

PSALM 28
LEADER'S GUIDE

Debra Band
The Illuminated Text

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 28 begins with a anguished cry for relief and ends in confident optimism. What accounts for the psalmist's change in emotion?

¹Of David
O Lord, I call to You;
my rock, do not disregard me,
for if You hold aloof from me,
I shall be like those gone down into the Pit.
²Listen to my plea for mercy when I cry out to You,
when I lift my hands toward Your inner sanctuary.
³Do not count me with the wicked and evil-doers
who profess good will toward their fellows
while malice is in their heart.
⁴Pay them according to their deeds, their malicious acts;
according to their handiwork pay them, give them their deserts.
⁵ For they do not consider the Lord's deeds, the work of His hands.,
May He tear them down, never to rebuild them!
⁶Blessed is the Lord, for He listens to my plea for mercy.
⁷The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him.
I was helped, and my heart exulted,
so I will glorify Him with my song.
⁸The Lord is their strength;
He is a stronghold for the deliverance of His anointed.
⁹Deliver and bless Your very own people;
tend them and sustain them forever.

Question: *“Listen to my plea!” the psalmist begs God. What’s happening? What can we know about the psalmist’s troubles?*

- The psalmist wants to be noticed
- The psalmist wants God to see that he/she is not evil, and should not be counted among those who are
- Evil-doers deserve what punishment is meted out to them.
- The LORD protects those who have trust in God

How do the illuminations convey the emotions and thoughts of the psalm?

Artist Debra Band finds deep personal relevance in this psalm. She began these illuminations late in the night following a surgery on her husband’s spinal cord cancer, which coincided with the beginning of the I Will Wake the Dawn project. The illuminations present her own scream of anguish and search for relief from her own and the world’s troubles and fears. She writes:

“Listen to my plea!” the Psalmist begs God, voicing human cries across the ages. Today, the final verse of the psalm is sung as a popular folksong during festival and life-cycle celebrations. In the full-page illumination, a woman’s arms reach toward a window to the infinite heavens; her palms face not outward, but inward toward her own face, suggesting the reflective quality of her search for the face and attention of the Divine.” (*I Will Wake the Dawn*, p. 50)

Question: *What images do you see reflected in Band’s illumination of this psalm?*

- The woman’s outstretched arms bear witness to the threats and terrors that beset humankind, grim visions of human disaster pervaded by blood and suffering;
- Her flesh is imprinted with images: (1) September 11, 2001 World Trade Center bombing; (2) Yassir Arafat’s black and white khaffiyeh next to a suicide bomb belt; (3) the Nazi “Juden” badge; (4) a military rifle emerging from smoke; (5) the wreck of homes flooded in the 2004 Tsunami, amid which bobs a child’s beach ball; (6) images of cancerous tumors, all surrounded and suffused with blistered and bloodied flesh.
- The figure of the woman herself, dwarfed by the enormity of the suffering that threatens her world, sits nearly hidden by the smoke and blood at the bottom of the image.
- The pose of the arms, reaching upward and echoing a typical pose of biblical prayer, with palms inward and fingers stretched tense and wide expresses her urgent conversation with God, begging for deliverance.

The artist’s personal reflection:

Indeed, for all her desperation, as she reflects upon her fears she knows that her pleas are a conversation with God, rather than a lonely and hopeless cry. Just as the Psalmist realizes from the depths of his despair that God will hear his plea and offer him a shield, as she looks both inward and toward the invisible presence of God in the cosmos, she realizes that she is confident of a divine response. Indeed, it is her search that enables the Divine response. Heschel explored the interplay between the human search for God, and God’s ability to respond to human need:

“God is not a pearl at the bottom of the ocean, the discovery of which depends upon the skill and intelligence of man. The initiative must be ours, yet the achievement depends upon Him, not only on us. Without His love, without His aid, man is unable to come close to Him.

And yet, “everything is in the hands of heaven, except the fear of heaven.” Man is free to seek Him and free to ignore Him. Only he who endeavors to purify himself, is assisted from above. Only he who sanctifies himself a little, is endowed with greater sanctity from above.”

Discussion Questions: *Why do you suppose the heavens are black?*

How does this reflect the psalm itself, and how much do you think this is artistic interpretation?

If you were illuminating this psalm, how might you do it?

