



Chana Cromer, detail from "White on White", 2012, 80 x 110 cm, painting on silk shantung  
"I got a telephone in my bosom and I can call him up from my heart." From "Freedom" by Richie Havens

## PAYMENT

Who will give me the price of the soul  
strip it of its specifics one by one  
merchandise spread out in the doorways of  
the rich

Who will give me the price, at all,  
in times of depression like these  
Perhaps it's better not to announce the  
prices  
not to quote numbers

Perhaps it's better to come one  
by one to the center of a traffic island  
in the tumult of the days

Amichai Chasson  
tr. Esther Cameron

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## CONTRIBUTOR EXCHANGE

Below are titles of books (mainly poetry collections) by contributors, as well as URLs. \* indicates a page in the "Hexagon Forum" of [www.pointandcircumference.com](http://www.pointandcircumference.com). \*\* indicates a page in the "Kippat Binah" section of the same site.

Hayim Abramson, *ShiratHaNeshamah: Shira letzadmekorot (Song of the Soul: Poetry with Sources)*, Beit El, 2016.

\*\*YakovAzriel is the author of *Threads from a Coat of Many Colors: Poems on Genesis* (2005); *In the Shadow of a Burning Bush: Poems on Exodus* (2008), *Beads for the Messiah's Bride: Poems on Leviticus* (2009), *Swimming in Moses' Well* (2011), all with Time Being Books.

Miriam Aronson has published three children's books, including *The Kingdom of Singing Birds*.

Simcha Angel, *Voice of My Heart*, forthcoming.

Hamutal Bar Yosef's many works are listed on [hamutalbaryosef.co.il](http://hamutalbaryosef.co.il). She has two bilingual poetry collections: *Night, Morning* Syracuse University Press, 2008, and *The Ladder*, Sheep Meadow Press, 2014.

Mindy Aber Barad, *The Land That Fills My Dreams* (Bitzaron 2013).

Judy Belsky, *Thread of Blue* (Targum Press, 2003) (memoir); *Avraham and Sultana*, 2018.

\*\*Esther Cameron, *The Consciousness of Earth* (Multicultural Books, 2004); *Fortitude, or The Lost Language of Justice: Poems in Israel's Cause* (Bitsaron Books, August 2009); *Western Art and Jewish Presence in the Work of Paul Celan: Roots and Ramifications of the "Meridian" Speech* (Lexington Books, 2014); *Collected Works* (6 vols.), Of the Essence Press 2016; [www.pointandcircumference.com](http://www.pointandcircumference.com).

Amichai Chasson, <https://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/poet/item/29459/Amichai-Chasson>; *Medaber im HaBayit (Talking with Home)*, Even Hoshen 2015; *Bli Ma*, Bialik Institute, 2018

Roberta Chester, *Light Years* (Puckerbush Press, 1983).

George W. Clever, *Dancing with Grandfather*, *Brightly Colored Beads*, both available on Kindle.

Heather Dubrow, *Forms and Hollows* (Cherry Grove Collections), *Lost and Found Departments* (Cornerstone Press)

Ruth Fogelman, <https://jerusalemilives.weebly.com/>, is the author of *Cradled in God's Arms*, *Jerusalem Lives*, and *Jerusalem Awakening* (Bitzaron Books), *Leaving the Garden* (2018), and *What Color Are Your Dreams* (2019).

Mel Goldberg has published three books of haiku: *The Weight of Snowflakes*, *A Few Berries*, and *Seasons of Life*, all in 2018.

Paul Hostovsky's latest book is *Deaf & Blind* (Main Street Rag, 2020). Website <http://paulhostovsky.com/>

Joanne Jagoda, *My Runaway Hourglass, Seventy Poems Celebrating Seventy Years*, Poetica Publishing, 2020. See [www.joannejagoda.com](http://www.joannejagoda.com)

Rick Kempa's most recent book of poems, *Too Vast for Sleep*, was published by Littoral Press in 2020.

Katharyn Howd Machan's *Dark Matter* (2017) and *Selected Poems* (2018) are both available on Kindle.

Irene Mitchell, *Fever* (Dos Madres Press, 2019), *Equal Parts Sun and Shade: An Almanac of Precarious Days* (Aldrich Press, 2017), *Minding the Spectrum's Business* (FutureCycle Press, 2015), *A Study of Extremes in Six Suites* (Cherry Grove Collections, 2012), *Sea Wind on the White Pillow* (Axes Mundi Press, 2009).

Rumi Morkin has published two volumes of *The Ogdan Nasherei of Rumi Morkin*. A third volume is in progress.

James B. Nicola's collections are listed on <https://sites.google.com/site/jamesbnicola/poetry>. Most recent: *Quickenings: Poems from Before and Beyond* (Cyberwit.net, 2019). Forthcoming: *Natural Tendencies* and *Fires of Heaven: Poems of Faith and Sense*.

Susan Oleferuk, *Circling for Home* (Finishing Line Press, 2011), *Those Who Come to the Garden* (Finishing Lines Press, 2013), *Days of Sun* (forthcoming, Finishing Line Press, 2017).

David Olsen, *Unfolding Origami*, Cinnamon Press, 2015; *Past Imperfect* (Cinnamon Press, 2019); chapbooks include *Exit Wounds* (2017), *Sailing to Atlantis* (2013), *New World Elegies* (2011), and *Greatest Hits* (2001).

Hava Pinhas Cohen, *Bridging the Divide, The Selected Poems of Hava Pinhas-Cohen*, bilingual edition, Syracuse University Press, 2015.

Reizel Polak's books include *Four Entered Pardes* (Greville Press Pamphlets, Warwick, UK, 2016); *And Where Did We Say We Were Going* (Black Jasmine, Sharon, MA, 2015); *Among the Red Golden Hills* (Black Jasmine, Sharon, MA, 2012).

Tirtsa Posklinsky-Shehory, *Medusa Shkufah Holekhet (Transparent Medusa Goes)*, Even Hosehn 2016; *Matmon shel Shamaniot (A Cache of Geckoes)*, Pardes 2018

Tony Reevy has three books, *Old North*, *Passage*, and *Socorro*, all published by Iris Press.

Michael Salcman's latest is *Shades & Graces*, Spuyten Duyvil Press, New York (2020). For others see online Contributors Exchange.

Edythe Schwartz, *A Palette of Leaves*, Mayapple Press, 2012, and *Exposure*, Finishing Line Press, 2007.

Michael E. Stone, *Selected Poems* (Cyclamens and Swords Press, 2010). *Adamgirk': The Adam Book of Arak'el of Siwnik'* (Oxford UP, 2007).

Henry Summerfield, *That Myriad-minded Man: a biography of George William Russell, 'A.E.' (1867-1935)* (Colin Smythe, 1975)

Wally Swist, *Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love* (Southern Illinois UP, 2012); *The Daodejing: A New Interpretation*, with David Breeden and Steven Schroeder (Lamar Univ. Literary Press, 2015); *Invocation* (same, 2015), *The View of the River* (Hemet, CA: Kelsay Books, 2017); *The Bees of the Invisible*, Shanti Arts, 2019; *Evanescence: Selected Poems* (Brunswick, ME: Shanti Arts, 2020).

Connie Tettenborn, <http://poeticartnmathbyconnie.6te.net/>

Lois Michal Unger's books include 'Miscarriage in Vermont', 'The Apple of His Eye', 'White Rain in Jerusalem', 'Tomorrow We Play Beersheva', 'Political Poems', 'The Glass Lies Shattered All Around'.

Florence Weinberger, *Carnal Fragrance* (Red Hen Press, 2004), *Sacred Graffiti* (Tebot Bach, 2010), *Breathing Like a Jew* (Chicory Blue Press, 1997), *The Invisible Telling Its Shape* (Fithin Press, 1997).

David K. Weiser, *Ladders: 333 Poems*, <https://www.amazon.com/Ladders-Poems-David-K-Weiser/dp/1709033517>

Changming Yuan edits Poetry Pacific with Allen Yuan, at [poetrypacific.blogspot.ca](http://poetrypacific.blogspot.ca) and has chapbooks available on Amazon.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

Joanne Jagoda's "Just One" is from her book *My Runaway Hourglass: Seventy Poems Celebrating Seventy Years*.

## I. What Has Been Given

### SUBTRACTING THE DARKNESS

Through glass through retina and synapse the incandescent flash that stops the second for the longer second's insuck of shivering breath then boom::

I cringe, and my children rush to the window to see the next bolt and my wife is arising from the dinner table to join them

and in the nervous shock of the thunder

I am suddenly swept back two decades into the current of climbing Moby Grape

in the Cannon Mountains of New Hampshire, the wind just freshening,

so I cannot hear what my partner John is yelling from 100 feet below,

and I notice the cars in the parking lot below have all fled, and there is only

my solo white pickup truck and John still edgy – edgy all day really – from

falling on the first pitch, and I'm edgy too bathed in his egoconcentric drama, wanting to shove it roughly aside and say *get focused!* :: we're nearly 600 feet up sheer granite and the mist begins to erase any certainty and John comes up to finish his pitch

and we're both staring at the guidebook but neither of us is certain

if we're on or off route :: the mist turns to rain and we gradually climb into darkness::

I'm leading what we're hoping is the last pitch, and I fumble a wedge in a long crack with wet, trembling fingers, and

it slips and falls, the carabineer and the wedge clank clanking their way down the slick granite until they knock free

both pieces below me, so there's no protection for the 60 feet of sickening space between me and John –

and if I fall this far above him, I'll tear us both off the cliff – and just then the first bolt of lightning lets loose – and a

second later the thunder, more deafening than anything I've ever heard, and I'm waiting

for the implosion of electricity to come rivering down the crack where I'm hanging,

but it doesn't it doesn't, and I realize I am holding my breath :: I shakily jam in

a last piece and in another ten feet I'm tying off at the top, and I want to kneel down and kiss the rock I'm so stunned so happy :: the lightning flashes again

less than a hundred feet away, and I feel it vibrate through the rock this time::

the ozone scorches every smell – and John tops the wall, and we're running

around the summit in the crazy darkness, punctuated by bursts of lightning, hunting for the trail:: the guidebook

tossed between us for 20 minutes :: this insane dance inviting our destruction – and finally finally we find the trail

and are leaping down

between the brush to safety and I swear I'll *never never never* climb again

and the lightning flashes again as my family stands at the window – and I realize

I'm still holding my breath. I rise and go stand at the window while we all watch the long, fine branches of incandescence subtract the darkness one long cannon boom at a time.

– David Holper

### NIGHTINGALES

As evening deepens and the woods grow still

A nightingale strikes up his piercing lay,

As if a stranger to the light of day

Intended by sheer gift of voice to fill

His blinded void. It sweetens trill by trill

As one by one the stars come out to play

And saraband the moonlit night away

Around the pibroch of his piping bill.

And if you listen carefully you'll hear

How other nightingales reply to him.

Until the stars fade out they'll warble on

Invisible in night yet sharp and clear,

Mourning until the moon sinks low and dim

And silhouettes of treetops point to dawn.

– Lionel Willis

### A LITTLE LIGHT

Roof to roof

lines sharp slope

chimneys faint smoke

who sleeps under these roofs

friend or foe maybe awake too

or dreaming their dreams as selfsame

as the crescents, circuits, swirls, secrets

of their fingers

a light left somewhere

the ancient fire, candle, heart of home hearth

a little light to fight the dark

light to light

star to star over

roof to roof.

– Susan Oleferuk

BS'D on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Shvat

No number disturbed the calm  
 And the universe tempered itself to one being  
 whispering the wonder  
 I only wanted to stay there  
 to drink in the warmth of the sun's rays.

Petals that fell from the tree made a soft carpet  
 Under the branches that grew upward  
 An old pomegranate returned to the elements.

Clear air, color, silence,  
 Light flooded the senses.

A bell's thinnest sound continues to echo  
 Restfulness of a moment without end.

– Tziporah Faiga Lifshitz

## A FULL DAY

a full day is standing at the sink washing dishes  
 watching birds fly overhead  
 flying to where they're going  
 the trick in life is not to know all the answers  
 sunlight covering everything  
 and the trees

– Lois Michal Unger

## FAIRY TALE SUMMER

When the cottonwood flies like white wishes  
 flicked from a wand  
 and the chorus is loud  
 from green princelings parading in  
 their kingdom of Pond  
 and birds eggs broken bright blue in needles of pine  
 are treasures to find  
 summer's magic is borne on the lights of fireflies

Mother moon will bathe all who wish to wash  
 in her silvery rivers with scents sultry  
 and pushing deep into knowing hiddens  
 and tempting shadowy walks forbidden  
 All is soft, all is hard, all is forgiven  
 stand on one foot and dance  
 to remember the land  
 we once lived in.

– Susan Oleferuk

## SCHOOL

children walk down  
 narrow dusty roads  
 vehicles stirring  
 billows of dust  
 turning air into  
 fine beige mist  
 appearing as  
 constant fog

no attention paid  
 it's the norm  
 106 degrees day  
 close to peak  
 summer season  
 raggedy school  
 sweet disciplined  
 teacher &  
 children clean  
 but for dust  
 clothes worn  
 but impeccable

blistering day  
 Chu Lai  
 Vietnam  
 1967

– Bill Culotta

## IN THE STILLNESS

In the stillness of the summer afternoon  
 the bees hum the loneliness of the hours  
 and you wonder if you will ever gather the flowers again  
 if second chances will be brought by a wind

In the stillness of long Sundays  
 baked in sun and steamed in smells  
 with children bored and red  
 you wonder why and you wonder when

In the stillness of the soreness  
 after the betrayal has fallen like sickness  
 your heart sounds like steps running away  
 you wonder if you will follow after

Night's stillness is its own with black folds  
 pressing against the forehead like an effigy crowned  
 stalking dread and worry  
 mighty night of sneaky sound

Come sit still a bit and let your heartbeat echo far  
 off the mountains, trees, sea and moving tide  
 come bellow, hoot, buzz and roar  
 to this magnificent moonsoaked earth.

– Susan Oleferuk

## INTERSTICE

It is Friday and I am finishing  
for the week in the studio,  
but I pause between projects

to reheat some coffee. It is late  
morning. The sky is overcast  
but the day is still cool. August

lushness making branches  
hang languorously, still weeks  
from the harvest and autumn

chill. Although I have begun to  
dodder some, and allow myself  
to feel that I am slowing down

even though I am not quite seventy,  
I think about Art Beck relaying  
how Willis Barnstone, at ninety,

living in Paris, is still writing four  
sonnets per day. Sometimes just  
standing between one point and

another needs to be just enough—  
that still place between doing  
and not doing, since immanence

and distance clarifies into  
the perceived present, of being  
alive in this one moment

for all time, dew still on the grass.

— Wally Swist

## ALONE AMONG OTHERS

I leave the company of worshippers alone  
A few smiles, a question about something I'd written  
I duck out the hidden drive, past instructions and cross  
The street, dodging traffic, to get to the other side. Once  
There I see the shadow of a dog barking and hear  
The insistent chirp and rattle of individual creatures  
And their mass. Birdsong punctuates the symphony  
Piercing solos, I see one singer perched on the concrete  
Ahead of my feet, shuffling last minute to avoid  
Contact. I pass the heavenly garden of velvet celosia  
A magenta tumble among the crowd of zinnias. I step  
Into the street to avoid too close a pass with a baby  
carriage

A family of worshippers from another assembly  
Smile and call the traditional greeting, sounds only

Wash my ears, one subspecies to another, languages  
Mutually unintelligible but bearing meaning  
nonetheless. I turn

The corner, the street from which I will enter the field  
Of no street, no traffic, no straggling crowd of strangers.  
Then I notice the hum of rubber tires on tarmac,  
The whoosh of air beneath the chassis, the dull roar  
Of engines portaging their humans to far-flung  
Neighborhoods. Two runners pass five minutes  
Apart, both clad in orange and black. Are they  
connected?

