to what purpose
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves
I do not know.

Other echoes
Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?
Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,
Round the corner. Through the first gate,
Into our first world, shall we follow
The deception of the thrush? Into our first
world.

There they were, dignified, invisible,
Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves,
In the autumn heat, through the vibrant air,
And the bird called, in response to
The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery,
And the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses
Had the look of flowers that are looked at.
There they were as our guests, accepted and
accepting.
So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern,
Along the empty alley, into the box circle,
To look down into the drained pool.
Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,
And the pool was filled with water out of
sunlight,
And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
The surface glittered out of heart of light,
And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.
Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of
children,
Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.
Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
Cannot bear very much reality.
Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.

b. Ta'anit 24a

Rav came to a certain place. He decreed a fast but rain did not come. The prayer leader descended before him recited: "He Who makes the wind blow," and the wind blew. He said: "Who makes the rain fall," and the rain came.

Rav said to him: What are your deeds?

He said to him: I am a teacher of children, and I teach the Bible to the children of the poor as to the children of the rich. If someone cannot pay, I do not take anything. And for any child who is struggling, I have a pond with a school of fish. I win the student over with my fish. I calm him and sooth him, until he learns to read."

רב איקלע ל'ההוא אתרא, גזר תעניתא ולא אתא מיטרא. נחית קמיה שליחא דצבורא, אמר "משיב הרוח" ונשב זיקא, אמר "מוריד הגשם" ואתא מיטרא.

אמר ליה: מאי עובדך?

אמר ליה: מיקרי דרדקי אנא, ומקרינא לבני עניי פבני עתירי. וכל דלא אפטר ליה — לא שקלינא מיניה מידי. ואית לי פירא דכוורי, וכל מאן דפשע משחידנא ליה מינניהו, ומסדרינן ליה ומפיסינן ליה עד דאתי וקרי.

The Iliad, Book XVIII

He pictured, then, two cities, noble scenes;
weddings in one, and wedding feasts, and brides
led out through town by torchlight from their chambers
amid chorales, amid the young men
turning round and round in dance: flutes and harps
among them, keeping up a tune, and women
coming outdoors to stare as they went by...

Wartime then;
around the other city were emplaced
two columns of besiegers, bright in arms...

Upon the shield, soft terrain, freshly ploughed,
he pictured: a broad field, and many ploughmen
here and there upon it...

He put there, too, a king's field. Harvest-hands
were swinging whetted scythes to mow the grain,
and stalks were falling along the swath
while binders girder others up in sheaves
with bands of straw...

A vineyard then he pictured, weighted down
with grapes: this all in gold; and yet the clusters
hung dark purple, while the spreading vines
were propped on silver vine-poles...
Light-hearted boys and girls were
harvesting the grapes in woven baskets,
while on a resonant harp a boy among them
played a tune of longing, singing low

with delicate voice a summer dirge. The others, kept time together as they skipped along.

Zechariah 8:4-6

Thus said the Lord of Hosts: There shall yet be old men and women in the squares of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age.

And the squares of the city shall be crowded with boys and girls playing in the squares.

Thus said the Lord of Hosts: Though it will seem impossible to the remnant of this people in those days, shall it also be impossible to Me?—declares the Lord of Hosts.

כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת עַד יָשְׁבוּ זְקֵנִים וְזָקֵנוֹת בְּרִחְבּוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם וְאִישׁ מִשְׁעֲנֵתוֹ בְּיָדוֹ מִרְבַּב יָמִים :
וּרְחִבּוֹת הָעִיר מְלֵאוּ יְלָדִים וְיִלְדוֹת מִשְׂתַּקִּים בְּרִחְבֵּיתֶיהָ :

כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת כִּי יִפְלֵא בְּעֵינַי שְׂאֲרֵית הָעָם הַזֶּה בְּיָמַי הֵהָם גַּם בְּעֵינַי יִפְלֵא נְאֻם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת :

Malbim

This prophecy corresponds to their concern... that they might be exiled from the land by Daryavesh for a second time. God tells them, “There shall yet be old men and women,” promising that the peace will be so great that “in the squares of Jerusalem” even the powerless, the elderly and the children, will dwell in the city without fear.

נגד החשש הב' שחששו פן, 'כה אמר ה' (ד-ה) יגלם דריוש שנית מן הארץ, אמר שעוד ישבו והבטיח שיהיה, זקנים וזקנות ברחובות ירושלים השלום גדול כ"כ עד שגם החלשים שהם הזקנים והילדים ימצאו ברחובות קריה בלי פחד:

Micah 4:4

But all shall sit under their own vine and fig tree with no one to disturb them. For it was the Lord of Hosts who spoke.

וְיָשְׁבוּ אִישׁ תַּחַת גִּפְנוֹ וְתַחַת תְּאֲנִתוֹ וְאִין מִחֲרִיד כִּי־פִי ה' צְבָאוֹת דִּבֶּר :

Ibn Ezra (12th century, Spain)

“All shall sit” – this refers to all the world’s inhabitants.

וישבו - כל אנשי העולם

Yehudah Amichai, “The Third Poem about Dicky”

In these hills even the oil rigs are already a memory. Here Dicky fell who was four years older than I and like a father to me in times of anguish. Now that I’m older than him by forty years, I remember him like a young son,

בְּנִבְעוֹת הָאֵלֶּה אֶפְלוּ מְגִדְלֵי קְדוּחַ הַנֶּפֶט
הֵם כְּבוֹר זְכָרוֹן. כָּאֵן נָפַל דִּיקִי
שֶׁהָיָה גְדוֹל מִמֶּנִּי בְּאַרְבַּע שָׁנִים וְהָיָה לִי כְּאָב
בְּעֵת צָרָה וּמְצוּקָה. עַכְשָׁיו אֲנִי גְדוֹל מִמֶּנּוּ
בְּאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה וְאֲנִי זוֹכֵר אוֹתוֹ
כְּמוֹ בֵן צְעִיר וְאֲנִי אָב זָקֵן וְאַבְל.

and I an old grieving father.

And you who remember only a face,
don't forget the outstretched hands
and the legs that run so easily
and the words.

Remember that even the road to terrible battles
always passes by gardens and windows
and children playing and a barking dog.

Remember the fruit that fell and remind it
of the leaves and the branch
remind the hard thorns
that they were soft and green in springtime,
and don't forget that the fist, too,
was once the palm of an open hand, and fingers.

ואתם, שזוכרים רק פנים
אל תשכחו את הידיים המושטות
ואת הרגלים הרצות בקלות
ואת המלים.

זכרו, שגם היציאה לקרבות הנוראים
עוברת תמיד דרך גנים וחלונות
וילדים משחקים וכלב נובח.

זכרו והזכירו לפרי שנשר
את העלים ואת הענף
הזכירו לקוצים הקשים
שהיו רכים וירוקים באביב
ואל תשכחו שגם האגרוף
היה פעם כף יד פתוחה ואצבעות