

WE ARE THE RIVER
Rabbi Victor Hillel Reinstein
Kol Nidre, 5770

And a river goes forth from Eden to water the garden and from there it divides and becomes four rivers (Gen. 2:10). The four rivers flow out into the world of human striving, carrying in their womb of silt and sediment seeds of Eden. And from the world of human striving, the four rivers are ever seeking their way homeward, toward the one that they once were and shall be again.

And people search for the rivers, for their whole life long, because they too want to go home to the One that is the Source. Some know that they are searching, and some do not. Happy are the ones who do. The seeds of Eden carried by the rivers are spread all about, finding root in people's souls, planting the hunger that will awaken them one night. So the yearning is within them, and somewhere a memory of when the rivers were one. If we could only find one of the four rivers in its quest to return, then we could sail upon the current and be carried home to the meeting of the rivers.

There are times when the way seems more open to our seeking, and times not. Of the way upon the land to follow to the river, there are no maps. And of the river's coursing there are no charts. All that will be is unknown, each one to survey and explore the way ahead, and to share with others the soundings of their lead. If we would remember, there is a scroll that tells the way, not across the sea or far away. It is scribed on the parchment of every heart, in each one's language and in the manner of their own understanding.

There is a Wise Woman who is the mother of all life, and she will guide us to the river and lead us on the way. But first we have to see her in order to approach. Hidden by veils, we think she is not there. The veils though are upon our own eyes and of our own making. The Wise Woman waits, hoping that we will come. When there is searching in the air, at turning of the seasons and of a year, the seeking of so many, as a gentle breeze that blows, lifts the veil from each one's eyes. Then we see the sun sparkling on the river. And the Wise Woman points the way, guiding us to the place where sea tides

pull and time and space meet to form the river bank. There where the water eddies by the shore, the people gather all together and wait to board the vessel, they think, that will make the voyage home.

The Wise Woman walks among the people gathered and speaks to each and every one. "How did you know that today is the sailing day," she asks. From one and then another, words that came from a common place, though unbeknownst to each other; "I know from the hunger in my heart and the yearning in my soul, and from the ancient scroll that is mine." To them all together, the Wise Woman said, "You have found your way to being here, and you shall set the leaving time. One by one you came, each one by yourself, even in the company of another. And yourself you shall remain, but in the knowing of something greater, each one needed and none to be alone. When you know joys and sorrows shared, passed from heart to heart with care, none unafraid of being who they are and open to the ways that others are, then shall be the leaving time, on the day when all seek at-one-ment with each other."

Then within herself and him each one began to look, knowing the question the Wise Woman would ask them next. And so she asked them all, in the hearing of each other, what do you bring with you for the voyage? They all began to answer, each in their own time, waiting their own turn. People spoke their fears, now that they were here is this where they wanted to be and with whom?

"I bring the fear of being alone," said one. And from another, "the fear of no place to be alone amidst the gathered ones."

"I bring the fear of loving," "and I the fear never to love."

"I bring the fear of dying," said one, "and I bring the fear of living," said another.

"I bring the fear, that there won't really be a place for me in the way that I am."

"I bring the fear of place, too, that I will take up too much space and make it so that for me there is no place at all, as often time before."

"I bring the fear that I will have nothing to give," said one, and from another, "that I will be asked to give or do more than what I can."

And so they spoke one after another from the fearful places deep within. The Wise Woman looked upon them all and she blessed them, "May all your fears become your strength in the overcoming of what you thought you never could. And for the fearing of

another, as you have heard each one, may your heart be filled with compassion and you be the comfort needed that wasn't there before."

Then the wise woman asked them there, "Do you bring only fear with you, or something more that speaks of who you are and of the places you have been? Did you bring the gifts of hand and heart and mind that are very your own to give?"

"Yes, yes," said one, "I also bring a song that I learned from a small bird long ago.

"And I bring laughter and a smile that I remember from the child that I once was."

Sang another, "I bring hope that people can still learn to love each other, their differences to embrace."

"I bring my favorite toys in this box to share," a child said.

"I bring the language of my ancestors, its laughter and its tears."