House of Orange Nassau? My alma mater on the run?  
No, says the dead black squirrel lying beneath the  
roadside tree.

Its gray cousin still lives to frolic another intersection.  
I turn into the field, between the houses and the  
electrical

Power easement, by houses built behind houses  
The celebration of the intersection of Fall's harvest  
With the end of the liturgy, the last words, the holy book  
About to close, only to open again, restart the engines  
Of creation just as we head into Winter's cold maw.  
I'm home, my dog barks, my beloved calls out a  
greeting.

I unburden myself of the implements of ritual and outer  
Clothes, to relax with a shared pot of *chai*, out back in the  
lovely

Sacred beauty we create, in which we some way  
Live but one week, only to disassemble the accumulated  
Tokens of Time's intersection with the holiness of  
creation, tokens

Of marriage to the beloved of my soul, alone among  
others.

— Michael Diamond

## NO SKY

I didn't see the sky today  
I didn't see its light rise in the east like a great beast  
or shred its past in restless white tatters and then hurry on  
I didn't see the sky today  
when the flurries were strewn  
wrapped gifts each holding itself in soft down  
I did not see the sky slowly pace into night  
and open a door to maps of chalkboard with prophecies  
written and love aligned  
for today there was no space or time  
a day ground down to heartless dust  
a day not mine.

— Susan Oleferuk

## WHAT HAS BEEN GIVEN

The night gorged and sang.  
A woman, in her velvet consciousness,  
listened; listened to a pouring out  
of sound, ravenously beautiful,

that could not be stopped, night's  
incessant bird with its wing-top  
slash of yellow calling to her,  
calling to her all night long

from the midnight branches of a tree...  
but softer now, in lamentation, ready  
now to leave among the leaves  
as darkness melts into the visible.

An owl takes over. A coyote. The first  
seeds of light. Over coffee,  
she reads the paper. Distractedly.  
Without much thought. She is old.

She will die quietly, breathless and alone,  
regardless of the company.  
She lapses into reverie. Hears the sound  
of wind through feathery leaves...breathes in

the lingering scent of the pepper tree  
that grew in gravelly soil outside  
the kitchen window...remembers thinking:  
*I hope I will not outlive the tree.*

Together, they shared their years.  
She understood the language of its bark,  
its gnarled limbs, knots and burls;  
the silence of its flowers.

Then one morning: a tired groan,  
a yielding up, as it slowly fell, a branch  
gently grazing the kitchen glass –  
slow, slow in the late heat of summer.

– Constance Rowell Mastores

## ABSENT LANDLORD

I love these woods with all my heart  
I walk along their paths each day  
yet soon they will be torn apart

their owner lives quite far away;  
surveyors came a few weeks back  
I walk along their paths each day,

I found an ATV's fresh track,  
some broken branches, heaved up stones –  
surveyors came a few weeks back.

I seek the woods to be alone,  
to walk in peace, to hear birdsong  
I don't break branches, heave up stones.

Please, roaring engines can't belong  
where deer graze shadows, owls make nests.  
I walked in peace, I heard birdsong,

I'll lose this place that I love best –  
these woods I love with all my heart,  
where deer graze shadows, owls make nests:  
too soon they will be torn apart.

– Kelley Jean White

## WHEN A TREE FALLS IN THE WOODS

What happens when a tree falls in the woods  
sound or no sound  
after the storm I walk the trail  
it is a woesome thing, a dead thing so grand it knew the  
sky  
its leaves still green with summer's soft hand  
its roots ripped out of the earth like a heart missing a  
dream  
its trunk wanton, wayward and wrong  
still a natural death  
the bark, roots, leaves and wood go to the ground  
and I will say a prayer and mourn  
and that is the sound.

– Susan Oleferuk

birds sing one song  
please remember me

– James McGrath  
2 April 2019

From the author: "This poem acknowledges the precarious  
bird life of our 2021 world/future natural world, now in  
transition due to climate change and human development. I  
may not be able to translate bird-song, surely the endangered  
heron, the rare parrot, the vanishing ibis of the world sing to  
those who listen, Please remember me."



## II. Tabernacle of Life

### ALMOST AWAKE

Out of the rhythms of my mother's womb  
 into the chilled morning of late winter  
 the northern winds whipping the  
 black-barked, not yet green trees,  
 old oaks, their acorns long scattered,  
 leafless willows, bent under the barrage  
 of thick snow and needle-sharp ice,  
 a cry gasping for breath  
 and then a woman's voice  
 (my mother? a nurse perhaps?)  
 murmuring, "Sleep, baby, sleep!"  
 But one eye half-open, seeing  
 the seemingly endless fields of  
 grass and dandelions and corn, soon  
 to rise out of the depths of the  
 slowly thawing ground.  
 I, too, am a daughter of Gaia,  
 of the good earth, and of the  
 distant yet familiar stars of the  
 Northern skies, of Cassiopeia and  
 The Big Bear, of red Mars and blue Neptune,  
 of lakes reflecting clouds,  
 of the streams and rivers singing relentlessly  
 on their way to the restless sea

— Brenda Appelbaum-Golani

### AT 21 MONTHS

little boy with the heart-shaped face already I'd like to  
 fight every bully for you those lights at your age or just  
 that so slight but that 4 year old. See who blocked your  
 way on the sliding board deserves if it down

little boy with a heart-shaped face already you Lord over  
 me I am your genie sprung from the bottle providing  
 you with dozens of dinner options allowing you to settle  
 a meal of oyster crackers and ice cream

little boy with a heart-shaped face is Charlie Chaplin  
 falls scar breaking my heart over and over. You can talk  
 but you won't your letter recognition full of Caprice A,  
 B, Q, M, X why?

little boy with a heart-shaped face I know why some  
 parents kill their young but I'd rather love you to death

— Allison Whittenberg

### ON SEEING MY DAUGHTER'S BALLET PERFORMANCE

Little dancer  
 move so fast,  
 first position  
 to fifth,  
 that time  
 can never  
 catch you.

— Tony Reeve

### to cut a new dress

we each hold two ends  
 and shake the material over the table

the yellow tent billows  
 resists gravity  
 undresses a moment

my mother recalls old garments  
 risks withheld in folds of time

an invisible cord pulls me in butterfly silk  
 into my future

then the dance sags  
 the fabric settles  
 against oak

her scissors pause  
 over the contours of my dreams

she says: when you cut a new dress say *Mazal Bueno*  
 Remember to Smile

over benediction of the dress  
 she wears her mother's smile

I say amen too fast to see the recurring smile  
 that stretches back generations  
 every mother's hopes freshly draped in silk

oceans she crossed  
 to enter the New World

how she fit in  
 or did not

how she managed her marriage  
 children and house on the miniscule budget  
 her temperament prone to panic

I sail past her lost in a book  
 reading voraciously  
 every text but hers

— Judy Belsky

## TURNING 30

Lately,  
I've fallen  
Completely  
In love  
With myself  
When I look in the mirror  
A sense of self-esteem  
Courses through me and all I can think of is  
"Damn,  
If you ain't fine."

– Allison Whittenberg

## THE PASSENGERS

*on Train 88, between Norfolk and Richmond*

We're on the new train –  
it's pushing limits, barreling  
west through Southside.

Sun's up. Through the coach  
window, U S 460's blacktop  
appears, vanishes  
on the other side  
of new-growth scrub.

Too soon, we roar under  
the new bypass – and I've missed  
seeing my old school.  
Maybe its run-down  
brick husk of dreams  
is gone –

the place where I used to sit and watch  
the freights, endless conveyors  
of coal, never dreaming –  
*What were my dreams then? –*

that, grown, I'd journey by,  
my little boy sitting next to me,  
watching, laughing, today.

– Tony Reevy

## DAWN FOLLOWS THE DARK OF NIGHT

I want your voice in my ear  
to lull me to sleep.  
Yet one more word  
that isn't yet good night  
and your lightest embrace to hold  
my not yet dreams.

If I must wait to hold you  
and look into your eyes  
then leave me your voice  
to soothe me here in the dark  
in the unknown.

Under far away stars  
in the evening's chill  
I learn to live  
within this light embrace,  
to train my breath to breathe alone,  
and my lips to remember.

– Chana Cromer

## JANUARY IS ENDING

January is ending and like a lone wolf, chilled and  
hungry, in the night's storm, you howl at the new moon  
suspended above us so pristine. You howl at this fresh  
new moon recalling dark days, battles fought before we  
met, before you had taken me into your arms, before my  
loving eyes had ever looked at you in this way.

Something I said reminded you of the pain of those days  
and your eyes blue as the morning's sky are suddenly  
steel grey. Your soft mouth has tightened. You hunch  
your back, poised to attack the enemy.

"But it's only me standing here, my dear." My tear  
softened eyes wonder, "Where does this anger come  
from?" Maybe my innocent words echo a bitter  
memory? Perhaps that burden you carry on your  
shoulders is heavier today.

"This anger rises in me because my heart when innocent  
was wounded," you reveal.

I remind you, "But it is I, my love," who now holds your  
heart in my hands. It's me, who watches over your  
battered heart in this velvet night.

"My love, it's just me," here under the new moon so thin  
and pure.

– Chana Cromer

## LOVE IS A MYSTERY

Love is a mystery  
held together by gossamer threads.  
So that when the light of day touches it  
it sparkles, ethereal,  
its particles surrounded  
by our sweet breath of morning.  
Love is a leap of faith.  
It is the illusion just beyond.



Now if we take to it  
 a magnifying glass,  
 if instead of a prism  
 that breaks its light into radiant color,  
 we take it to the laboratory,  
 splay it between the glass slides,  
 examine it under our high-powered microscope,  
 If we dissect its paltry cells and  
 count their elements,  
 If we remove its protons and neutrons  
 and bare the nucleus,  
 they like Tinkerbelle, will die.

We must clap our hands in joy  
 in sheer wonder of a miracle  
 or be fated to dirty our fingers  
 with the ink of regret,  
 constructing poems of what almost was.

– Chana Cromer

#### COLD GRAY (V2)

Below the clouds  
 forming in my eyes,  
 your soft eyes,  
 delicate as warm silk words,  
 used to support the love I held for you.

Cold, now gray, the sea tide  
 inside turns to poignant foam  
 upside down separates –  
 only ghosts now live between us.

Yet, dreamlike, fortune-teller,  
 bearing no relation to reality –  
 my heart is beyond the sea now.  
 A relaxing breeze sweeps  
 across the flat surface of me.  
 I write this poem to you,  
 neglectfully sacrificing our love.  
 I leave big impressions  
 with a terrible hush inside.  
 Gray bones now bleach with memories,  
 I'm a solitary figure standing  
 here, alone, along the shoreline.

– Michael Lee Johnson

#### NOT YOU

It wasn't you who pocketed my dowry.  
 It wasn't you who devoured all my fattest years.  
 It wasn't you who cheated me.

I myself took off the golden necklace,  
 I myself cut off the braids  
 with which my mother had crowned my head,

and with hands hungry for adventure  
 delivered myself, body and soul, to you.

– Hamutal Bar-Yosef

#### PROVERBS 3:18

i am strolling  
 the blithewold gardens  
 and pause to ponder  
 this tree – –  
 its limbs lay  
 like a body  
 on a cot

the bed of life  
 beneath my feet  
 has faded and  
 death has become of  
 fallen maple leaves  
 losing their pigment  
 to a new season  
 of life

i am standing  
 among ancient  
 sequoia trees  
 meditating on that  
 proverb that keeps  
 visiting me, feeling  
 the reach of beams  
 between trees of life.

– Adrienne N. Wartts

#### THE MEXICAN VENDOR

The Mexican vendor's call pierces the silence  
 of Saturday morning with *cacahuetes, elotes, tamales*  
 blaring from the loud speaker  
 as my three dogs bolt from the bedroom  
 barking to warn me of imminent danger,  
 and waking me from a dream of my mother  
 watching TV and dozing in her easy chair  
 covered by an afghan she had made  
 with red and brown and purple squares.  
 In my dream I stand and listen  
 to her labored breathing as she sleeps  
 perhaps reliving her youth  
 in the old Sheffield days or maybe when  
 she met my father and they first spoke  
 all those many decades ago.  
 Maybe she relives everyday events,  
 cooking meals, playing with us children  
 or visiting with friends over coffee,  
 cleaning out chometz for Pesach.  
 I was not with her in the final hours  
 of her life but in this morning dream  
 she and I are together in the silence.

The sound of the vendor fades and  
 my dogs come back to bed where

I praise them, *buen trabajo mis  
perros bravos*, for saving me once again.

They wait for me to get up  
and give them their breakfast.  
Outside the day is starting, bright and warm.  
The songs of birds fill the quiet house  
while down the street the noise of  
construction begins anew.  
I want to return to my dream  
and I long for the peace my mother  
created, even in a dream.  
How I long to have coffee with her  
once again and watch her smile as she  
recounts memories from my childhood.  
Then the morning sunlight fills the house.  
I warm yesterday's coffee, toast a bagel,  
and get my *tallit* bag to prepare for  
Shabbat prayers at my synagogue  
which will fulfill my need to believe  
my mother and father and other loved ones  
are together in a place of quiet solace  
and my dream becomes a respite  
from my seemingly bereft present.

— Mel Goldberg

#### INGATHERING

A good day. I barely feel any abdominal pain  
sitting at services on the Feast of Tabernacles,  
here to say Kaddish for my father.

He liked little jokes like this — this was his last —  
he lived right through the High Holy Days and died  
on the Feast of Tabernacles in order to get me here.

We say a prayer for the conjunction of Shabbos  
and the Feast of Tabernacles,  
a poem in ten couplets shaped like a Ghazal

each line of which ends in *Shabbos*. This day  
the Torah portion for the Feast of Tabernacles  
comes from Exodus, God and Moses "negotiating"

over new tablets and whether any man can see God's face  
and live. *No* the Lord says vowing to shield His prophet  
in the cleft of a great stone, not a flimsy Tabernacle

like the booths Israelites carried for forty years  
in the desert, while I think of Abraham opening his flaps  
at every crossroads, turning his tent into a true  
Tabernacle

so he might see dust-covered strangers come from far away,  
give them wine and bread, and ingathering the hungry  
like God ingathered souls from the Tabernacle of life.

— Michael Salcman

[untitled]

When someone dies a collection of good deeds scatters  
in all directions  
And all the foals go wild in the stable.  
It seems as if they are just jumping in terror or in a  
mistaken feeling of freedom  
But basically they are collecting on their backs all the  
deeds which are flung upward and fall back  
down on them  
Like snowflakes that melt on their way to the earth.  
They melt but are there without being visible to those  
who did not see them before  
When they were still in a more orderly format.  
A mare in mourning that's really not me  
She is the opposite of me and I know how to recognize  
unfreedom when I see it  
My foals are spotted and piebald, and I have a lot of  
them.  
The only way we are alike is that I too am a mare  
And when the weather changes to winter  
I also like to collect snowflakes on my back.

