

THE PASSIONATE GOD

Isaiah 43 : 1 - 28

“If you ask most people how they would characterize God, what they would want to say is: Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent. But those are not Israel’s categories. Israel’s categories are Faith, Justice and Mercy. These are all relational terms. This God has bet everything on relationships. And this God intends us to bet everything on relationships.” *Walter Brueggemann*

YAHWEH'S DECISIVE LOVE

Fear not, for I have redeemed
you.

I have called you by name.

You are mine.

Isaiah 43:1

This verse and the ones that follow in the first section of this text present God as one totally dedicated and committed to his people.

There is nothing he will not do for them, and their security is of utmost importance to him. God desires that his people Israel not just survive, but thrive. His plan is to take this tiny nation, which has been uprooted and overcome by more powerful nations, and to fill it with significance and promise under his protection. God's desire is for a covenant relationship of unbounded and reciprocal love.



“Because you are precious in my
sight, and I love you”

Isaiah 43:4

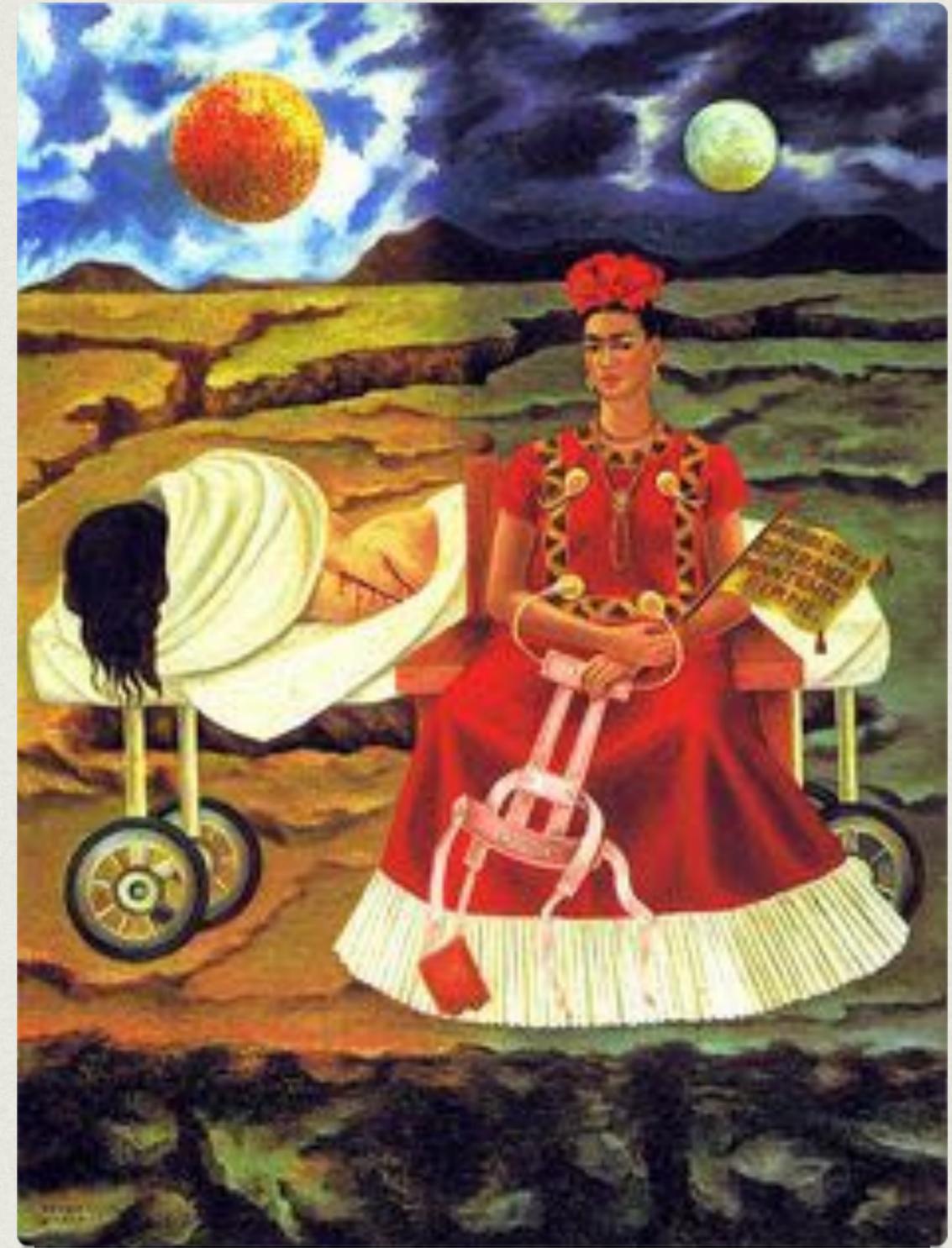
THROUGH FIRE AND FLOOD

“ When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
When you walk through the fire you shall not be burned,
And the flame shall not consume you.”

