

Last week we considered Psalm 1 which opens, “Happy are those who have not walked in the wicked’s counsel.” Psalm 1 proclaims God’s opposition to the wicked, understood in the Hebrew as the vainglorious, deceitful, incapable-of empathy, blowhard rulers who often come to power. Nobody in this Zoom room qualifies for such a label. And if you’ve been told otherwise, you’ve been told wrong. *Our* spiritual task is not to walk in the counsel of the wicked.

Today, we consider the meditative nugget in the middle of the Psalm. It’s there for us when we under pressure from the bullying ways of the wicked. It’s both a reminder (who we are) and an aspiration (who we are becoming).

***And they shall be like a tree planted by streams of water,  
that bears its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither—  
and in all that they do, they prosper.***

This middle portion is inviting us to slip into a meditative space, a refuge space in the face of any big bad wolves threatening to blow our houses down. Slipping into this imaginal heart space is a way of resisting their bullying words and deeds.

***And they shall be like a tree planted by streams of water,  
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Susan King offered an Inter-Faith spirituality class last year and I took it. She recommended we look for a tree we could identify with and spend time in its presence with an open heart. I did that, and a reassuring, calming energy came to me—like being in the presence of a long-lived grandmother, who’s been there/done that, isn’t going anywhere soon and might just outlive everybody. A wise grandmother whose strength doesn’t need words to express. And I was like, *I gotta* pay more attention to trees!

Trees planted by streams of water were a big part of Hebrew spirituality. Just like in most traditional cultures, especially the Indigenous nations that were here for such a long time before the Europeans arrived with their ways. The Six Nations Confederacy (properly the Haudenosaunee Confederacy) was the first democracy where I live, predating what we

call a democracy. One of their ruling principles: we make policies considering the impact of seven generations coming after us. Hebrew spirituality has more in common with Haudenosaunee culture than our own, as it too was an indigenous culture. Hebrew spirituality arose from the land, the promised land, regarded as sacred. It was a spirituality that understood connection to the land as connection to the divine.

The **Eden story** of Genesis 2, Israel's origin story, its holy of holies story, features trees planted by streams of water. This scene was represented in the tabernacle and temple—the tree of life represented by the Menorah, the 12-branch candle stand, near the basins of water in the holy place.

**Jeremiah** was a prophet working in a time of wicked rulers. He calls the image of Psalm 1 to mind, with some embellishing details:

**Blessed are those who trust in the Lord,  
whose trust is the Lord.**

**They shall be like a tree planted by water,  
sending out its roots by the stream.**

**It shall not fear when heat comes,  
and its leaves shall stay green;**

**in the year of drought it is not anxious,  
and it does not cease to bear fruit.**

So this was a tried and true image of sustainability, of endurance, of resilience. We see it in **Revelation of John**, with a scene of trees at a riverbank with leaves providing healing, natural medicine for the nations, leaves that stay green.

So it was natural to think of one's life and sense of connection to the earth and to Creator as a tree, with an underground root system equivalent to the stretching branches of the crown—this idea of drawing life and sustenance from an invisible-to-the-naked-eye source. That's an image of spirituality. And of course, trees are their own community, with root systems that connect one tree to another, even bringing slow motion aid to distressed trees from their neighboring trees.

In Jeremiah's expanded version of the Psalm 1 image, the picture of resilience in drought and heat is stressed even more than in Psalm 1. The roots of a tree have an uncanny ability to search out water...recent studies show that the roots of a tree are equipped

with sensors that pick up acoustic vibrations. They hear the water flowing at a distance and move toward it. In the experiments they ignore the sounds of recorded water flowing, and only go for the real thing.

Beneath the surface of our everyday preoccupations, beneath the surface of our noisy chattering minds, cluttered with thoughts, we have roots as well...There's something below the surface of our everyday awareness, hidden to others, hidden perhaps even to ourselves, roots seeking out divine waters

We know well enough who the wicked rulers are, but who are we? We are not who they tell us we are, we are not avatars of their fearmongering.

***And they shall be like a tree planted by streams of water,  
that bears its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither—  
and in all that they do, they prosper.***

A small translation note: Robert Alter indicates that the Hebrew is a little ambiguous in this last line. The “they” in “and in all that they do, they prosper” could be the tree or its fruit. So it may not be a umbrella promise of success in everything so much as an assurance that the fruit we bear will prosper. Once fruit is borne, it has a life of its own and can bear more fruit

The thing about trees is they are playing the long game. The wicked have their time, but the trees outlast it. One of the things I'm trying to focus on to manage election day stress is planning on a few things I intend to keep doing regardless of the election result. What am going to do on Wednesday regardless of the election result? I'm focusing on that. A Tuesday plan, yes. Emily's hosting a socially distanced outdoor drop in time on Tuesday. I'm hosting a pray through the day on Zoom, a 10-minute prayer break at 8am, Noon, 5pm, with a divine office prayer written for the occasion. So I have a Tuesday plan. But I also have a Wednesday plan. What am I doing regardless of the result, on Wednesday? Beyond that, In the days/weeks/months after the election is all over and settled, what are we going to do? For me, I'm going to keep investing in organizations resisting the version of this country that the current president conjured, rode to power and worsened. I'm going to keep doing my personal homework on recognizing and dismantling white supremacy in my sphere, and I'm going to focus on being kind to myself and the people around me, just to keep my leaves from withering whatever lies ahead.

So now we're ready for Susan King to lead is in a little longer-than-usual mediation using this image from Psalm 1.

Pronunciation: Hoe-dena-show- nee

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**Those who have ears, let them hear!**