



David Runcorn The language of tears

David Runcorn is one of those annoyingly talented communicators – both on the page and in person. His helpful examples and illustrations clarify his ideas and this book in particular presents his thought in mercifully short chapters to give space for reflection.

He starts by acknowledging the barriers we may put up between ourselves and tears. There are some, he says who simply cannot cry. Others fear making themselves vulnerable. Others still have experienced the futility of tears: I cried and nobody came! But, despite the world's expectation that we should be 'strong' and cope, he wants to encourage us to risk all in order to move beyond the masks we create to discover who we are in and through our tears.

Tears can be an expression of a number of reactions: a sign of that breaking open as seen in moments of spiritual revival; of frustration at the cruelty of the world; of disappointment and exhaustion; and also of joy and relief.

Today, he feels, tears are too often repressed, leaving an exhaustion and a barrenness – literally a dryness – where they would be a balm.

The Bible, on the other hand, is full of examples of tears and Runcorn looks in particular at Psalm 137. Once the Israelites had "sat down" – ie stopped to take stock – they could only weep as they remembered: lament as an antidote to despair and a better response than complaining.

All this, Runcorn believes, prepares us for that joyful tearful homecoming at the end of time when we will not be able to hold back.

Do we dare allow ourselves, this book asks, to pass beyond our embarrassment and discover that inner life that maybe we hide even from ourselves?

Jim Cox