Isaiah 43:2

What follows in this text is a variety of word pictures that illustrate the nature of God’s dedication and healing intentions to Israel, and the lengths he will go to achieve them. The destructive powers of water and fire are no match for Yahweh. I am reminded of Romans 8, which states that “nothing can separate us from the love of God”. Brueggemann continues by suggesting that Israel may see these images of passing through the waters unscathed as references to their deliverance from bondage in Egypt, and Christians may see “welcome illuminations of baptism, a sacrament of relationship whereby we are inducted into the protective and sure care of Yahweh.”

In continuing this idea of the transformation of images of destruction into images of mercy and salvation, is it also possible to see the devastating image of flames as “tongues of fire” which, instead of death, bring the life giving spirit?





GATHERING GOD'S BELOVED

Do not fear for I am with you;
I will bring your offspring from the east,
and from the west I will gather you;
I will say to the north, "Give them up,"
and to the south, "Do not withhold;"
bring my sons from far away and my
daughters from the ends of the earth -
everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made.

Isaiah 43:5-7



Isaiah 43: 3-4, 14

I give Egypt as your ransom,
Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.
Because you are precious in my sight,
and honoured and I love you,
I give people in return for you,
Nations in exchange for your life. . .
For your sake I will send to Babylon
And break down all the bars,
And the shouting of the Chaldeans
will be turned to lamentation.

Protective and Possessive?

A tiny, miserable and insignificant band of uprooted men and women are assured that they - precisely they - are the people to whom God has turned in love; they, just as they are, are dear and precious in his sight. And think who says this - the lord of all powers and authorities, of the whole of history and of all creation!

Claus Westermann



TESTIMONY TO THE HOLY, TRUE GOD

Bring forth the people who are blind, yet have eyes,
Who are deaf, yet have ears!
Let all the nations gather together, and let the people
assemble.

Who among them declared this,
and foretold to us the former things?
Let them bring their witnesses to justify them,
and let them hear and say, "It is true."

You are my witnesses, says the Lord,
and my servant whom I have chosen,
so that you may believe me

And understand that I am he.
Before me no god was formed,
nor shall there be any after me.

I, I am the Lord,
And beside me there is no saviour.