— Tirtsa Posklinksy-Shehori

#### LAST DANCE

My great-granddaughter, old enough to stand  
Alone at her first birthday party, clung  
In giggling pleasure to my thin-skinned hand  
As we both waltzed across the room among  
An anxious family, poised to intervene.  
But no one seated there tried to explain  
The nonsense sounds they all heard pass between  
My trembling lips and hers. Yet it was plain,  
Beyond enjoyment of our festive dance  
Each understood one certainty as true:  
Although I had delighted in the chance  
To hold her little hands in mine, we knew  
With time's sure unavoidable advance,  
I'd be compelled to leave before she grew.

— Mel Goldberg

#### PAS DE DEUX

Little one of huge wings, enormous reach  
I hear you hour by hour, moment by moment.

You my ever companion, watcher and keeper  
Of all things mine, even my name yours to own.

Little death of me, do you carry within you  
The time of my last breath.

How do you weigh my most hidden thoughts and  
Desires that propel my steps through such maze.

Do you find them worthy, sufficient to grant  
Me reprieve for the long journey to old age.

Or do you already grow impatient, thinking soon  
To end my shadow dodging in a grave's

Silent shroud, all the life of me become  
No more than mold and worm and

A skull's wry smirk, my dreams as forgotten  
As last year's broken toys.

These years I have carried you. Have  
Felt your weight pressing against

Even my words, the smiles I have managed  
In the parlors of boredom and routine.

Even the febrile workings of passion as  
Nighttime offers the full cup.

Little death, my fate is yours. My end  
Your own, your mission concluded

When whatever pale hands close the  
Beads of eyes, lay cloth above my face.

Or perhaps not. Do you hasten to join  
Some new sojourner at moment of birth,

Implant your scheme inside that moist  
Skull, take measure for the fifth act.

— Doug Bolling

#### GLASS BOTTOM BOATS

The dead are always looking down on us, they say  
Watching us look up at them and wondering  
where their endless journey is taking them

Even as we lay down and try to sleep,  
their glass bottom boats scrape  
the thin space between life and death

They shout and wave while we butter our toast,  
not knowing when our ticket will be punched  
and we'll take our place by the helm

— Robert Phillips

#### OPULENCE

And one day  
in the midst of falling  
it will come to her  
that her time though brief  
is cherished;  
as the tiny flowers on the forest's floor  
are cherished;  
as the bees that feed on them  
are cherished;  
and the light that invades the dark  
is cherished —  
visibly, audibly, palpably —  
in the modesty  
of its grace.

— Constance Rowell Mastores

#### six for light

1  
light eats the rings in groves of elms  
beneath thick shrouds remote fields light up  
at the edge of woods  
dark grasses quiver  
wind blows open  
the silent mouth of caves

2  
we feed each other light  
light slides down your throat  
illuminates trails  
on one, a small creature is startled  
on another, sky bends  
to drink a white-tailed ocean

3  
light finds you dancing  
you glitter like small cities at the rim of a sea  
a song of light flares from your throat

4  
even before birth  
we are drawn to distant light  
veiled light  
weaves wild assertions

5  
the first rhythm we learn is the rhythm of light  
stories are forced by pressure of light  
into our pores  
skin edits light  
it sifts the tales we tell and retell  
around and around us we wind an ancient scroll  
as if we were its center pole  
as if we revolved  
on an axis of words

6  
 we enter caves that steal our light  
 we immerse in its traces  
 inscribe final stanzas wherever we find surface  
 on stone, skin, inside our eyelids  
 when we lie down  
 we dissolve into rivers of light  
 shift our substance  
 as easily as we breathe  
 in and out

—Judy Belsky

### III. Soul's Eye

#### THREE POEMS

196.  
 Like a kidnapped infant  
 Who wonders where he came from,  
 The soul is wrapped in doubt.

Framing subtle questions,  
 It hunts for hidden signs  
 To penetrate the shroud.

And yet, when secret thunder  
 Follows a lightning flash,  
 The soul forgets to ask.

\*  
 204.  
 My spirit's strong enclosure  
 Composed of structured earth,  
 Constrain this trembling heart!

Protective cage of bones,  
 Defend these fragile veins  
 And calm their frightened pulse.

But at the crucial hour  
 Do not obstruct my soul  
 When it must journey home.

\*  
 186.  
 Silver chains of wisdom,  
 Descending link by link,  
 Have reached my outstretched arms.

I strain to grasp the handles  
 To elevate myself,  
 But something pulls me down.

The quicksand of my folly,  
 The swamp of vanity,  
 Confine me to the ground.

—David K. Weiser

#### SOUL'S EYE

With my soul's eye I saw  
 the past, the inner structure  
 of the present.

The eye is the window of the soul.  
 But the soul's eye?

Mind focuses  
 the soul's eye.  
 The third eye opens,  
 draws and pulls.  
 Tingling.

Seeing what?  
 Ah, to know that ...

—Michael E. Stone

#### PUZZLE

My whole dazed life  
 I implored begged  
 wailed for saints  
 ecstatic gurus  
 to awaken rescue  
 instruct how to live  
 teach me to write a psalm  
 that knits pain  
 into comfort shawl  
 draft a map endow  
 guide me from dark chasm  
 walk me into enlightenment

Know now I have  
 forfeited precious time  
 drained myself of fortitude  
 believe I have been given  
 another chance today  
 to avow venture trust  
 resurrect myself from  
 the murky quagmire as it  
 presents itself

Have awakened to notion  
 I am a puzzle  
 a breathing box  
 pieces big and small  
 each day one or two  
 emerge some clear  
 others gauzed  
 no instructions  
 but over time a painting  
 begins to brush itself

Now know I am invited to  
end my stalling estrangement  
Mark Nepo a wise poet  
says the earth began  
as a dish shattering  
like you dear reader  
I am nudged to fiercely  
gently tenaciously  
glue my pieces together

– Marianne Lyon

#### THE HARD WAY

One on his way  
Has not yet reached his objective  
He walks and walks with effort.  
He sees a rocky mountain  
Trees and shrubs  
Previously seen.  
Everything is new  
As on the day of Creation  
Before the eyes of the walker.

Step by step  
He progresses on a hard way.  
He seems utterly alone  
But God sees him  
Sees his movement  
And He leads him  
by the hand.

– Hayim Abramson

BS"D 17 Iyyar 5780

How to allow the mystery  
Not to distract me,  
To divide it into portions  
For the days that are yet to come,  
Like the seven good years.

How to allow the mystery  
To renew itself each day,  
Like the quiet that crowns  
The gleam of light that shows

At the break of dawn,  
Like the silences that contain  
The fountain of voices,  
Like the light  
That is kindled in your eyes.

How to allow the mystery  
To reveal an ancient secret  
That walks in the cool of the day.

– Tziporah Faiga Lifshitz

#### TWO POEMS

And man is like a tree planted on the abyss  
Thoughtless  
Like a dearth in the earth  
Dearth in the earth  
Why man?  
Man without anything  
Planted in the world  
Without land  
Like a dry tree  
Blocked from thought  
What is man  
Man without land  
Like a desolate thought  
Planted in the earth  
On the abyss

\*

Off the coast of China  
in the Pacific a ripple

Long-distance horses  
neighing in silence  
Stormy waves  
shout into the distance  
like a butterfly effect

Someday perhaps  
you'll know the world's existential  
loneliness  
It doesn't stay in your personal space  
as you requested  
It breaks barriers  
Join it to the fate  
of peoples

The butterfly and the horse  
have done their part  
and you have remained  
in your place  
behind them

And then choose the optimal distance

– Shmuel Warhaftig

*Saint-Saens Violin Concerto*

*The soul strives to stay afloat, singing its own sweet song,  
While the world crashes around it.  
Soldiers assail the walls of its fortress  
And night encroaches.*

*Carefree and solitary, the soul of art whistles insistently its tune  
Standing with a brave heart, it speaks its spangling, joyous melody,  
Upholds its symmetry of marble columns.*

*But yet again the dark trumpets blare over the castle's walls and  
A forest of colors shivers with terror.*

*Morning finds the soul still dancing, raising itself  
Along paths of lightness, wearing freedom like a feather.  
Crowned with a fragrant garland of jasmine petals,  
It leaps and twirls,  
And inhales deeply the breath of life.*

*Time freezes, the crisis is over, the fortress has withstood  
The marauders. Over the bulwarks all the birds of heaven  
Twitter at once to accompany the soul  
In its new song of conquest.*

– *Norma Felsenthal Gerber*

## TV GUIDE

Totally Vicarious  
Terifically Vituperous  
Do you watch it while you eat?  
Do you eat while you watch it?

Tantalizingly Visceral  
Titilatingly Vulgar  
Do you watch it while you read?  
Do you doze while you watch it?

Temptingly Voyeuristic  
Time wasting Vortex

Does it share your bedroom?  
Take up your head room?

Turn it off please:  
smash it on the floor  
throw it in the trash  
beat it with a stick  
walk it out the door

Tune up your vision  
clear your head  
a slave no more  
your master's dead!

– Batsheva Wiesner

## SABBATH TABLE

Enter the haven of my apartment  
step into the spacious salon  
Focus on the beauty of the center table  
adorned with white brocade cloth

Lovely six-petaled white lilies  
stand erect in blue glazed vase

Seven glass cups filled with golden oil  
await lighting in the ornate silver candelabra

White silk embroidered with royal blue  
covering two loaves of braided breads

Shapely decanter with sparkling red wine  
next to a silver goblet for the sanctification

All proclaim  
the Sabbath is ready to enter

Welcome the gift as it descends  
gratitude for the tranquility  
Peace granted  
from the One above.

— Simcha Angel

## SELF-SUSPENSION: WERE I EVER ABSENT

All human d stances  
Would be d\_ stances  
Were I absent  
Noth ng  
Could hold together even as a  
word  
Were I absent  
Ex stence  
Would break right after an ex  
Were I absent  
L fe  
Might turn out no more than a  
typo  
Were I absent  
T me  
Would stop moving towards me  
Were I absent  
H story  
Would become a h(ushed ?) story

— Changming Yuan

IV. *The Blink of An Eye*

## BABYLON

Another rounded heap of sun-dried brick  
Distends the path our tired boots feebly kick,  
Trekking all day across the level sand.  
Distant and near they punctuate the land,  
Tokens of human effort, all alike  
They look from far, but close, each proves unique.  
What mounds are these that brood on lives long gone?  
Here lie the crumbling roots of Babylon.

O vanished ziggurat that struggled here,  
Laboriously pitted tier by tier  
Against the tyrant curve of gravity:  
Your story haunts the stairs of history.  
Upwards humanity's huge steps still climb  
Only to be upended over time.  
Change forges branching futures from one past.  
Nothing but everything can ever last.

What was it like to think only one word  
Existed for each tool or stone or board?  
That was the way our ancestors were sure  
The world was made till they stopped killing poor  
Strangers for babbling. How sweet their voices  
Mingle across our aeons of blind choices  
As cheerily they build your far-famed height,  
Hanging your festive gardens in the light!

The symphony of joyous language fades  
Across this rubble land that peace evades.  
Even our god has changed beyond all hope  
Of raising any unity of faith. We grope  
For words to name the speaker of the curse  
That still confounds the fabric of this verse:  
He came surrounded by his anxious peers  
To cancel you, mother of all their fears.

Ikon of human hubris, have we found  
Some answer to the fable you expound?  
To worship the forever fecund dance  
Of fields of waves, necessity and chance  
That we have taught ourselves makes everything?  
What? Make that lottery Creator, King,  
And all the chaos that impairs our reach  
Just Thompson's Second Law at work on speech?

We don't know where we're going, but we care.  
Is that all we can do to get us there?  
Maybe it is, but I would like to know  
Whether to speed it on or take it slow.  
I've heard that God's Word whispers in all things:  
It dances in the waves. In birds it sings.  
The words that left your boast unfinished rest  
In every lexicon. We love them best.



They recollect how all this might have been  
 If we had listened to your mounting din.  
 Two voices wrestle in the human throat,  
 One the ego's unruly, feckless note,  
 The other Reason that, in Chomsky's view,  
 Remains what all languages translate to,  
 The art of being what we say, once given  
 To build a world fit to become our Heaven.

Behind our backs the sun, descending, takes  
 The ruddy hues of dust-laced air. It bakes  
 Your clay less callously. Your bits of ruin borrow  
 Fire from it. Shadows stretch toward tomorrow  
 In deepening violet. Someone stakes out our camp.  
 We break out rations, blankets and a lamp.  
 Above, the universe, forever changing,  
 Wipes out old certainties, new ones arranging.

—Lionel Willis

#### AUGENBLICK IS GERMAN FOR GLIMPSE

Too long a word to describe so brief a time,  
 perfect enough to mirror one perfect lie,  
 recently voted the fourth most beautiful word  
 in the German language, it means a moment

and spoken sounds like the blink of an eye.

How lovely the recentness of an instant seems  
 to them, the romance of the immediate,  
 the thrill of what's almost gone before it arrives,  
 all this and more precisely incised

in a single word like heartworm in a muscle  
 when every beat might mean an ending  
 and all of existence merely a glimpse that vanishes  
 to that universal eye whose light has failed us.

The Germans love this word. What came before it?

—Michael Salcman

#### AN ASSESSMENT

Nature, you are no goddess, though despotic.  
 Your servants might expect to be betrayed.  
 You are an energy that pulses through  
 This ever-changing world that you have made.

You are neither good nor evil, cruel nor kind,  
 Of pity and of malice quite devoid,  
 Indifferent to all you have created,  
 To all that fossils show you have destroyed.

No goddess, yet you fill the role of siren  
 To lure folk from their world of city streets,  
 Of money and machines and competition.  
 Their communes meet a series of defeats.

No goddess, yet an idol to the many  
 Who see the milk but not the sabre tooth,  
 Who think your closeness purifies mankind.  
 History tells us this is not the truth.

—Henry Summerfield

#### DEATH OF MY ENEMY

Soul to soul we step, walking upon the dead  
 carpeting a great city — native Iroquois and Dutch  
 settlers, also high-divers clothed in flesh —  
 trample Spring's blood-red blossoms and fetch  
 garlands on Gaga's elevator shoes and rhinestone toes,  
 speak in volumes of forgettable prose,

and misremember untold numbers  
 of helmeted heroes, Nimrods asleep on our avenues  
 and homeless corners, their arms outstretched beg  
 for kindness, as spectral as burned flesh,  
 as familiar as a harbor sound,  
 as unforgiving as a rabid hound

chained in a neighbor's yard. What can silence  
 their silent petitions, where is the poem of heaven?  
 Not here in the hallowed ground off Church Street  
 with its flattened temples nor that far-off house in  
 Pakistan.

If truly dead, who is left to fear our prideful power  
 and is nothing good to come of this vengeful hour?

