

DRASHETTE/INTRODUCTION TO POEM – AUGUST 2, 2025 *Linda Blachman*

Two years ago I stood here on my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and said it would be my last drash. And meant it. The parasha was *Kedoshim – You shall be holy*. For me, the textual nugget unlocking holiness was *Love your neighbor as yourself. Love the stranger as yourself*. How to do that? By remembering our own estrangement and suffering. Having compassion for self and others. It seemed like a good place to stop.

That was before Oct 7<sup>th</sup>. A few months later, I began writing a poem, “River to Sea: A Prayer,” as an outlet for my private horror and heartbreak. I wrote in fits and starts over 18 months, hoping I wouldn’t have to finish it; peace would be brokered, making the poem unnecessary. Things darkened. And darkened. I picked it up again in June, finished it and decided to share it. Today was the only open spot this summer: Shabbat *Chazon*, the saddest Shabbat of the year when we begin Moses’ farewell address and Isaiah’s Haftorah of impending doom, and end the day with the saddest holiday, Tisha B’Av. It felt *bashert*.

My poem connects all parts of this day. The thread running through it carries traumatic endings and loss, profound grief, culpability and contrition, and a plea for transformation that might guide us towards holiness, towards hope.

Tonight is the nadir of the Jewish calendar. We sit in darkness, low to the ground, read Lamentations with flashlights, recall calamities that have befallen our people. This Tisha B’Av feels unlike any other. We’re reenactors of past calamities *and* actors in current tragedies playing out in real time on two fronts. We’re Jews *and* Americans, doubling our experience of shock, brokenness, anguish and uncertainty.

Right now I’m immensely grateful to be Jewish and to our ancient rabbis who out of destruction created Rabbinic Judaism, including containers and rituals for personal and communal mourning. Navigating loss and grief is the most common human experience. Addressing it can deepen us, open our hearts and move us towards healing, compassion and renewal.

Beginnings start with endings, and Shabbat *Chazon* intends more than sadness. “*Chazon*,” the word opening the Haftorah, literally means “vision.” Chassidic masters teach that on this most desolate Shabbat, every Jew is shown a vision of the Third Temple yet to be built. May it be one that brings us closer to the commandments of holiness, loving ourselves, the neighbor, the stranger, all of life.

From the River to the Sea, from sea to shining sea, this poem is my vision. I invite you to find yours.

---

*The poem is dedicated to current and future generations of children, and to the courageous Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Arabs who are meeting together face to face to seed a better future. You'll find a partial list of such groups and organizations on the table in the foyer.*

## RIVER TO SEA: A Prayer

From the river to the sea  
Let there be space for all beings  
Space to breathe, to be free  
Let mercy blanket this blood-soaked land  
A sacrament.

From the river to the sea  
Let there be two histories  
Two peoples  
with thousand-year memories  
Two ancestral chains, two ancestral claims  
to homes, olive trees, security.

Let sweet silence ring over hills and wadis  
Cease fires bow to binding treaties  
Let the rumble of revenge be stilled  
Let the rubble be tilled  
No more children traumatized, orphaned, maimed, killed  
No more tyrants and terrorists playing games with everyone's lives  
Children can't wait for adults to grow up  
No one can heal until everything stops.

Let the dead rest, send adults to their room  
for a needed time out, for facing the truth  
owning their pain, a reckoning, an end to  
comparing miseries, competing certainties  
dredging up prooftexts throughout history  
    who lost more who cost more  
    who harmed more who killed more  
    who should be shamed who should be blamed  
    who gave more who saved more  
    who victim who villain  
    who victor who vanquished  
    who suffered more who sinned more

Enough!  
Don't let the past define the future.  
Nor current wars dictate endless war  
Polluting the skies, defacing the earth  
Narrowing minds, tormenting souls  
Power has corrupted. Madness has erupted.  
Survival of the fittest breeds brutality  
What has happened to morality?

Surrender!  
There is nowhere to go. No other land.  
Make a way out of dead ends  
No one is leaving. Everyone is bleeding.

Surrender!  
Dismantle the architecture of terror, trauma's machinery  
Iron domes, basement bunkers, refugee camps, tunnels of tragedy  
Bury allegiance to hatred, violence, martyrdom, greed  
Bury lies, manipulation, failed ideologies.

Supplant grandiose myths of glorious conquest  
with simple stories of human dignity  
Replace fevered dreams of total victory  
with plans for collective freedom and security  
Embrace equality, good and evil as inborn capacities  
Let arrogance melt into humility.

Break down the walls, shatter the ceilings  
Break the mirrors, encounter your fears  
Renounce eye for an eye  
Instead meet eye to eye  
See your own face in the face of the enemy  
the heartbreak, the yearning, and the humanity.

Do not say it cannot be done  
Who could have imagined the walk on the moon  
An end to The Troubles  
German acts of remorse and reparation  
Mandela free. Electricity. The Statue of Liberty  
now weeping and bowed. But remember:  
When the people rise up, dictators fall  
Dead oligarchs must abandon their money  
Dead ideologues their dogmas, rigidity, zealotry  
New construction follows destruction.

Turn the pages  
Call in the Angels  
Call in the Sages  
Pen something good and  
bright for the Ages.

Let wise hope rise from the river to the sea  
An awakening of moral imagination, creativity  
Dream new dreams. Welcome neuroplasticity.  
Trauma can heal  
Habits of harming can morph into mourning.

Take courage from those who cross borders  
Who greet their shadow and welcome the stranger  
Coax rivers of sorrow towards paths for tomorrow  
Who let tears flow and trust grow  
Allow grief to soften the hardened ground  
Who prepare to do what has rarely been done  
Hand over their guns, sheath their knives  
Risk being vulnerable for everyone's lives  
Steeped in loss but no one a loser  
Taking a chance on a better future.

Where every child will be well fed, carried into sleep  
sheltered in bed with pillowed heads  
Schooled in truth, compassion, decency  
unafraid of beautiful diversity.

Where every home is a house of safety  
inviting curiosity, possibility, hospitality  
protected by Divinity.

Two ancient peoples on their own land secure and free  
Peaceful at last between the river and the sea.

– Linda Blachman