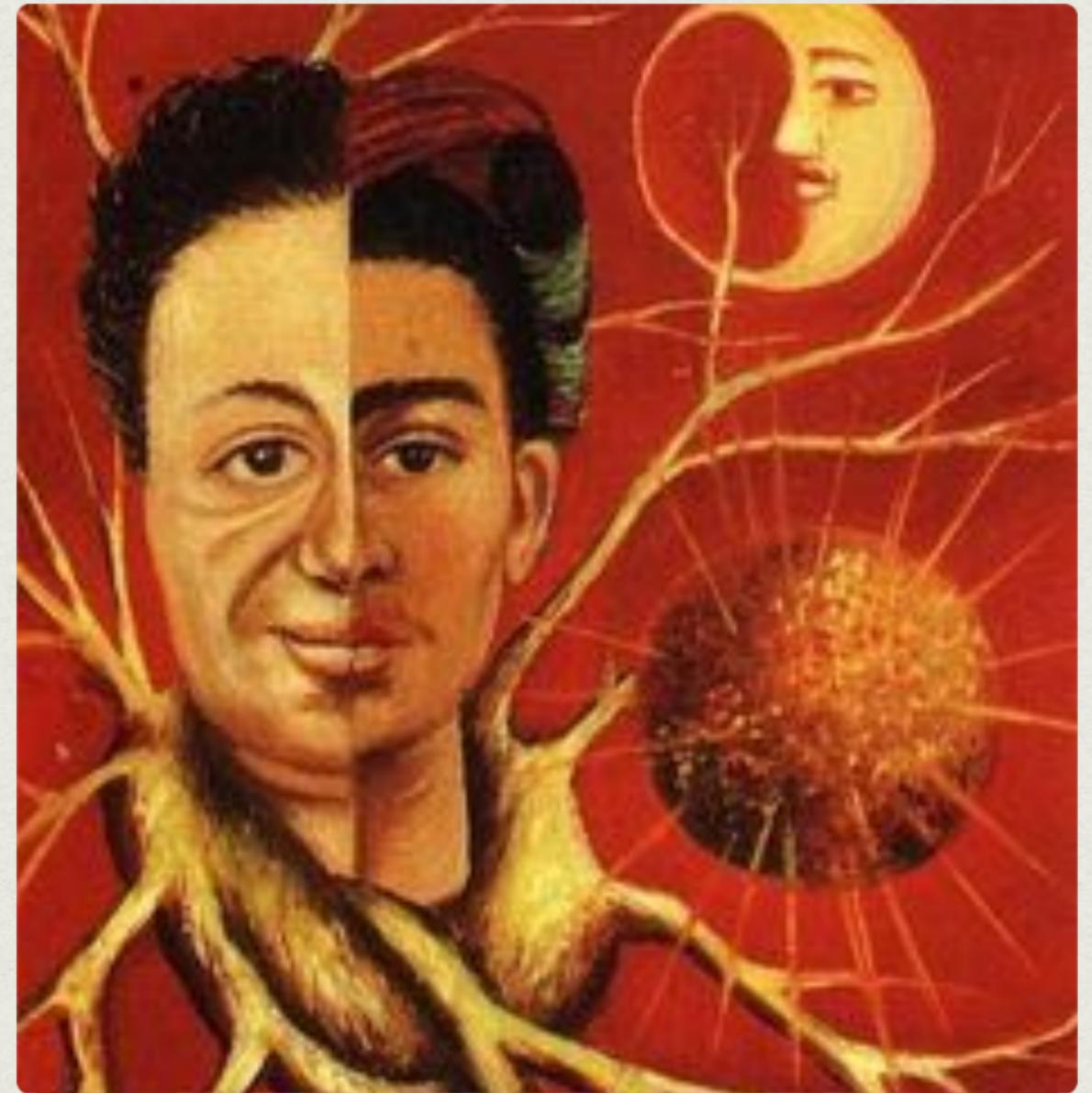
Isaiah 43:8-9



TESTIMONY TO THE HOLY, TRUE GOD

“How in the span of a few verses can the prophet move from a description of Israel as a people punished with fire and still resisting God’s law to a divine commissioning of these same people as witness and chosen servant?”

- It is just such imperfect people that God uses as agents of change, of healing and justice on earth.
- At issue is the presence or absence of various gods in the history of their nations.
- God’s words of love can work to shock Israel into remembering how God has been present through good and bad, through punishment and prospering. For Israel’s God is Immanuel, “God with us.”
- By standing witness before the nations to God’s faithfulness, Israel’s own heart undergoes transformation.



A NEWNESS FROM YAHWEH

Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.
The wild animals will honour me,
The jackals and the ostriches;
For I give water in the wilderness,
Rivers in the desert,
To give drink to my chosen people,
The people whom I formed for myself
So that they may declare my praise.