— Michael Salcman

#### CONCENTRATION CAMPS

The way I explained it to myself, the way  
 I made sense of it in my own way (I was seven  
 when I first learned about them), was all those people  
 starving and crying and dying together in those big  
 piles behind the barbed wire — were forced to  
 concentrate

on suffering. So it made sense to call it that. That part  
 made sense, I thought, because concentration was very  
 difficult. And I hated having to do it myself  
 in elementary school when the teacher caught us  
 looking out the window at the trees, or the sky, or the  
 rooftops

of the houses across the street — when she caught us  
 looking  
 out at life — and forced us cruelly back to the problem  
 under our noses, the problem of the numbers, the  
 problem

that wasn't going away no matter how much we  
 looked away from it. And those people, I thought, they  
     must have  
 tried to look away from it too. They must have groaned  
 and looked away, and there must have been sky  
 above them, and trees on the other side, and maybe even  
     a red  
 rooftop or two off in the distance where life was going on  
 in rooms with clean white linen and tinkling forks and  
     knives...  
 The way you make sense of a problem like that, a  
     solution like that,  
 a number like that, a number that's so big you can't fit it  
 in your head, can't fit it in the world – though the world  
     keeps trying  
 that solution, over and over – is to break it down, like  
     the teacher said,  
 and keep breaking it down until you get to the smallest  
     parts,  
 the ones divisible only by themselves and one: sky, tree,  
     house,  
 one little boy. Then look out the window at the world  
     again,  
 and see if it looks any different.

– Paul Hostovsky

#### WHAT WE DID ON SUNDAYS DURING THE WAR

In the early forties, few people owned a car, and if you  
     had one,  
 you hardly used it, because gas was rationed.  
 If you had one and could afford to, you went for a ride  
     on Sundays.  
 Otherwise, you went for a walk.

Every Sunday, we went for a walk, my mother and  
     father,  
 my sister and I. Over the bridge, past Starlight Park,  
 up the 174<sup>th</sup> Street hill, around the corner to visit cousin  
     Benny,  
 my father's nephew, on Benny's father's side.

Benny was a doctor, but we got to call him Benny. There  
     was a  
 stoop, a waiting room for patients, Benny's office, a  
     kitchen.  
 We never got past the kitchen, but there must have been  
 bedrooms, a bathroom.

I hung out in the waiting room; it was piled with  
     magazines  
 I never saw anywhere else, like Esquire. When it was a  
     sick visit,  
 I was brought into the office and sat up on the exam  
     table.

On Sundays, we came into the kitchen, drank coffee, ate  
     strudel.

Benny's mother, aunt and uncle lived there, somewhere in the  
 mystery of the rear. Benny's aunt made the strudel.  
 I was told they were refugees. His Uncle Martin  
 had a wife and children he hoped to bring out after the war.

Martin, Benny's uncle on his mother's side, was a  
     photographer.

He loved taking pictures of our family. He even took one  
 of my sister sitting on the exam table in Benny's office. We'd  
 glue those pictures into our family album.

After the war ended, we'd still walk to Benny's on  
     Sundays.

His mother and his aunt and uncle sat in the kitchen,  
     silent and  
 somber. His aunt no longer offered us coffee and strudel.  
 Uncle Martin stopped taking our pictures.

– Florence Weinberger

#### ALICE DEAD AT ONE HUNDRED TEN

– for Alice Herz-Sommer (1903-2014)

Her family knew Kafka and Mahler.  
 Of the former Alice remembered  
 he was a strange little man  
 who once came to Passover dinner.

Alice's mother died in the camps, also  
 her lovely husband Sommer.  
 And his lovely name.  
 Also Kafka's sisters and lovers.

She and her son Stepan were spared  
 by an officer who loved Chopin.  
 Hitler loved dogs and ate vegetarian.

Three times a year the Red Cross came  
 to certify the kindness of her keepers.  
 Three times a year the prisoners held  
 an *opéra comique*, mostly Mozart and Wagner.

Otherwise  
 no heat or food or clean water  
 in the Terezín lager. Without music

she would have starved like the others  
 or drowned frozen by grief.  
 But she knew every Chopin étude by heart  
 and ate them for optimism.

– Michael Salcman

## THE MARTYRED VILLAGE

*On June 10, 1944, a German SS detachment dynamited and burned the French village of Oradur-sur-Glane, killing 642 men, women, and children. The ruins are preserved as a memorial.*

Blackened baby prams slough ash.  
Houses gape, roofless

as Picasso's *Charnal House*. A dead child's  
rag doll lies beneath a gutted crib.

We walk the village streets.  
No one smiles. No one speaks.

Gone, the rhythm of the farrier's pin  
to shoe a horse's hooves.

Gone, the whirl of the cobbler's *Landis*  
stitcher, the smells of glue and pitch.

Gone, the hum of the *Singer*,  
fingers guiding blue and white gingham  
under the needle. Rust coats the treadle.

— Edythe Haendel-Schwartz

## REPORT FROM THE BOOK OF VISIONS

I survived the hunger  
I put nothing into my mouth  
until bodily secretions stopped  
and became a rumor among my body's cavities.  
I exercised at night, I broke vessels,  
I made teraphin for myself, I took myself  
outside, I revealed myself with great lights.

At the propitious hour I beheaded my desire  
I grasped it with my hand (there was neither fire nor  
water  
in it), I laughed expressionlessly at its misfortune.  
What could I do when I was dragged in chains  
through the courtyards on the eve of a foreign holiday  
and I bored my ear through at the gate of the city,  
the crowd pointed at my face. I could not  
remain alive.

— Amichai Chasson  
translated from the Hebrew by Esther Cameron

## THE GRAVEDIGGERS

"We scooped the darkness empty"  
— Paul Celan

The corpses of stars turn into melted candle wax in the  
neighborhoods behind our walls  
We watch them wasting away every nine months  
They are created anew in big clay vats  
They block the streets beside our house.

Every morning we overturn the tables of the  
moneychangers  
We sew curtains from last night's wedding dresses.  
We hide summers in pits of the earth.  
Every morning we wait for darkness.

We remain outside the walls exposed  
to winds, to plunder, exposed to every gypsy  
who relieves himself in our yards  
No one stands guard  
and when we return from the workshops to break  
the bread, to drink the milk,  
to sprinkle salt on the cork table,  
the stars do away with themselves  
and their tired flesh sours into boiling milk  
upon our lives.

Our dead we'll bury under the floors  
of our houses in the dark

— Amichai Chasson  
tr. Esther Cameron

[untitled]

Let the hardworking keep their accomplishments  
Let the courageous keep their deeds of valor

Look, we have found a slug,  
Said the children I found in among the mallow plants  
Looking for wet brown snails,  
And I thought to myself, it's lucky that memories  
Of acts done to snails and slugs do not occur to them  
Acts done to boys and girls  
Acts of children only

Let the heavy-laden keep all the diligence  
Let the generals keep the no-outcry-in-the-streets  
I will keep the lefthand corner at the peak of my head  
And pack into it a mix of love and faith in the ability to —

— Tirtsa Posklinsky-Shehori  
tr. Esther Cameron

## REQUIEM FOR A FLOATING VOICE

Beit Zayit, 7/4/19, 12 Nissan, two days before the elections

I am a floating voice,  
floating — on the river's surface  
like a dry leaf,

a voice floating in a river of refuse,  
swept along by a wind from the polls,  
a wafting of lies.

I am a voice floating fleeing  
activist pitchforks seeking to punch their letters  
into me that my form may be as theirs,  
letters seeking to wipe out their fellow-letters.  
A Torah cannot be written with one letter,  
not even with two.

A floating voice, soon to sink.  
And my voice that crowns kings,  
that seals fates,  
that stamps decrees,  
is moving with accelerating speed  
toward the voice of the thundering waterfall.

— Imri Perel  
tr. Esther Cameron

[Translator's note: in Israel voting is done by putting into a ballot box slips marked with the sign of one of the parties. These signs consist of one or two letters of the alphabet.]

## OF COLD CODE WRITTEN IN THE STARS....\*

Yes, let's go beyond ourselves,  
our usual communication. Find  
new patterns, different patterns  
than what machines now hold us to:  
screens where blown kisses from loved ones' lips  
don't take shape until seconds after.

Let's look at night when we know light  
is a billion numbers away.  
From it we can spin our stories,  
the real ones that matter and last,  
taking time beyond fractured moments  
to a slower future, a deeper past.

— Katharyn Howd Machan

\*a last line by Barbara Crooker in *Some Glad Morning*

V. *The Poem and Its Story*

## THE KISS

"People tell me that when I am in heaven they  
will remember this picture." — Alfred Eisenstaedt

It was perfect timing. V-J Day, August 14, 1945  
at 5:51 ET when Alfred Eisenstaedt,  
barely 5 feet tall (small enough to be invisible)  
was on the prowl in Times Square with his Leica III  
(the artist as predator) for the instant  
he could capture before it fled, as he crouched  
south of 45th Street, looking north, where Broadway  
and 7th Avenue intersect, in the still-perfect  
light of the late summer afternoon.

Others claimed to be that sailor  
and that nurse in the iconic photo,  
but it was George Mendonça, in his navy blues, age 22,  
who ran from Radio City Music Hall  
when the projector stopped  
midway through "A Bell for Adano"  
(because he heard the Japanese surrendered)  
to find Greta Zimmer, age 21,  
a nurse in her starched uniform.  
stunned by the news and standing on the street,  
(clutching the embroidered purse her parents had given her)  
directly in Mendonça's way,  
though it easily could have been someone else.

Just then, Eisenstaedt's practiced eye  
spied the contrast of dark blue and white  
as Mendonça, completely enthused, swooped down,  
grabbing Greta in that awkward, contorted embrace,  
while Eisenstaedt, in 1/1000 second  
caught them both and got his shot,  
and ran back to his studio with his prey,  
an instant of time frozen for posterity.

In the darkroom he might have laughed out loud  
(he'd been gifted by his muse with a detail  
he had done nothing to deserve)  
when he saw the angle of her perfectly stockinged leg  
(she said she always made sure her seams were straight)  
turning up and taking shape,  
with her sensible, white nurse's shoe lifting off the ground  
floating up from the developing fluid into the light.  
Attaching it by clothespins to the line to dry  
he could already see it in the pages of "Life."

Outside the picture:

Of the three, Eisenstadt, Mendonça and Zimmer,  
Eisenstaedt and Zimmer could only collide  
because he left Tezew, Poland just in time, and her  
parents

sent her, age 15, and her sisters from Austria in '39.  
In that split second when his camera caught  
the angle of her leg, as it left the ground,  
she had yet to discover her parents had died in the camps.

That war was our last good fight.  
Liberty and justice were ours and God  
was on our side, and no one could fault  
George Mendonça from Rhode Island,  
brash and unabashedly proud in his uniform,  
hugging his way through the crowd,  
before he grabbed Greta and kissed her  
while another girl standing behind him,  
who would be his bride,  
said years later that she didn't mind.  
Eisenstaedt never married,  
but forever after had his Cinderella.

Though we try to salvage what we can  
from time's relentless tide,  
the context of this photo is fading into oblivion.  
All that will remain is a boy  
kissing a girl in a white uniform.  
But there was once a time we were relieved  
and secure that God's will had been done  
on earth as it was in heaven,  
confirming what we believed when we sat  
at wooden desks in rows with our hands,  
folded in prayer, all our voices in unison,  
our hearts and minds so sure  
about our blessed America being the best  
of all possible worlds  
in those faraway days.

— Roberta Chester

**The story:** Thanks to "The Writers Almanac," which gifts me via my e mail a daily poem and a list of historical events which happened on that particular day, I read it was the photographer Alfred Eisenstadt's birthday. He had taken many memorable photographs, but the one he will be most remembered for is "V-J Day in Times Square," which appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine shortly after V-J Day celebrating the surrender of the Japanese and the subsequent end of the Second World War. The iconic photo of the young sailor grabbing the nurse and kissing her epitomized the euphoria that the war had ended and captured the imagination of the entire country, expressing in that photograph what a thousand words could not convey. What surprised me was that the photograph and the back story inspired my own digression about my childhood school days and America at a time in history when the country was so justifiably proud. Note: Ernst Leitz, the owner of the Leica company, was responsible for "The Leica Freedom Train", which helped Jews to leave Germany by "assigning" hundreds to non-existent overseas sales offices.

## A DIFFERENT RAIN

Morning...  
I listen for the soft sounds  
The automatic filling of  
The ice-maker in the refrigerator  
The murmur of my wife  
As she turns in her sleep  
The distant rumble of the train

It rained last night  
Making this morning's silence  
This morning's click-click-click  
Of the battery operated clock important

It is always silent when the rain stops  
Always there is a reminder  
Of where it has been  
The moisture drips evaporates but slowly  
For awhile it almost feels  
As if it could come again but it doesn't  
It is always a different rain that nourishes the land  
A different rain that reminds us of the others

— Ed Bearden

**The story:** This poem was a gift. I looked outside at the rain and the poem came to me almost complete. It is written without punctuation and all the first words of each line are in capitals, both things I almost never do. I think the lack of punctuation gives the poem an unfinished feel, which of course it is, and of unfinished events. Some of the lines are longer too, which contribute to the meditative quality of the poem. There is a calming that comes with simple basic routines. The familiar things that ground us, stabilize us in troubled times, times of change and loss. There's hope that things might stay as usual, come again. I really like the idea of *come again*, for this poem. Because the poem is about generations the number of times can't be known. The first line of the poem sets the tone. I had originally written *Mornings...* When I removed the plural 's' it changed everything. Morning is a new day, a new beginning, but morning can also be spelled *mourning*. Each of the two spellings can describe beginnings and endings. The second, rather than a new beginning, now denotes a grieving and has a melancholy tone. That little shift of direction is the way poetry works. I generally prefer poetry that tells little stories. The title of the poem is about generations — each rain a new (or different) generation, written as my generation is now the older and the most vulnerable. Moisture that evaporates slowly, describes the slow way we lose contact with the generation before us, drop by drop. All I have left of the generation before me is my mother's younger brother and anything I can remember. The night before I wrote the poem I had a dream about my father, so some of that is in the poem. I hadn't thought

about him for a while. It felt as if he could have been here, but of course he wasn't. The lines that speaks of my father reads "For awhile it almost feels / As if it could come again but it doesn't." There is a sense of finality in the line, the poem. Each new rain is a metaphor for a new generation. Each rain (generation) slowly evaporates, then is gone. Each rain leaves behind its "nourishment" in the soil for the one that follows. I especially like the last line. In each current generation you can see a reflection of the one that preceded it. I see my own ears in those of my nephew.

#### SONATA OF A BAG LADY IN THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

The person opposite watches my feet  
laid out upon my pawn-shop sneakers.  
Her stares prick my toes like pins.  
Toes free to stretch! No longer bent to work  
like seamen below deck on a schooner,  
or captives shackled to their oars  
in ancient quinquiremes,  
Day in, day out, rowing, rowing.  
Toes free on the marble floor!  
Free from the pavement's heat,  
burning my soles like hell-fire  
licking relentlessly the feet of sinners.  
Free from the pain of calluses  
grown purple and luxuriant  
as garbage bags on sidewalks,  
where newspapers, piled high as pillows,  
are my roadside bed. My toes then curled  
in their alien prisons for the night.

Toes, free as fingers on piano keys,  
now playing a sonata silently  
upon my sneakers. The person opposite  
stares, her eyes round-up my errant toes,  
return them to captivity again.  
She does not heed the music they have made.

—Joan Netta Burstyn

**The story:** During the 1970s, I sometimes arranged to meet my husband after a meeting, in the reading room at the New York Public library. Exhausted from a meeting one day, I just sat for a while, watching the people in the room. Opposite me sat an elderly woman who seemed to have with her all her belongings. They were in two small bundles on the floor beside her. She was still wearing her overcoat while reading a book that she held on her lap. I noticed that she had taken off a well-worn pair of sneakers and that her bare feet were resting on the floor in front of her.

