

Breath - by Ann Henders

When people ask me, 'What was it like to be dead?' It makes me stop whatever I am doing. I find myself instinctively reaching out to touch whatever is near, a wall, a table, their shoulder. There is a change in the air around me. It's not colder exactly but thinner, clearer. Like the difference between drinking good cold water drawn from a well and water scooped from a rushing, living stream. I know that I must connect myself to something solid, hold on tightly so that I do not, once more, sink into the oblivion of not being.

My death made me special, although dying in itself is not remarkable at all it happens to everybody eventually. So I really should say that being reawakened, rising to the surface and breaking through from there to here to take breath after breath of warm scented air was what truly made me special.

I was 12 when I died. My life until then had been just like all the other girls in my village. We helped our mothers at home and were expected to look after the sheep and chickens. We attended the synagogue, where my father was an Elder and we dreamed of the sort of men we would soon marry. Then I woke up one morning and my throat was sore. I still took the feed out to the chickens but the light of the sun hurt my eyes. My back ached, my face burned. When I turned to go back into the house the ground heaved as if I was on my uncle's fishing boat. I must have fallen, the next thing I remember was my mother kneeling by my bed, wiping my face with a cloth and crying. She told me that father had gone to find a healer. But the sound of her words hurt my ears like cymbals clashing in my head and the touch of her cloth felt like claws upon my face.

Then, nothing. No pain, no heat, no sound. Just comfort, peace, security. I nestled as if in the softest bed of feathers and slept. Then I heard a man's voice "Little girl, I say to you, get up". To tell you the truth, I didn't want to get up. I was afraid but he took my hand and I felt something, strength and courage and love and so much more flow from him to me. That's when I took that breath, that was the moment life returned to me and it hurt. Have you ever watched rain fall onto parched, cracked earth? As the drops fall and start to flow each grain of soil seems to drink the water and swell. As the water runs into the cracks the ground softens and binds together. You can picture the drops finding the tiny seeds below the surface and waking each one of them up, "Come on, this is your moment, your reason to live" That's how I felt. I had been awakened to a different life but why?

The healer ate with us that evening. My mother and my father, Jarius offered him the best food and wine that they could find. They listened to his every word and never stopped thanking him for bringing me back to them. I said little, it was enough for me to feel the air entering and leaving my body, something so ordinary and yet each breath felt like a blessing. As he prepared to go he made us all promise that we

would not tell anyone what had happened. "But what shall I do with the life that has been given back to me?" I asked. He replied, "Freely you have received, now freely give".

The rest of my life has been truly unremarkable. I learnt some of the skills of healing. I have helped bring babies into the world, nursed the sick and been with many as they leave this world. They hold my hand and take comfort in the reassurances I give them about the place they travel to. Every morning when I take my first waking breath I offer it up to my healer.