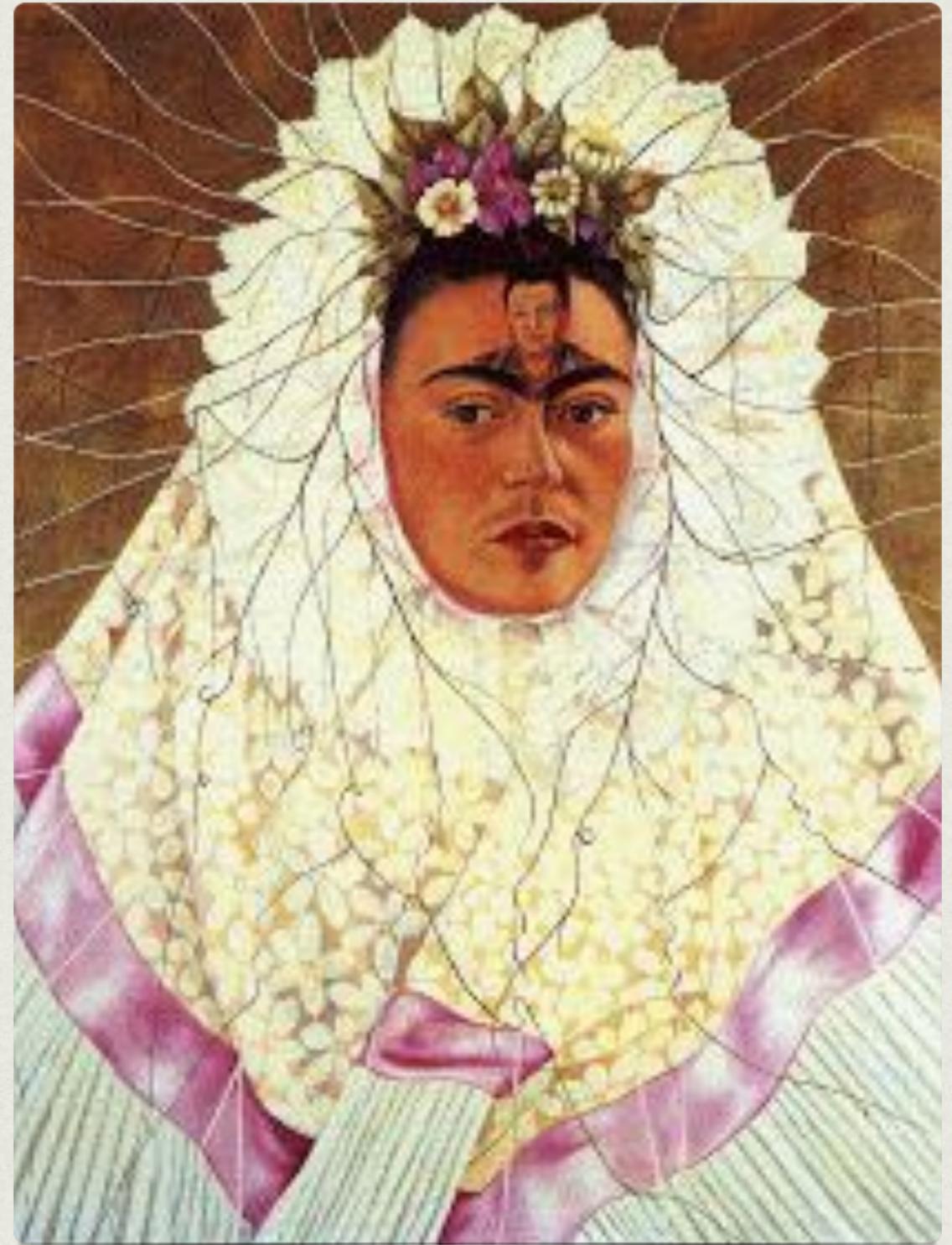
Isaiah 43:18-21



REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING

Right at the point when his audience would have begun to yield to the soothing effects of the traditional images of the exodus, Isaiah introduces a clashing dissonance with the words, 'do not remember the former things.'

This comes at a point where a nostalgic relation to tradition threatens to tie the people to their past and to stultify alertness to present realities, responsiveness to new opportunities, and the potential for growth into yet-unrealized possibilities.





Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob;
but you have been weary of me, O Israel!
You have not brought me your sheep for burnt
offerings, or honoured me with your sacrifices.
I have not burdened you with offerings,
or wearied you with frankincense.
You have not brought me sweet cane with money,
or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices.
But you have burdened me with your sins;
you have wearied me with your iniquities.