At that time, there were plenty of people in New York City whose only home seemed to be within the

doorways of buildings. This woman, however, had chosen to come in out of the hot summer day to the library. Surely, then, she was a well-educated person. She was down on her luck, perhaps, but not without a desire to maintain her literary interests. Where better than the New York public library to find both air-conditioning and intellectual nourishment?

As I thought about this, I realized that the woman was aware of my interest in her. She must have "felt" my continued glances at her. So, what does she think of me? I wondered. As I explored that question, later, I decided to write this poem in HER voice, not my own. What she perceived, I intuited, was my intrusion on her enjoyment of that all-too-short moment in the cool of the reading room.

#### A LITTLE TIME-BOUND SPACE

What you wrote from afar  
is in my pocket  
and will become part  
of the portfolio  
depicting those early days  
spent without ever a thought  
of death or diminishment.

I stand still an instant  
and think what I have done  
to hold on to the arsenal I built  
of much more than illusions,  
an arsenal of deeds,  
many recognizable as honest,  
hundreds involving you.  
Only a few choices  
have stood for a mistake.

In this little time-bound space  
it is foolish to be content  
with less than the rewarding completion  
of an act performed  
without haste  
like the writing of a letter  
in the moonlight  
of this distant place.

—Irene Mitchell

**The story:** I had in mind a friend, a dear friend, who was instrumental in exposing me to a trove of philosophical thought, especially that of Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein. This friend was killed in an auto accident; a winter day's snowstorm was to blame. I often write letters to this friend who cannot, of course, read them, but who, perhaps, does receive them.

## AFTER THE FUNERAL OF MAX STEINBERG

They didn't invite me to the Prime Minister's wartime  
 press party —  
 which despite the killed and wounded and the suffering  
 was called  
 a "party" — so of course I didn't tell him, with a severe  
 expression as was proper  
 (the line of the forehead twisting like the line of defense),  
 how the alerts catch me sprawled  
 on the sofa with limbs outspread terrified by every ring  
 that might mean  
 that the people's army is calling me to go into the Strip  
 and how I lose my share  
 in the world to come for a pottage of running images  
 from the battles, quickly skipping the ads  
 for bandages trying to locate familiar faces among the  
 uniforms and the screams of the separating  
 bodies  
 and the shards of bombshells and I leave the house only  
 for the funerals of lone  
 soldiers and sometimes when they offer me  
 documentation from hell ("Exclusive!  
 Watch now!") I watch, curious, weak, openmouthed  
 before the screen at the party. Waiting for the rabbit.

— Amichai Chasson  
 (23/07/2014)  
 Tr. Esther Cameron

**The Story:** The Three Weeks of the summer of 5774  
 threw me into a state of paralysis. The land was burning  
 with sun and blood and in our little basement apartment  
 in Jerusalem our oldest son was just learning to walk. I,  
 in contrast, was going backward. Throughout the whole  
 of "Operation Defensive Shield" I lay in front of the  
 television, deepening my severe addiction to the news,  
 waiting for the telephone call (which never came)  
 summoning me to reserve duty. I was almost incapable  
 of crossing the threshold of my door.

When the ground forces entered the Gaza Strip, heavy  
 fighting ensued in the Shejaiya neighborhood. An anti-  
 tank missile was fired at an IDF armored personnel  
 carrier. Seven soldiers from the Golani brigade met their  
 deaths there. One of those killed was Max Steinberg  
 o.b.m, age 24, a lone soldier who was older than his  
 comrades in the platoon, who was born and raised in an  
 American Jewish family from Los Angeles, who loved  
 football and Bob Marley, and who had no relatives in  
 Israel.

Would I have left my life on the West Coast to fight in  
 the Gaza Strip? Exchanged the Pacific Ocean for the  
 Mediterranean? Left my language and culture, my  
 family and friends and put on the army uniform of a  
 country I had not grown up in? Something in Max's  
 face, in his story, in the questions raised by the choices  
 he had made and the fate that ended his life, caused me

and 30,000 others who had not known him to  
 accompany his coffin on the final journey in the military  
 cemetery on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

In the course of the funeral I remembered how, when I  
 was in the regular army, the officers had ordered us to  
 "become emotional on demand" at the sight of the graves  
 on Mount Herzl — and I was unable to fulfill the order.  
 And now I was there again, as a civilian, and could not  
 stop sobbing. I came and wrote down the poem in a  
 single sweep of the pen. Aside from the title it does not  
 mention Max o.b.m. directly, but his memory and his  
 story are at the basis of the thoughts behind the words.

SIX

Set up the song, and  
 count the beat  
 after  
 Aunt Diane and I  
 would talk  
 your dad into  
 letting us sign  
 you up for dance.

One, two, three ...

Include a pinch of  
 make up you  
 always ask me for  
 when you grab my  
 pale green  
 Clinique  
 tube, and press your

four, five ...

lips together

X lingers in the sound of  
 a kiss. You say, "Mommy,  
 put lipstick on me." I  
 reply, "Not today."  
 Maybe when  
 we sign you up  
 for dance, I think.

1 Dig your hands  
 into  
 your first birthday  
 cake.

one, two ...

I buckle your  
 black patent  
 shoes.



2 Lift you up  
above  
the water and  
sing ...

three, four ...  
You say,  
"You'd never  
lock the door  
on me?"

3 "Dance, dance,  
dance. We're going  
dance, dance," I still  
sing as I lift you  
above the pool.

five ...  
"No, and I will  
never leave  
you," I say.

4 You grab your brother's  
hand  
inside a cabin  
in an apple orchard  
where  
a blue-grass band plays,  
and you two laugh  
and dance.

5 I put down the  
chopping board and pick  
you up. We spin to a  
Taylor Swift song, and  
sing at the top of  
of our lungs.

6

Six  
a birthday you never got to see.  
the number of weeks, since you left.  
the number of beats in song before I cry.

i guess at least  
in heaven you  
didn't have to  
wait  
until six to sign up  
for dance when  
now you  
tap across rainbows.

one, two, three, four,  
five.

—Rebecca T. Dickinson

**The story:** The poem "Six" was written on the six week anniversary of my five-year-old daughter, Corrie's, sudden death at five-and-a-half-years-old. She suffered from an undetected tumor that took her in a period shorter than twenty-four hours. The first poem "Six" was written with the fear of distance beginning to build from a time when my daughter was alive, and the realization she never reached the age of six. I do not capitalize some beginnings of sentences or the pronoun "I" because when a child dies, it goes against nature. It goes against everything we believe life to be. The lowercase letters symbolize this.

#### DON'T TOUCH

In Bubby's house, I can't touch  
the red velvet chairs, so stiff  
around the dining room table  
that if I moved them, they'd break  
apart and splinter in my hands

I can't touch the basket of fruit  
resting in the perfect center  
of the round yellow table  
in her yellow kitchen  
and can only look at the bright hard grapes  
that never change each time I visit

From the polished mantelpiece  
children's faces stare  
from a faded photograph  
*Who are they?*  
Bubby pulls my hands away.  
*Nisht Anriren.*

In the dining room, a long curtain  
falling over the window  
tempts small children to wrap  
themselves round and round in lace  
but I can't touch that either

Once, when Bubby isn't looking  
I stroke the flimsy gauze  
which slips away

Outside, ash-gray twisted metal pipes  
are spewing black smoke,  
staining the walls of the neighbor's house

like the smudged numbers on my Bubby's arm  
just under her sleeve  
I brush against  
by mistake

—Sarale Farkas

Bubby – grandmother  
Nisht anriren – don't touch

*see next page*

**The story:** It was the summer of 2020. I sat at my dining room table writing when I glanced at our window curtains; suddenly I was six years old again, visiting my Bubby in Boro Park. Her apartment was immaculate with thick carpets, plastic covers over the couches and wooden chairs positioned perfectly around the table. As a small child, I knew almost nothing about the Holocaust, except that it was connected to the numbers on my grandmother's arm, hidden beneath her long-sleeved blouses, and perfectly pressed suits. Once, I noticed a single black and white photograph on the mantelpiece of five girls posed in front of a brick factory. "Who are these girls?" I asked my grandmother. "They lived a long time ago in Hungary." Her eyes lingered on the photograph for a moment. Then she lifted it and took it to her bedroom. I soon developed a vague sense of a mysterious past, of something dark and hidden.

For a long while, I had wanted to write about my Bubby, but was terrified to enter that shrouded world of memory. This poem is both about my grandmother's need to keep the past covered, to maintain the facade, and about the innocent curiosity that compelled me to move aside the curtain and enter a strange and forbidden world.

### **Eight Things No One Can See**

#### ONE

Tomorrow will be the  
memory  
and the not  
remembered.

If I forget you,  
it is only temporary.

You may return as a postage stamp,  
or the curve of a falling leaf.

If I step on your shadow, forgive me,  
I was looking at yesterday.

#### TWO

The afternoon sky has the appearance  
Of being tired:  
holding up the refugees of clouds,  
feeling the sun and the wind  
breathing in-and-out,  
keeping space for flocks of jays  
and robins.

The sky shares its endless conversation  
with stones, mountains and rivers.

Lakes hold the sky of day in their palms  
until the moon drops its eye  
into the silence.

#### THREE

As the shadows of light criss-and-cross  
the wall, opposite where I sit,  
waterfalls appear, bits-and-pieces  
of ghosts, maps without destinations.  
faces that vanish before they smile or weep.

This is how time passes, changing like sand  
running through fingers.

#### FOUR

Looking out the window, opposite where I sit,  
seeing branches of trees story-telling.  
a flock of birds worshipping the valley.  
a whisper of dust on the road,  
the wind is there,  
no sound comes through the window:  
I spread loneliness across the valley.

#### FIVE

What brings the cat to jump into my lap  
when I read a poem?  
She is all fur-fire,  
orange and black,  
feet of winter wheat.

She lies down, facing that place  
where I see only a pillow  
and a lamp.

The poem read. The touch of fire.  
My pen tells her jumping,  
staring story.

#### SIX

I must speak of death now  
Because I may not see  
dandelions again  
or count the number of stars  
in Orion's Belt.

This does not mean fog or drought.

This does not mean loss of memory  
a touch of virus.

This means I only want you  
to sit and to listen, to breathe.

#### SEVEN

Yes. There are many kinds of breathing:  
the in-and -the-out,  
the morning freshness,  
the night of good bye.

Breathing is invisible, except

when your winter-breath  
clouds to moisten the glass  
in the door so I can write  
your name before the world vanishes.

## EIGHT

And if death comes unprepared for an embrace,  
I will ask it to wait its turn,  
I have deer to count and apples to pick.  
I will offer it a chair and a glass of water  
from the well.

— James McGrath  
1 December 2020  
La Cieneguilla; Santa Fe, New  
Mexico

**The story:** This is a murmur, a reflection of light and shadows as I sat still on a cold December day writing via telephone with my Santa Fe, New Mexico poet friend, Cynthia West. During the 2020-2021 virus days, I write with friends via telephone. When we write, Cynthia and I share a theme on the telephone. In this case, "Things I cannot see." One of us telephones the other, check in, share a recent poem, decide upon a theme, hang-up, write for 20-25 minutes, telephone, respond, share our writings and continue the process. We spend 3-4 hours in this writing practice.

"Eight Things No One Can See", evolved as I sat looking out my window, out past photographs of my two daughters who died of cancer' in the past three years; out across my orchard, over the field, through a flock of migrating winter birds, to the Sangre de Cristo mountains above the city.

I write to the "you" of my memory: a child, a lover, a stranger, one merging into the other as images are formed. This may be my mythic journey.

Writing "Eight Things No One Can See" is a brief moment in time. A book could be written about things no one can see.

The day I wrote was a lonely day, a cloudy windy sky; thinking of the refugees at the New Mexico-Mexico border, the refugee children in cages there. I was feeling the shadows falling across the wall in the room I was writing. Pumpkin, the calico cat, jumps into my lap. At 92, I think of death. There are deer in the orchard. Apples may come next fall, I always have fresh water from my well for visitors.

## THE HARES ON JUDGMENT DAY

The hares... cannot live without coming together for play.

— Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*

To the great forest came a dog.  
He said the L-rd had sent him  
To tell the creatures of the wild:  
"Tomorrow the world is ending.

"The measure of man's sin is full,  
They've made His existence a burden.  
Prepare yourselves as best you can —  
At noontide falls the curtain."

The lion bowed his head in thought.  
He made a proclamation:  
"All animals shall meet at dawn  
In solemn convocation."

Throughout the night the animals  
Were moving through the wood,  
Till in a central clearing wide  
They all assembled stood.

As the sun rose the lion spoke:  
"Who here can find a way  
To turn aside G-d's wrath?" None there  
Had anything to say

Until at last the monkey piped:  
"Let's try fasting and praying  
For mercy!" "That's what humans do —  
Does it help them?" jeered the Raven.

"If I could only get a word  
In private with the L-rd,  
My shrewdness even on high, I ween,  
Some counsel would afford.

"You, brother Eagle, to such heights,  
I hear, are wont to soar."  
The eagle sighed: "Though high I flew,  
I never found the door."

Then spoke the hare: "It's plain to see  
That we are at wit's end;  
So we propose, in Heaven's name,  
These hours in play to spend."

Then all the hares, both young and old,  
Began their merry dance;  
They well knew how to leap and bow,  
To caper, hop, and prance.

The animals stood round and gazed,  
Forgetting care and sorrow,

The sun climbed up and shone as bright  
As on Creation's morrow.

The good Lord looked into the world.  
The hares at play he sighted  
Within the peaceful circle there –  
My, but He was delighted!

Upon this play so fine and free  
His eyes he could not sate.  
The minutes passed, the hours passed,  
The time was getting late.

The noonday hour was gone, and still  
He was not tired of seeing.  
"Well, well," He said at last, "I guess  
The world can go on being."

So hear: even if the time grows dark  
And many storms beset it,  
Whoever still can find a spark,  
The world will not regret it.

– Esther Cameron

**The story:** Peter Kropotkin was a Russian prince turned (peaceful) anarchist. In *Mutual Aid* he argues against the theory of "survival of the fittest" as a justification for individual ruthlessness, pointing out that the species most likely to survive and evolve are those whose members help one another. The book contains many interesting anecdotes of animal life, like the one about the hares. Kropotkin is mentioned in Paul Celan's speech "The Meridian," which led me to look him up. In the 1980's, in Jerusalem, I was close to a circle of immigrants from German-speaking countries who still spoke and wrote their native language. For this circle I wrote, in German, the original of this poem. For a long time I despaired of translating it. But a few weeks ago someone wrote to me that while my poems were of a kind he didn't generally like, being ideological and agenda-driven, there was a saving lightness about them. Energized by this comment, I proceeded to translate the poem into Hebrew and then into English. The original poem was more formally perfect (the stanzas were rhymed abab) and contained the word *Tierkreis*, which means not only "circle of animals" but also "Zodiac," which gave the thing more of a cosmic dimension. But one friend reassures me that some of the fun still comes through. In going back to the poem I realized how much it is rooted in the "Meridian" speech, which has been a lodestar for me over the years. The meridian – a word derived from the Latin word for "noon" – is the line that connects the points on earth where it is noon at a given time. The poem reflects Celan's sense of an ultimatum and yet also a lightness that sometimes surprises, especially at the end of "The Meridian." Translating the poem, in turn, inspired me to formulate a proposal I have been making quite seriously for years

as kind of game, called "putting the world back together." The rules are posted at <http://www.derondareview.org/geulagame.pdf>. After all many inventions are made in a spirit of play...

