



Reflections on Psalm 34

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Psalm 34 is a song of embodiment and of the senses. It roots us in our physical being in the world and names those things that paralyze and limit us – fear, shame, poverty, broken hearts, crushed spirits. What of these things is not with us today? In the news, in our communities, our congregations, in our souls. The psalmist is prophetic in identifying such ongoing realities of life. Yet into this lived world the psalmist brings our senses. Through the voice of the poet, we begin--not with a blessing for ourselves--but with a blessing for God/Divine Life, as we are invited to join in the singing and speaking of this blessing, to join in the hearing and rejoicing. These invitations continue on a more personal level as we are called to seek and therefore to leave behind terror and shame. We are called to taste and to see the good in Holy Presence, the good in our presence. We are called to truth. We are called to listen.

The Divine Presence is embodied, too, with eyes, ears, a face, and a body that is near to those whose hearts have been broken. The divine and human bodies and senses are sung into healing relationships with one another as we follow the psalmist's invitations to action.

Psalm 34 is one of seven acrostic hymns in the psalter, where the lines begin with a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Acrostics are often considered a mnemonic device, a way to more easily remember the next line or phrase in the psalm. This psalmist also seems to want us to remember embodied experiences of ourselves and others, and the refuge that is available in letters, words, songs, flesh, and relationship.

Psalm 34.4, "I sought the Lord, who answered me, and delivered me from all my fears," is traditionally recited in synagogues when the Torah scroll [the Hebrew Scriptures] is taken out of the ark. There is often beautiful music that accompanies the Torah before it is opened. How are we seeking Holy Mystery in and around us? through our senses? in sacred stories, songs, and in community together?