

"Open Unto the Hard Rain"

By David Bradley

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I've been thinking about a song from that ancient psalmist Bob Dylan, "A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall." It's a song about facing sadness, loss, hurt. He wrote it in 1962--60 years ago. In the wake of the hard rain of Hurricane Ian, it's hauntingly prophetic. You might know it. The singer's asked by an unnamed source "Where have you been?" "What did you see?" "What did you hear?" "Who did you meet?" And he answers, with imagery that's harsh, painful, prescient for right now: he's been in seven sad forests, seen a newborn baby with wild wolves all around it, heard the roar of a wave that could drown the whole world, met a man wounded with hatred.

The questioner never refutes the sights and sounds, never comments. Just asks. And keeps tenderly calling the singer "my darling young one." Well--who's that asking, with this tender empathy? My brother-in-law Rabbi Rob Nosanchuk inspired me to wonder--What if it's the Source--what if it's the Mystery...the Thing Greater Than Us, asking us, gently, about the hard things we're experiencing? In his Rosh Hashanah sermon this year, Rob framed Abraham's cry to YHWH about the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as a cry of pain which YHWH hears, not defensively, but with empathy--go on, my darling one, speak of the hurt. Name the losses.

It's not Abraham's time. And it's not 1962. It's 2022, or 5783. Just last week we heard the roar of a wave that seemed it could drown the whole world. We've met the hatred and seen the violence--again, just last week, right down the street. And we've all faced personal losses. These come every year and in every time, but the losses of the past two years, at least to me, feel extra heavy--coming at a time when the hard rain's fallen...harder.

As we gather at this time to remember, I miss my mom and dad and all the friends who died too young these past two years. I'm angry about hideous gun violence. So what good does it do if the Mystery asks us to name the losses, to describe the hurt? I don't know. And at times I can just get stuck in the sadness and anger.

But then...You might have heard Rabbi Shawn's prayer "Open Unto Me," adapted from Rev. Howard Thurman's prayer. Rev. Thurman prays "open unto me, light for my darkness." Rabbi Shawn's adaptation says, "Open unto me, light AND my darkness...Open unto me courage AND my fear...hope AND my despair." Where have you been? What did you hear? Light and courage and hope, yes, AND darkness and fear and despair. You've been human. Name that. And remember, describe, and claim those opposites that make up living.

My mom is gone, AND for eight months this year I walked through Lankenau Hospital, where she volunteered for 5 decades, where my dad died, and I've trained as a chaplain. What did I

see? I saw a son say goodbye to his dying mother and the mother pass away in front of me. Who did I meet? I met a mother holding her stillborn son. AND I heard a dying woman singing, with joy, her favorite hymns. And a courageous 25-year-old woman facing Lupus embrace the big power of saying "*Hineini*," here I am. Life is loss AND joyful singing, fear of disease AND the courage to say, "Here I am, afraid."

The last question Dylan's mysterious interviewer asks is "What'll you do now?" The singer says "I'm going out now..." I'm thinking of the phrase *Lech lecha*—what YHWH says to Abram in Genesis: "Go thou, from your land...to the land which I will show you." *Lech lecha* gets wonderfully turned in various translations and can be rendered as "Go to yourself" (Go inward to find your journey) and "go out from yourself" (Leave the self to find what's beyond).

What'll I do now? How do you hold grief or sadness or a loved one's hurt, with living forward into an uncertain future? Robert Penn Warren had a poem in which he said, "Even as I begin, I remember." As if to start, to go out, you have to remember, even pain. *Bereshit*--in the beginning--is remembering. So, what'll I do now? Hold both meanings of *Lech lecha*. "Go in and see the sadness and the fear, feel the hurts, don't hide from them, and then go out, bringing it all along, to connect with what I see and hear, who I meet, and find how those encounters might transform me." My humanity contains all that I feel and all I meet...and more, as does the humanity of everyone else. I witnessed that in those hospital rooms, where courage and fear, joy and sorrow, light and darkness lived together. I'll remember *that*.

"What'll you do now?" How to begin? It can be a gentle invitation from the Mystery...*Lech Lecha*: go out with all our powers of grief, fear, courage, joy, "open unto" it all as Shawn's prayer says, remembering and living with love.