#### BAKING A UNICORN

Don't we all want to bake a unicorn?  
To watch our ideas rise, take shape,  
solidify, consolidate,  
while we wait hungrily – transform  
by incubation's chemistry  
into a billion-dollar company?

Don't we all sometimes wish we had  
a piece of that pie? But if so, why  
*one* unicorn? Why not two or three  
or half a dozen – why not be  
the Elon Musk of unicorn-bakers,  
the shakers and makers?

How to be Elon – in our dreams at night  
that's the sought-for, prayed-for angle:  
how to make half-baked ideas come right,  
rise to heaven, find an angel. \*

– Judy Koren

\* A unicorn: a startup that has reached a valuation of a billion dollars without going public.

An angel: a private investor who provides the seed money to develop a startup.

**The story:** I have been attending a poetry course Zoomed from the UK; one of the sessions was on the importance of a title and how to choose one. The poet giving this session claimed that he always thinks of the title first, and then writes a poem to match it – the opposite of my own usual practice of first writing the poem and then choosing the title. Among his list of possible ways of generating a title was to brainstorm some wild, wacky phrases, which might not even make sense, and think about the possibilities arising from them. One of the examples he gave of such titles was "Bake some unicorns." Being Israeli, with family members working in high-tech, I immediately thought of the meaning of "unicorn" in the jargon of the high-tech industry: that exceedingly rare creature, a startup which achieves a valuation of \$1 billion while still remaining private. This brought to mind another hard-to-catch creature, an angel: in high-tech jargon, a private investor who supplies the initial investment for a fledgling startup. The metaphor in the title took over from there.

## VI. Numbers

### ENCOUNTERING NUMBERS

(in not so easy pieces)

#### I.

My father (OBM) sits at the dining room table waiting  
for my 2<sup>nd</sup> grade math papers. I am seven  
and hopelessly left-handed and therefore,  
by definition, imperfect. It was impossible to get the  
numbers  
to line up in a straight line because my fist was in the  
way,  
as difficult as it would be to write  
with a ballpoint pen without turning my fingers  
and the paper black and blue.

#### II

I am 17, having just discovered I love poetry.  
Not surprising, because the music of the language  
had long ago been inscribed in my memory those  
lovely, long afternoons  
when my mother (OBM) read to me from "A Child's  
Garden of Verses."

The famous poet Louise Bogan was teaching  
a summer course at Columbia University, just a short  
bus ride  
from home, and I was determined to go.  
My father, checking the catalogue, gave his permission  
on the condition that I also take the course in calculus.  
I did attend one class but the chalk scraping the  
numbers on the board  
so assaulted my brain, and the pain was so acute I had  
to leave.  
Truth be told, the poetry course was way over my head  
but I enjoyed sitting among those who loved what I  
loved,  
even though I didn't understand a word.

#### III

I am 22 holding my precious first born, my beautiful son.  
I am oblivious of the puffy eyes and bruises, and all the  
signs  
It was not an easy trip, for either of us making his way  
through the birth canal into this world.  
But I am counting the miracle of his ten perfect tiny  
fingers  
And ten equally perfect tiny toes, and I am beyond  
euphoric.

#### IV

We are on a beach in Maine and my children are playing  
in the water,  
while I sit on a blanket on the sand nervously keeping  
track of them.  
I know too well which one is cautious, which one is a  
daredevil,  
which one will try to keep up, afraid to be left behind,

which one won't leave the water even if we've all left to  
go home,  
and which one will run back to me with kisses to make  
sure I haven't gone.  
Suddenly, I am counting, and one is unaccounted for.  
My heart and my stomach have reversed and I am  
standing,  
shading my eyes against the sun, distraught and crazed.  
The world has become an ominous, impersonal place  
and there is no guardian angel here or anywhere,  
until I see her jumping up and down in her pink bathing  
suit  
brandishing a fist full of shells.

#### V

These days when I think about numbers, about how  
they are a distinctly human invention,  
how they are the language of time,  
(not always a friend of mine) –  
how numbers and time go hand in hand,  
always neatly in sync traversing the numbers on a clock,  
and how we must be vigilant  
against using them to define who we are  
branding human beings and living creatures,  
instead of using names.

#### VI

Conceivably and blessedly, we never run out of words  
but when we run out of numbers,  
to explain what is beyond us,  
we resort to infinity.

– Roberta Chester

### QUESTIONS

What are the tales through numbers told  
That other species cannot hear?  
The moon says "Twelve," the sun says "One";  
Such knowledge breeds both hope and fear.

Stars say, "The infinite – behold!"  
Zero has secrets no mortal knows.  
Between, what instruments can measure  
The painful speeds at which time flows?

The body's symmetry says "Two";  
The symmetry of the soul says "Four";  
The right, the left – two matching halves;  
The mandala – the longed-for door?

Or are two and four still incomplete?  
Add one to make the sacred seven –  
A day beyond the pains of time,  
An earthly or transcendent heaven.

– Henry Summerfield

## CHALLENGED

In school I learnt biology  
 history and geography  
 and Shakespeare's and Milton's poetry  
 but not geometry or trigonometry  
 'cause I am challenged mathematically.

I'm glad to learn linguistics  
 or take a class in semantics  
 and another in stylistics  
 but I'll never learn statistics  
 'cause I am challenged mathematically.

I need math for physics and chemistry  
 and statistics for anthropology  
 sociology or psychology  
 so I studied literature and philosophy  
 'cause I am challenged mathematically.

Still, I can photograph in morning's light  
 allow my imagination to take flight  
 or dance with my man all through the night  
 or take my notebook and sit down to write  
 although I'm challenged mathematically.

– Ruth Fogelman

## HANDOUTS

One for the serious boy at the border, who polishes my  
 windows and the mirrors too, even though they aren't  
 dirty.

Three for *el aduano*, who places my papers on the table  
 between us and says, "Pay me what you can afford."

One for the woman with the brilliant shawl and the tiny feet  
 and the baby like a monkey on her neck, who cuts me off  
 and keeps me in her eye until I give.

Another for her partner – same colors, slung baby, same  
 fierce eyes – who appears like a wasp out of nowhere the  
 instant I do.

One for the legless dwarf positioned by the bakery, his  
 palm crooked like a claw, mouth twisted, eyes yellow  
 except for two small points which might or might not  
 see me, because he is perfect.

One for the grocery boy who doesn't expect it.

One each for the kids doing body twists and flips on the  
 safety bars of the Metro, because I am entertained.

(The *americano* said you can tell which panhandlers are real  
 and which ones in a racket, if you inspect the gums  
 between their teeth. He grinned broadly to show me  
 what he meant.)

None for the crones who squat by the holy water in the  
 vestibules, fingers spread on their laps, squinting out  
 with eyes of God – I don't owe them anything.

None for the man with a face like a pillow who limps  
 down the bus aisle handing out his card, "I am a deaf-  
 mute, without work, please help," and then collects on  
 the way back out – too smooth.

None for the children rattling their little red and green  
 boxes, droning *chicletas, chicletas*, nor for the ones who  
 swarm over the hood at the PeMex, smearing the dirt on  
 the windows with their dirty rags, nor for those who are  
 too small to do anything but laugh and chant *money!*  
*money!* – because there are too many.

– Rick Kempa

## ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR

Grade point average,  
 postage stamp price,  
 tax percentage,  
 clothing size,  
 calendar date,  
 birthday.....  
 Numbers affect us  
 Time has no addition  
 only subtraction. Gift  
 of moments has a  
 ticking clock.  
 Biblical Book of  
 Numbers confirms  
 G-d is not vengeful  
 as we move through  
 allotted years. Seven  
 creation days. Forty  
 days and nights of  
 flooding. Etched  
 in granite are birth  
 and death dates.  
 Have I made mine  
 count?

– Lois Greene Stone

## THREE POEMS

**seven times 7**

7 is our number of birth years apart  
 7 years ago today we first met  
 7 years later i'm his age then  
 7 months we carried on June  
 7th is the last time he phoned  
 7 hours between our time zones i  
 42 wept / 6 months ago he slept...  
 @ age 49.

— Adrienne N. Wartts

**numbers**

the series keeps appearing  
 i would think to go to a shrink  
 if not for the book of Numbers,  
 your love for figures, and  
 friends who say pay attention,  
 i would be wedged  
 threading mismatched patchwork  
 instead of simply sewing patterns.

**unlimited (re)Source**

i continue to encounter copper  
 and i'm usually thinking  
 of you when i do so  
 i don't bypass it anymore  
 because i have found  
 that a penny on any  
 street carries more  
 value than any dollar  
 on wall street  
 and there's no common  
 denominator between  
 the two since one is  
 a greedy gamble and  
 the other a price-  
 less metaphor for  
 promises with-  
 out stock (or for) exchange.

— Adrienne N. Wartts

**The story:** When I was a child, I used to hear family members energetically talk about visitations from deceased loved ones. I thought they were simply missing them, until lovely things began to occur after someone I loved departed his earthly life. Because they continued to occur, I had to question, explore, and/or respond to them. Poems were the way for me to do so. A wakeup call occurred on 3/18, a series of numbers that keeps appearing. The book of Proverbs was a favorite of his, so my poem "Proverbs 3:18" was born. [See p. 17 — Ed.] In grieving his death, I noticed the occurrence of sevens, and wrote "seven times 7." The

poem "unlimited (re)Source" is based on my encounters with coins, and reminds me of the underlying meaning of the Biblical story "The Parable of the Lost Coin."

**THUS**

It promised to be just another day until you pointed out the date. I had not noticed any numbers on display before that stunning moment. Mindless gladness to be still alive then morphed into ambivalence about inhabiting a world in which a man as kind as you offends me simply by remembering.

From now on, please do not assume you know the reason for my mood, the method of my managing what happened years ago, the compromises I have made for love.

Let us proceed — apologetically — toward all awaiting either you or me.

— Jane Blanchard

**Pick a Number**

If I were a number  
 from 1 to 10,

I would not be a **1**;  
 It's too solitary.

**3** is too odd;

**4** is too friendly,  
 and **6** is too round.

**2** is too even;  
 It just isn't me.

**8** has the problem  
 of grand symmetry.

**7**'s too lucky;

**10** is too proud,  
 While **9**'s just as round  
 as a **6** upside-down.

By elimination,  
 I must be a **5**—  
 Part rounded, part square—  
 Not too much of one thing.

It seems to thrive  
 right there in the middle.

Coincidentally,

I'm a **5**.

Yes, that's me.

— Connie S. Tettenborn



## SEVENTEEN HANDBREADTHS

Eruvin 76

*Are sufficient to circumscribe  
a square which is four  
by four, and murky  
as twilight shadowed  
by a Socratic circle.*

One question leads to another,  
a tunnel burrowing into the marrow  
of an elusive truth rabbis of yore  
fathomed with fuzzy mathematics:

*The distance from the center  
of the square to its corners  
is greater than the distance  
from the center to each side.*

We, latecomers to the calculus  
of community, benefit  
from the sages' struggle  
with time and place, build  
our homes upon soil solid

because ancients measured it  
step by soul-straining step.

— Vera Schwarcz

## 14 WORDS IN SEARCH OF A TITLE

Swirling sea spindles:  
a threshold of time, life's a crippled staircase,  
whirligig to death.

— Vincent J. Tomeo

## FOURTEEN\*

Malchut she'b'gvurah  
The king of restraint  
Royal boundaries  
Only a king can push forward  
Enlarge and reshape  
as amoebic creations  
And only a king knows  
When to stop —  
On the fourteenth day.

— Mindy Aber Barad Golembo

[Note: this poem refers to the counting of the omer, which takes place in the 49 days between Passover and Shavuot. During this time some meditate on the Sefirot, whereby a combination of two Sefirot is associated with each day. Rabbi Simon Jacobson gives an introduction to this practice at [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/277116/jewish/Introduction.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/277116/jewish/Introduction.htm)]

## THREE SONNETS

## THE TWELFTH DIMENSION

There, in the twelfth dimension, have numbers burst,  
have all equations lost their meaning? There,  
in the twelfth dimension, is space-time the here  
and now and nothing more than that, as first  
becomes the last? And there, have protons cursed  
electrons for turning into string? Where  
may particles of gravity repair  
a universe that is de-universed?

There, in the twelfth dimension, can shadows find  
something besides gray matter, something more  
significant than mass and energy,  
like light — the light we never saw behind  
the two dimensions of an unseen door.  
There, in the twelfth dimension, will truth be free?

## THE FIRST DAY OF THE SEVENTH MONTH

"And in the seventh month, on the first day of the  
month, you shall have a sacred convocation; you shall  
do no manner of servile work; it is a day when the  
shofar is blown." (Numbers 29:1)

The play will soon begin — *eleven, ten,  
Nine, eight, seven, six* — soon the chatter dies,  
Quite soon you'll stand upon the stage, all eyes  
On you alone. You read the script again  
In hope you won't forget its wording when  
The spotlight shines — *five, four* — it is unwise  
To worry, but your costume can't disguise  
Your trembling, so you say a prayer, amen.

A shofar blows. The curtains rise. Within  
The confines of a narrow stage, you go  
To say your lines the best you can. The sun  
And moon, the day, the night, are actors in  
The drama of your life — *three, two* — you know  
You stand before an Audience of One.

## THE NEW ARITHMETIC

Behind an unseen door, you calculate,  
subtract and add your shadows' numbers: two  
plus one is sometimes less than three as you  
relearn addition and subtraction — eight  
plus four is sometimes more than twelve, what's straight  
is sometimes circular, and what you knew  
before is now irrelevant, since few  
is sometimes many, little — sometimes great.

You have discovered seven minus six  
is sometimes less than one, that nine plus three  
is sometimes more than twelve, that four times four  
is sometimes seventeen. Arithmetic's  
new axioms enable you to see  
how more is sometimes less, and less is more.

— Yakov Azriel

## THE NUMBER FOURTEEN

Like everyone I had two grandmothers.  
Mine were both 14's.

My maternal grandmother was born on February 14th.  
My paternal grandmother was born on July 14th.  
And their characters matched their birthdays.  
My maternal grandmother's middle name was  
Valentine.

She was a loving couple's only daughter.  
She had seven suitors.  
Her oval-framed photograph hung in my mother's  
room.

Features perfect as a doll's  
yet full of spirit and sweetness.

I hope I have made one verse  
with a lilt like the tilt of her head.

My paternal grandmother's name was Jessie.  
Her features were regular but she was thin.  
When I knew her she looked like an urban version  
of the woman in American Gothic.

She'd had three sons and wanted a daughter  
and I was her first granddaughter.  
She had a way of taking you along  
with whatever she was doing  
while conveying that whatever she did  
was very important.

She was the first person to survive to old age  
with Addison's disease.

She took protein at dinner  
and gave herself shots.

Before she married she studied piano in Germany  
and met someone her father would not let her marry  
and was discontented ever afterward.

You might say she was a battle-axe.

My mother says that whenever I was around her  
after awhile I would start to sound like her.

An astrologer once told me

"Your Venus is in Libra  
and your Ares is in Mars.

That means whatever you love you really love  
and whatever you hate you really hate."

I write a lot of poems with fourteen lines.

I write a lot at the full moon.

When I was young I spent long hours looking in the  
mirror

hoping my Valentine's Day grandmother's face would  
show up there

though it never did

but it was on my Bastille Day grandmother's birthday  
after a phony hearing up in northern Wisconsin  
that I sang this fourteen-stanza song of freedom.