Some began to cry..., as upon their heart's door they knocked and it began to open, closed for so long, and scars for some that softened, afraid to look no more.

"I bring a seed of peace that I found among the ruins where so many died."

"And I a sprig of lavender bring, like my daughter long ago to me, gentle she, gentle be, comfort ye my people...."

"I bring the tears that I have shed when looking for a friend," a young girl said.

"And I bring an open heart to receive them in," smiled another, while reaching out to her new friend.

"I bring knowledge that my grandfather taught me, not of books but of his life to share and to remember."

"It is memory that I bring too, said another, of stories long forgotten...."

"From tissue paper wrapped," another laughed through tears, "I bring a baby's curl and a first tooth lost."

"And I the skill to organize all that is needed for the voyage," one who had been so quiet proudly said.

"I bring the patience of time gladly given, to listen through the night to all who need an ear and a heart to really hear."

"And I," said one whose face was like the sun, "bring the palette of my joy to paint the

sky when her canvas be of cloud."

All who spoke, some aloud and some within, remembered gifts they had forgotten that were theirs to give, that seemed so ordinary, so they thought or were made to feel, but here among the gathered ones each one knew they had a gift to give that now began to shine. Taking hold of each one's hand the Wise Woman said, "bring your joys and your sorrows, your fear and your courage, and the song of yearning that is in your heart; there is a place for everyone." And the veils that fluttered above their eyes she took away, and of them she stitched together sails for the voyage to catch the spirit wind that hovered on the water.

To their surprise, the Wise Woman stepped back and was quiet for a time. Then she turned to them and said, "This will not be an easy voyage, are you sure you want to come? Look around into the faces you have come to know. Will you remember what has been learned of each one? On a day when the sun does not shine, will you remember the warmth of body and of soul that touches you today?"

"There will be rapids along the way," she cautioned, "rapids of fear that can roil away resolve from every heart."

"And jagged rocks that are of gossip, sharp and able to cut from out a vessel her keel, whether of wood or of flesh."

"Ah," she sighed, "storms of anger and strife will sadly come, taking by surprise in the middle of day or of night."

And of cold complaining winds she told them, that muffle hearing to the doing of what is needed for the good of all."

Some were startled then by the way the Wise Woman spoke. Would she not take care of them? And some were afraid, unsure the commitment to be made. Some turned back from the gathered ones, other callings on their time, not yet clear enough within themselves to stay. Each one in their own time and in the right place to find. Those who remained were saddened to see them go. "There is so much more to learn of each other and from one another," they said.

Those who remained gave threads of life and story to the weaving of the vision. It began to form in the telling of each and all together. Of rainbow song and color of skin,

they told each other of where they had been, ways of loving, ways of learning, ways of being become the waves rolling out and in again to shore. The Wise Woman sang her song, at times the melody, at times the harmony to the song the gathered sang. It became one song, antiphonal and reaching. She told the people in her song what they already knew, what all people really know but don't remember knowing, of weathering sea and storm together, their love the breakwater to the wave that to one alone would overwhelm. Of the dance in one great circle, she sang, weaving close the lives of all among them joined; to celebrate times of blessing come, of new life beginning and lives become as one, weaving closer still the tears to hold when one among them journeys on and from this world to the world beyond. From all the gifts and fears to share, the learning that comes of life that is different for each one, without each other only that already known remains as drift wood dry upon the shore.

The sun was setting on the river, golden in the sky, and so the day of at-one-ment, its end drawing nigh. Seeds of Eden blossoming, rivers flowing home to the One. The sound of a great horn filled the air, and the song carried on the wind. Some think there never was a river to which they had come, and never the voyage to have begun. Others are sure they travelled far, for they had come to a different place than the place they were before. "Think upon the stories you have heard," the Wise Woman said to them all, "and the songs that you have sung, and the seekers all that you have been, each one for the other a guide along the river. And if you should wonder the coursing of the river and its name, look at each other and remember," she sang, " We are the River."

And they all started to sing together, antiphonally at first:

We are the River

We are the River

the River of Peace, the River of Peace