Isaiah 43:22-24

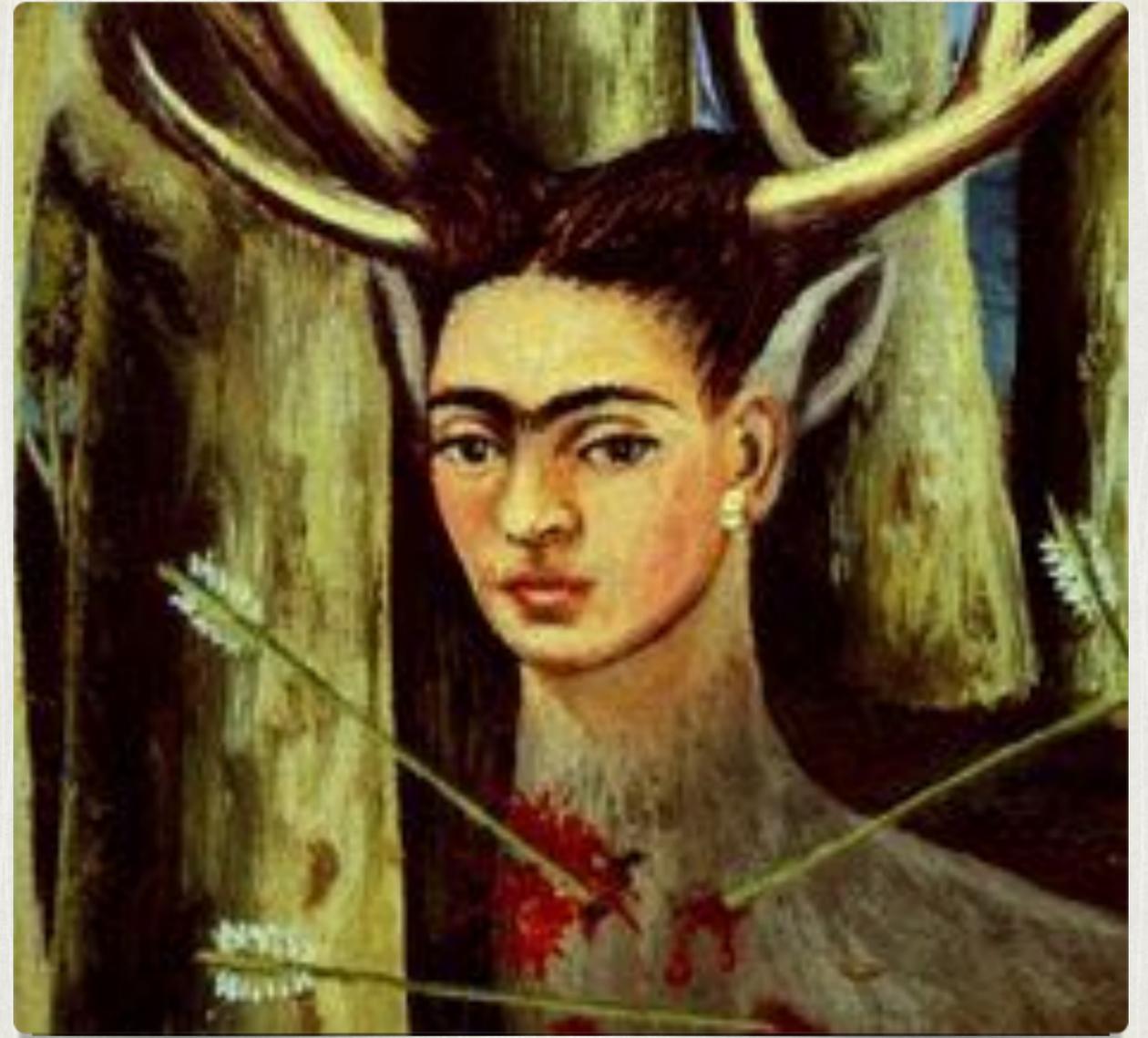
A WEARYING PEOPLE

I, I am He,
who blots out your transgressions for my own sake,
and I will not remember your sins.

Accuse me, let us go to trial;
set forth your case, so that you may be proved right.

Your first ancestor sinned,
and your interpreters transgressed against me.
Therefore I profaned the princes of the sanctuary,
I delivered Jacob to utter destruction,
and Israel to reviling.

Isaiah 43:25-28



“Lament is the breaking of numbness by the admission of pain and loss. When pain is brought to speech, it turns to energy. When pain is not brought to speech it turns to despair.”

Walter Brueggemann

THE PASSIONATE CHARACTER AND LOVE OF YAHWEH



Contrary as they may seem on the face of things, expressions of divine anger, as genuinely as affirmations of divine steadfastness, reveal the commitment of God to authentic, reciprocating love.

Paul Hanson

A COMPLICATED PORTRAIT

“The literary technique of enveloping a sublime hymnic celebration of divine grace with disquieting descriptions of a loved one who spurns the divine lover and nevertheless is called upon to witness to divine grace . . . is a skillful means of expressing the tragedy and the hope that coexist in the divine-human relationship.”

Paul Hanson

“(Perhaps) Yahweh’s motivations are mixed and unclear, as they often are in relationships of deep love and deep pain.” *Walter Brueggemann*





PASSION
is the bridge
that takes you
from pain
to change.

—Frida Kahlo—



Meet the Artist - Frida Kahlo