## THE FOURTEENTH OF JULY

All in the dewy morning

On the fourteenth of July  
I went to walk beneath the trees  
That grow so green and high.

And there I met Tom Jefferson,  
He was pacing up and down,  
His head was sunk upon his chest,  
His face it wore a frown.

"What is the matter, sir," I said,  
"Or what is it you seek?"  
"I'm looking for the people  
With whom I wish to speak."

"What do you mean," I cried in fear,  
"I see them all around."  
"I see their bodies just like you,  
But their spirits are not found."

"They do not hear, they do not see,  
They walk with empty eyes."  
"I guess you mean the media  
That have got them hypnotized."

"Their ears are filled with crashing sound,  
Their eyes with flashing lights,  
Their minds too full of greed and gore  
To sort out truth from lies."

"They have no time to meet and talk  
And hear the liberty bell —  
It is as if some evil king  
Had bound them in a spell."

"Climb up, climb up into that tower,  
"And ring that bell once more."  
"That bell has got a crack," I replied,  
The sound would not go o'er."

"Then you must forge it new," he said,  
"In the flame of your desire,  
Until they come together  
To hear what freedom requires."

"Tell them to keep the Sabbath,  
A day when all are free:  
That day they must not buy nor sell  
Nor sit and watch TV."

"It is a day to meet and talk  
And find the ones they trust  
To keep their hands from bribery  
And on wisdom to insist."

"And these in turn together  
Will meet in council high  
To write a Constitution  
For the coming century."

"For everything wears out at last  
And needs to be renewed  
Out of the ancient spirit  
Of truth and rectitude.

"That spirit has a mighty power,  
Although the odds be high;  
Will you go and tell the people?"  
I said that I would try.

**One more note on the number 14:** Unique among poetic forms, the sonnet has a mysterious attraction. Sonnets have been written to the sonnet; you can find a whole collection of them here

<http://www.sonnets.org/about.htm/> I too have tossed my tributes on the heap; one of them ends:

Yet in the form itself there still abides  
A kind of centering virtue that gives hope,  
As if the world in its enormity  
Is but the aura of a soul; the sides  
Of all contention balance round a shape  
That cannot change, nor forfeit dignity.

What could account for this quality? Some years ago I noticed that the digits of 248 (the number of positive commandments in the Torah) 365 (the number of negative commandments) both add to 14! It is said that the source of all the commandments is the *tselem elokim*, the Divine image in man.

It is true that frivolous, scurrilous and vapid poems have been written in sonnet form. Still, over the centuries poets have kept coming back to it when they needed to express what mattered most.

— Esther Cameron

#### SUMMING UP LIFE

A teacher of mathematics  
Finds it easy to sum up his life  
Multiplying the joys of marriage  
By the division of responsibility  
Adding the equal distribution of love  
Subtracting the occasional sorrows  
Presenting his achievements  
From his own angle  
And proving conclusively  
That in total it was all worthwhile,  
*Quod erat demonstrandum.*

— Rumi Morkin

#### SICK OF NUMBERS

As the numbers graph higher,  
the virus seems to veer closer,  
to me and my loved ones. The numbers loom.

Just as gas prices gauge one's well-being,  
as bargains determine one's consumer astuteness,  
numbers measure one's fear, inadequately.

"Number of deaths," to remove oneself  
from embodying the suffering of those  
actually dying and dead, loved ones sorrowing.

Numbers to prove one's point and disprove another's.  
Tossed about to mask one's fear, and mock the  
fear of others.

To distance one socially, mentally, spiritually, from  
those  
who discomfit with their numbers, and their politics.  
Numbers to normalize.

To guide us through the illusions and delusions,  
to that happy place, that doesn't quite feel all that.  
Sterile, neutralized. Numbers, with the emphasis on  
numb.

— Ivars Balkits

#### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

What can you do when you don't understand?  
And the numbers keep coming your way.  
What can you do when you're going to fail?  
Probability and Statistics that day.

What can you do when your head not in the game?  
No matter what the professors will say.  
What can you do when there is no place to hide?  
And you can't run away.

What can you do when your life is a mess?  
Wife and children have all run away.  
What can you do when you came un-prepared?  
On an NSF grant from the government with pay.

What can you do all alone in your thoughts?  
Too proud to ask for God's help when you pray.  
What can you do when you no longer belong?

With those who understand, so they say.

— George W. Clever

#### JUST ONE

I have heard my entire life  
of the "six million,"  
two laden words bandied about  
seared irrevocably in historical memory  
a concept too big to imagine, to capture, to grasp

But it all becomes tangible  
if I focus on just one soul,  
my sweet grandmother

my namesake  
 who gave me her high cheekbones  
 who had five sons and was brave and strong  
 who left a family who would have adored her  
 with sixteen grandchildren, twenty-nine great  
 grandchildren  
 and many many great great grandchildren

She was transported from Terezen to Auschwitz  
 on May 15, 1944  
 which we know because  
 the Germans kept such good records

Could it have been a fine spring day  
 with the sky audaciously blue  
 and birds chirping innocently  
 on the way to hell  
 or more likely, I believe in my heart  
 the birds were silent witness

And sometimes I ponder  
 if by the grace of God  
 could she have perchance  
 in her final minutes  
 seen a vision parading in front of her...  
 of her amazing progeny  
 leading Jewish lives, raising Jewish children,  
 the lawyers, teachers, educators, business folk,  
 doctors, nurses, scientists, computer guys, Jewish  
 community leaders,  
 musicians, chefs, writers,  
 just to name a few,  
 then perhaps,  
 I would like to believe,  
 she closed her eyes  
 and went in peace...

— Joanne Jagoda

### SIXES

Six decades passed  
 to this day. To me  
 it is daily wonder  
 that we have our state.

For us who remember  
 that six million,  
 six decades and  
 we are six million  
 in the land.

They are convenient  
 as justification, yes,  
 but those six million  
 did not create Israel.

It is easy to hang  
 the state's being on  
 six million hooks. But  
 the vision did not come

from Treblinka or from  
 Dachau. Though those  
 and their hellish likes,  
 proved the thesis right.

We have none but  
 this land, this history.  
 They killed six million  
 but we are sovereign.  
 What a sweet word,  
 sovereign.

At least  
 our mess is our own,  
 and we live...

— Michael E. Stone

\*On the 60th anniversary of the establishment of Israel.

**[Note: in former times, "numbers" could also mean  
 "poetry"!]**

### FIERCE FRAGILITY

I do not think I want a Pulitzer  
 in poetry. Been reading Berryman  
 and found out how he died. Which means there were  
 at least four who — did what I never can.

Why is it such a dangerous award? —  
 that's notwithstanding that Sylvia Plath  
 got hers posthumously, and is adored.  
 But whether three or four.... Well, do the math:

The Pulitzer award for poetry  
 only began in 1922:  
 the rate is ghastly. No causality?  
 Perhaps not. But the correlation's true.

What fragile fierceness, focussed, formed, once soared —  
 then crashed. Four times. (Don't tell me there were *five*,  
 nor nominate me for the damned award.  
 I'd rather be fierce, fragile, and alive.)

—James B. Nicola

## FOR SYLVIA PLATH

Ars Longa Vita Brevis Est

The poem lashes more fiercely than the wind,  
Wallace Stevens, "Man and Bottle"

But poets, artists, make a slit in the umbrella,  
they tear open the firmament itself, to let in  
a bit of free and windy chaos. . . .

Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy*

Child of innocence in children's way,  
A house of rooms and voices, sunlight  
And shadow, slow making of

a mind.

Young woman within and without  
Routine rites of passage,  
Proper words but underneath  
Slow build of language unappraised  
Unspoken, flames of more  
Than customary fire.

And still the search in pages  
Of both life and art for answers  
To such power in the text,  
Pain shaping rhythms  
Hardened, axe strong against  
Whatever soothing legato  
Ready at hand.

What then of life and art,  
How do they mate if so.  
Twined, untwined, uneasy  
Siblings caught in a push and  
Pull now near now distant,  
Mysterium cradled in a  
Sylvia's blood,  
No answer seeming sufficient  
To such agon of pen and  
Ravaged feelings.

As leering from an  
Always shadow the  
Indifferent maw of death,  
Its earthen sty  
Of muck and stench,  
Flesh eater failing  
Where the  
Poetry lives.

—Doug Bolling

## A DRINK OF WATER (A Journey through Icons)

I thought I was so smart  
I never slept  
Listened from the top of the stairs  
Chronologically barely two  
I loved adult conversations  
At night

Danny Kay  
The first of the many

Late night comedians  
His haunting background music  
I cannot blame Milton Schafer  
For sleepless nights  
Any more than I can blame Kay

I understood every word  
They laughed at me  
Yes, I agreed that I  
would be grown up at five  
nuances intonations  
the music itself  
so melancholy  
why was that man whining?  
Did I or did I not  
Love the new baby  
Not yet born

Belittled my childhood  
*A drink of water*  
The Shout — NOW!  
Terrified  
Scolded  
I was sent up to bed  
Defeated  
alone  
Tears on the carpeted steps

Then there was  
Allan Sherman  
Less threatening  
I'd survived the Bay of Pigs  
Knew all about "quarantine"  
And I was an experienced camper  
Who managed to fall asleep  
now and then

Ben Shawn thrilled to  
Our ability to read Hebrew  
He drew us an Aleph -Bet  
With Japanese brush  
After my brother and I  
Destroyed his rock garden  
Guilty

I put a thumb print in a still-wet David Manzur  
painting  
It yet hangs  
Somewhere in the family

Here's Johnny!  
I tried to learn to play golf  
I didn't understand his jokes  
And why was he on so late at night?  
Robert Berks' statue of Brandeis?  
On the university campus?  
I saw its metal kishkas!  
Frankenstein in the studio  
His daughter climbed trees almost as well as me

If I told you the name of the religious couple

Who went to see a live performance of Hair  
Nudity and all  
I'd have to kill us both

Not just name-dropping  
I said how do you do  
to any number of artists, politicians, authors  
stepped on their feet  
spilled coffee  
I was up very late

Why am I the only one in the movie theater  
Who cracks up  
When Rodney Dangerfield  
Screams I love you  
Having heard Dylan Thomas' poem?

A millennium later  
I recognize the voice of T.S. Eliot  
On a disc, reading  
As someone from my childhood

And I rage against  
—Mindy Aber Barad Golembo

#### ALMOST

"Stop!" the body screams  
to the soul  
escaping  
on the dazzling  
borderline  
between two worlds.

"Stop, wait.  
My God, at last.  
Look, here's where poetry comes from!"

Fingers—  
twitching for the ballpoint—  
growing cold.  
Becoming not mine.  
—Constance Rowell Mastores

#### VISIT TO THE CARDIOLOGIST

Paired **atrial** or ventricular beats are called **couplets**  
[www.womensheart.org](http://www.womensheart.org)

Such tests may elicit  
relief or fear  
but on this visit  
I almost cheer.  
Couplets? as poet I write masses,  
As professor their art  
I impart to my classes.  
Couplets in my heart?  
Forget about that *abab* rhyming  
Let's hear it instead for this new chiming  
Marvell, Dryden, Pope, step aside for me:  
My couplet credentials? read my EKG.  
—Heather Dubrow

#### THE TRANSLATOR ON TRANSLATING

It was a morning in early summer: A silver haze  
shimmered and trembled over the lime trees . . . I  
climbed a tree stump and felt suddenly immersed in  
Itness. I did not call it by that name. I had no need  
for words. It and I were one.

—Bernard Berenson

As much as many of these renderings  
flow, each has its own

challenges, their specific adaptation; each  
one poses an intrinsic set of

particular difficulties in their interpretation.  
It is similar to climbing a rise

to a break in the woods, and you're always  
surprised when you crest

the overlook to see the view of open sky.  
As in a poem by Soen,

from the Japanese: "A decade spent seeking  
for it deep in the forest, but only

today I can hear enormous laughter  
echoing along the shore of the lake."

—Wally Swist

[untitled]

Weaves letters and places them close together  
Like threads of tsitsit  
Connecting heaven and earth

And from the letters flow words  
And from the words poetry is formed  
And from poetry angels are born

And between blue and white  
A ladder is set up  
Angels ascend and descend

And on the firmament a song of ascents  
And on earth combinations of letters

—Shmuel Warhaftig  
tr. Esther Cameron

## VII. *Where the People Have Gone*

### SPRING IN THIS PANDEMIC

Dear you, to wonder at how this one  
strawberry-wheel-look-alike unseen to the eye  
strikes demands our domestic rushing world

come to a halt we are confined at home  
alone or with others where else to go  
the wonder of what each separate distance

between us holds where no tsunami-cyclone-  
hurricane-tidal-wave-earthquake no  
man-made war has done to surpass

this stop-us-in-our-tracks palliative  
care of moment directs our footsteps through  
ever-present uncertainty how we see

out of our small-vision vistas of grand  
human kindness songs hands clapping  
praise to the known givers violins we hear

played on foreign balconies orchestras  
each musician playing in a room at home  
through this great upheaval to common routines

we practice dignity with grief for the ones lost  
we practice dignity with spoken gratitude  
to hold dear to the Invisible in our midst

– Reizel Polak  
March 25, 2020

### AND THIS IS A MEMORY THAT WAS

When the house was destroyed the scattered ones  
gathered on the hill  
The smell of burnt plastic still lingered in our nostrils  
The world went back to its natural ways. We did not stop  
the vegetables from rotting, the eggs from beating  
themselves. The food remnants grew moldy on the plates  
We gathered crumb after crumb  
Bread falling like sins on the eve of Passover.  
We tried to remove the smell of burning that stuck  
under our fingernails as we fled.  
We squatted on the ground when we needed to  
Relieving our intestines at the side of the road.  
Old men wrote equations on ledger paper  
calculating what was left and what we would live on.  
We sat orphaned like the last consolers  
waiting for the big sleep.

Who among us remembered  
a thin man who stood on a crate  
in the middle of the bustling market on the eve of the  
Sabbath  
and shouted in a quiet voice:  
Yet forty days  
And the house shall be overthrown.

– Amichai Chasson (tr. EC)

HOME-THOUGHTS, FROM LOCKDOWN  
*After receiving my first shot of Corona vaccine*

Oy, to be in Rambam\*  
Now that the vaccine's there,  
And whoever walks into Rambam  
Sees, one morning, well aware,  
That the people crowd, processing's brief  
Round every table, beyond belief,  
While the queue inches, as the guards allow  
In Rambam – now!

And after three weeks, there will follow  
The second shot (I'd prefer a pill to swallow!),  
Mark, where my concert tickets on the ledge  
Lie in their folder, unused, since Passover,  
Bottles and food-box – at the counter's edge –  
That's the wise housewife; brings supplies twice over,  
Lest family think she never could recapture  
The former life, but she is an adapter  
And though the future's rough with outings few,  
All will be well when mankind wakes anew,  
The Café cups will fill; schools will resume,  
– Far brighter than this present time of gloom!

– Rumi Morkin

\* Rambam is a hospital in Haifa. The poem is a parody of a  
poem by Robert Browning, "Home-Thoughts, from Abroad."

199.

This sky-blue paper mask,  
My thin and fragile shield,  
Might save me from disease

But won't improve my mood  
As the fatal curve grows steep  
And mortalities increase.

May this cerulean shade  
Invoke the grace of heaven  
And make infection cease!

– David K. Weiser

### TO MORROW: A SINNET SONNET

Since	yester twilight
Along	the borderline of tonight
With	fits of thirst & hunger
Among storms	of pain
Under	attacks of evils & viruses
Between	interludes of insomnia
Beyond	both hope & expectation

At	the depth of darkness
Amidst	the nightmare
Through	one tiny antlike moment
After	another...
Against	deadly despair
Until	awakening
To	the first ray of dawn

– Changming Yuan





## DOORWAY

You have already gone into the outside.  
Can you go out to the inside?

The doorway: two doorposts, lintel  
And threshold.

A gleaming square  
A chariot of light  
To anoint it with blood and sign:  
A fourth dimension opens

The pyramid of blood has opened like a bud  
And the heavens break forth

Years of gazing.  
What we see with closed eyes:  
A black square rimmed with gold

We enter into our freedom

—Sivan Har-Shefi  
tr. Esther Cameron

## JERUSALEM 5781/ 2021

. . . *this day I created you. Ask of Me and I will give. . .*  
Psalms 2:7-8

This first morning  
after the third lockdown —  
awesomeness —  
we walk the glorious  
Jerusalem streets  
to the once-again  
open-to-all Wall.

— Felice Kahn Zisken

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### VIII. What If That Ram

## THE VIEW FROM THE THICKET

Stubborn I am, the hill too steep,  
the woods too thick, and I climb,  
leave behind my comely ewe of  
curly hair, ewe of bleat I hear  
as song.

She lags behind, a beauty from a  
bordering flock that sees my splendid  
horns as fear-some, daring, sees me  
foolish when I flash them. I'm not  
prone to battle. I just like climbing.

I climb to breathe, to cleave with twin  
god-given horns the weeds and furze,  
to see from heights meadows where I  
graze. I do not seek to butt my pride  
against her brothers.

Ah, here I am, higher than I've  
ever been. I should see wider, but  
thickets block my view. I'll slice  
right through the gorse, the unformed  
leaves and sickly yellow flowers.

Much better but still the thorns  
claw at my eyes. Something stirring  
past this prickly hedge draws me on;  
I fear my long-haired coat and split-  
hooved feet may hinder.

A murmuring of humans, not too clear.  
I'll push ahead, near as I can get. Damn,  
my horns are snared, these treacherous  
brambles have me ambushed here.  
I can't get free.

The more I shake my head and stamp  
my feet, the more the branches twist  
and lock me in. They coil around  
my fetlocks, entwine themselves and  
hobble me.

My jiggling's cut a tiny clearing  
inadvertently. I see two men. One  
seems older than the century. One  
lies prone, bound to tinder. The elder  
holds a knife.

If he can hear my cries, his knife  
might cut me free. I bleat my  
crisis song, loud as can be, the way  
a desperate human blows through  
a hollow horn to warn of plight.

I bellow once again. There's a  
white-winged being hovering just  
above my neck. The lad lying on the  
wood looks terrified, the old man's  
knife high enough to catch the light.

He stops and turns his head; he sees  
me! I am saved. He brings down  
his arm, turns to the young man and  
hacks right through the rope. He  
weeps, as some men do.

The youth shrugs off the rope,  
the old man's arm, and rises off  
the altar. Glares at the man he calls  
father, turns his back and walks away.  
The old man with the knife comes for me.

—Florence Weinberger

## HANNAH RACHEL OF LUDOMIR

*Once upon a time there was or was not a woman. They say: she was a righteous woman. They say: she was a very clever woman. And she gave blessing and Torah and counsel to her followers, men and women. A lady Rebbe. They say: when she refused marriage she was shunned and went to the land of Israel. And some say: She put on tefillin and prayed at the Western Wall wrapped in a tallit.*

*Now they say: we have found her grave, and it is listed in the records of the kolel founded by immigrants from Volhynia on the Mount of Olives: " – The righteous Rabbanit Hannah Rachel, daughter of Manesh" and the date of her death – the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Tammuz 5648.*

*We have placed a gravestone on all those things they said.*

*On the legends whose existence wanders between worlds rests the reality of a stone tablet.*

*Between her bones, rotted or not, and her spirit which perhaps hovers, and the gravestone which the women of my generation unveiled on her grave – there am I.*

*At night my soul wants to rise on the breezes of the prayers whispered by the lady rebbe who is outcast and disembodied, from her nowhere place on the Mount of Olives towards the place opposite her which is the foundation of the world.*

*At night I will whirl in the silhouette of a woman dressed in black, whose moans are doves.*

– Lift up your eyes round about, and see, Hannah Rachel,  
they all gather together, they come to you.

Enlarge your house of study,

And they will stretch forth the curtains of your habitation.

And you will say in your heart:

Who has begotten me these,

For I am a maid, solitary and desolate and driven away,

I am afflicted and tossed with tempest and bitter,

And who brought up these?

– Sing, O barren one, who did not bear

For many are the daughters of the desolate who hearken to your bitter weeping,  
To the lamentation of your soul.

Your lips, O sleeping one, we will cause to murmur in Ramah,

For you are our delegate, here is your prayer shawl,

In the streets of Jerusalem let us hear your voice

O bride

We are your bridesmaids, the daughters of Jerusalem,

We will renew your youth, return your captivity,

The hope for your future,

We will enclose you in vessels and vestments, O bride,

With jewels and a crown we will adorn you on the day of the gladness of your heart,

This is the day when you are spoken for. A tablet of stone we will make for you

And engrave your letters on it.

Your countenance we have not seen, we will make you a face

Out of the silver studs of our longing,

Out of the yearning of our orphanhood toward you.

We shall make you a face of many faces, O our parent, our daughter.

From the deep of our Torah, small stones – the primordial stones from which the waters proceed – we shall place  
on your grave.

We have covered you with a soft stone and a lullaby

So you won't catch cold.

"Tarry here this night

And it shall be in the morning that if He will redeem you – He will redeem you

But if He will not redeem you – We will redeem you.

Stay this night,

For your daughters are your makers, your daughters are your mothers."

– Sara Friedland Ben-Arza  
tr.: Esther Cameron

## SALTED

All that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in his world He created male and female.  
Likewise, Leviathan the flying serpent and Leviathan the crooked serpent He created male and female;  
and had they mated with one another they would have destroyed the whole world.  
What [then] did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He castrated the male and killed the female preserving  
it in salt for the righteous in the world to come.

Bava Batra 74a

Their voice goes from one end of the world to the other, and in between are creatures who do not notice.

Bereishit Rabba 6:7

Below me are palms  
Far below them, water  
And deep beneath the water, salt  
That preserves the she-leviathan.  
There is none more moderate than she,  
None more patient.

On the fifth day  
in the first hour the queen was teemed from the weeping waters  
abandoned to the lap of their sobbing:  
Alas for us that we did not merit the nearness of our Creator.  
In the second hour the she-leviathan of the deep called up a surge,  
Insolently lifting herself, drawing near.  
In the third hour  
from above  
a foot came down on her,  
rained down salt,  
burned brimstone  
into her skin, her flesh, her hair.  
There is none more moderate than she,  
none more patient.

In the primordial salted depth she rests –  
a plain and its cities and their insides became her maw,  
the Jordan gushes into her mouth  
and the hollow of her mouth is never filled  
for the salt dissolves all that is sown into her kingdom  
to produce its voices that do not come to an end.

From the nether end of her abyss  
her silence roars  
to the end of my head in the top floor of the hotel  
and in between the strenuous racket of an Israeli spa with exercise machines  
and in between squalls shimmy to benefit many creatures without end  
and in between the voices of my body, and the leaps of thoughts that cannot be contained  
and they do not notice.

– Sara Friedland Ben-Arza  
tr. Esther Cameron

## TO SEE HIM

I went to see G-d at the foot of the mountain with all the elders  
 I wrapped myself in Joseph's prayer shawl which is sheep's wool and all stripes  
 I approached behind Moses' back and in my hands two clay bowls the earth of the desert and they were full to the  
 brim with the milk of my children. And when the words came back from the mountains  
 With an echo of shshshshshshshshshsh mehhhhmehhhhh and all the goats bleated and the sheep cried and the cows  
 mooed  
 And the whole herd of my people and my family called out and from the mountains came shshshshshshsh mehhhh  
 mehhhh  
 And a bright sun ignited the blood in the basins and gave back a lightning of knives from the altar  
 And Moses read out the book of the covenant in my mother tongue, I seized my children and brought them  
 under my prayer shawl, I threw the milk of my breasts over them and the shawl that covered my head and  
 shoulders  
 was dyed with the cows' blood which Moses sprinkled on me and my people and the sweet smell of the milk  
 dyed and will dye my children with its taste all the way to the Jordan  
 and then I saw G-d  
 and He was not reflected in the basins of blood but in the blue that was over the altar and in the sea  
 which rose up on me in the blue that is inseparable from the green and in the song that we sang beyond the sea  
 for in the color G-d was revealed to us in the desert in the blue and the pavement and the sapphire in the fire and in  
 the cloud  
 and in the gray that is between them in the voice of Moses and in the milk that He gave me for my children and the  
 smell of the milk  
 There is none like Him to open the sea to dry land and to place in the hands of Moses the power to write the book  
 which he read  
  
 And they did eat and drink the flesh of the cow and drank her blood and I baked the bread  
 And I pounded the mallow and the nettle and the thistle and everything I found growing close at hand  
 And I added some goat's milk and some partridge egg so they would drink and eat  
 The bittersweet taste of the G-d they had beheld.

– Hava Pinhas-Cohen  
 tr. Esther Cameron

## COME UP TO ME ON THE MOUNTAIN AND BE THERE

I knew that he wanted to be there more than anything  
 To be there with Him, to be with Him to be there  
 With Him on the top of the mountain in the place they call the heavens  
 And to flatten the words into stone as they are born  
 To be there alone, but to be with Him  
 With the One who cannot be seen and perhaps he will feel  
 The breath of His mouth on the nape of his neck

And he will forget the touch of my palm on his neck  
 Come up to me and be there, his Lord said to him  
 As if I were not there at the foot of the mountain  
 Waiting for his lips scorched by the letters

It's me down here waiting to feed him  
 From the pot of squash and eggplant  
 And the meat will fill his belly and make him forget

The Name and the breath of His mouth  
 And the spirit's breath on the back of his neck

– Hava Pinhas-Cohen  
 tr. Esther Cameron

## WHAT IF THAT RAM

That day began as most days do:  
Gathering at the well,  
gossiping with other women,  
thinking about dinner.  
Even though my old bones ache,  
I carry on.

But I was out of sorts, uneasy.  
Abraham had acted strange all week.  
Headaches, visions, I don't know.  
Something on his mind.

That day, Abraham asked Isaac, our late-born child,  
to help him gather wood.  
We had enough wood.  
But I thought they needed some father-son time.  
A walk in the woods would do Abraham good.

Isaac adored his father.  
Our son is the joy of our lives,  
born when I was old and childless,  
in despair.

Before Abraham left  
he mumbled something about the sun? son?  
I paid no mind.

Birds were flying low.  
There seemed a trembling in the air,  
as if a storm was coming.

It grew late, I was worried.  
Had they come upon a beast, or hostile tribe,  
or slipped among the rocks?  
I even thought to track them,  
but the clouds were black, the sky was darkening.  
and I did not know where to search.

When they returned, they brought no wood.  
Only a ram's horn.  
At dinner both were too quiet.

At bedtime, I asked Isaac:  
Why are you so pale and shaken, my beloved son?  
He told me a tale hard to believe:

"As we walked,  
I asked father the names of birds,  
I showed him the veins of a leaf....  
but his thoughts were elsewhere.

We came to the place called Moriah,  
an old place of sacrifice.

Father had this look, pained and scared.  
He touched my head, tenderly,  
mumbling a prayer.

He laid the branches we had gathered,  
bound me to the altar . . . .  
Was this a game? I didn't like it.  
He raised his knife . . . .  
I screamed . . . .

Just then, a ram appeared.  
Father dropped the knife,  
hugged me, he was joyous,  
then he sacrificed that ram.  
So much blood!

Father said that God had stayed his hand,  
testing his obedience.  
But I threw up."

I kissed my son and tucked him in.  
Abraham was at his prayers again.  
"Mad! Mad!" I cried to him.  
"You may have scarred our son for life!  
I followed you from place to place,  
from Ur to Haran, into Canaan,  
wherever God commanded you to go,  
I followed.  
Even though it pained me,  
I accepted Ishmael as yours,  
and did not wish him harm.

But this is where it ends. Enough!  
What kind of God would ask a man  
to sacrifice his son?"

But Abraham was adamant.  
"Remember:  
You were much too old to bear a child  
and yet God heard your prayers.  
Surely that is proof that he's a just and loving God."

I had no words to contradict his faith.  
"Promise me that if God speaks to you again,  
you'll share his words with me."  
Abraham agreed,  
but I did not believe him.

He thinks women are not meant to ponder God's will.  
But I think about the world, just like a man.  
I see suffering and pain that I cannot explain.  
I do not understand the mind of God.

Torn between my husband and my son  
I wept, and nightmares still trouble my sleep.  
Stay or leave? But we had nowhere else to go.

Now Isaac argues with Abraham,  
says he no longer believes in God.

I cannot put my mind at ease.  
What if that ram had not appeared?

— Miriam Aroner

## CHAOS

And the world was chaos, with darkness on the  
surface of the abyss ....

Genesis 1:2

in the eleventh dimension,  
countless multitudes of matter and mass

converge

to oscillate

on violin strings infinitely long  
and infinitesimally thin;

strings merge into strings

to emerge

as confluent membranes

vibrating

in dissonant frequencies of noise,

reverberating

in harsh crescendos of cacophony;

twisted, distorted membranes,

stretched beyond the abyss,

strain to survive,

strain to be transcribed

into the language of mathematics

until numbers burst,

until equations

collapse.

in the eleventh dimension,

innumerable parallel universes

collide  
and convulse;

frenzied rogue waves

crash  
and slam

rippled membrane into rippled membrane;

turbulent singularities

of matter-time-energy-space

explode

until quarks stop pulsating,

until equations

collapse.

in the eleventh dimension,

gravity  
dilates and dilutes,  
undulates and leaks

through porous membranes shaped as loops;

unnumbered multiple universes, convex and concave,

piled upon one another,

first totter,

then topple,

then suffocate each other,

still-breathing corpses buried inside a  
mass-grave;

thrashing sheets of rabid white energy

rip

string after string,

membrane after membrane,

as violent black waves gang-rape

big bangs that now whimper,  
crippled and abused;

spirals of density,

condensed inside the tail-end of voids,

shudder;

time is swallowed by

time,

until electrons freeze in the ice,

until equations

collapse.

from every corner of the eleventh dimension,

parallel universes

crawl

in the darkness

on their hands and knees,  
scraping and scratching their skin

on the sandpaper  
of science.

is there a twelfth dimension

where we can rise from the ashes

and learn to make sand-pies again?

why don't we hear the words,

"Let

There

Be

Light"

?

— Yakov Azriel

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Chana Cromer, **Struggled/ Dust**, 1999, 30x40 cm  
Gouache, petals and plaster on paper

### What's missing in Zoom

"the sound of your skin" \*

The depth of your chin

The breeze of your hair

The squeak of your chair

The taste of your words

The heart has not heard

– Chana Cromer

\*this line is borrowed from graffiti on a wall in a local park