# The Deronda Review

a magazine of poetry and thought

Vol. 11 No. 2 2026 $7.00/28 NIS

[untitled]

Amid the great noise
I sought a corner to write
The sorrow of my birth
To return to the womb of the earth
To the black hole
Untouched by the darkness of man
And there
To create life

*

And the days are the Days Between the Straits
And between contraction and contraction
A mother's cry is heard
A searing pain proclaims what had been Concealed
Before the womb was pierced

And the heart prophesies
That what has now been born

Will no longer be shielded or fortified
Against destruction

*

Words flow from the spring of chaos
From darkness upon the face of the deep
Attempting through utterance
To create
Light

—Tamarah Touvian

Nechama Sara Gila Nadborny Burgeman, *Beyond the Firmaments,* acrylic on canvas, 1m x 80cm. See story here!

## In This Issue

*I. Very Good 3*
*II. An Endless Gift 9*
*III. Coming to the Mystery 14*
*IV. Stages 21*
*V. In Between 29*

***CONTRIBUTOR EXCHANGE***

Below are titles of poetry collections in English by contributors, as well as URLs. For a completer listing see derondareview.org/contribex.htm.

L. Ward Abel, is the author of four full collections and eleven chapbooks of poetry, including *American Bruise (*Parallel Press, 2012), *Little Town Gods* (Folded Word Press, 2016), *A Jerusalem of Ponds* (Erbacce-Press, 2016), *The Width of Here* (Silver Bow, 2021), *Green Shoulders: New and Selected Poems 2003–2023* (Silver Bow, 2023), *and The Teller's Road* (Bottlecap, 2025).

Hayim Abramson, *Sefer Shirat HaNeshamah* (Book of Songs of the Soul), www.hayimabramson.com

Miriam Jaskierowicz Arman , *L'urlo dell'anima - Scream of the Soul* (Carthago Edizioni, 2025), *Open the Heavens for Me*: *An Ode to Hope* (2026).

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. Many of his poems can be found on the 929 Tanakh site, at https://www.929.org.il/lang/en/author/36669. Also, see http://www.pointandcircumference.com/kippatbinah/azriel.htm

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

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

Jane Blanchard's latest collections are *Metes and Bounds* (Kelsay Books, 2023) and *Furthermore* (Kelsay Books, 2025).

Jeffrey Burghauser, *I Bought an HP Office Jet* (2018), *Real Poems* (2018), *Still Telling What Is* Told (2020) *Understandings* (2021), *Some of Their Tunes* (2021), *Noble Numbers* (2023), *The Siege of Jerusalem: A Modern Version of the Anonymous Late Fourteenth Century Middle English Epic*

(2023), *Complaint: and Other Poems* (2024), *The Monody in Six Movements* (2025).

Esther Cameron's Complete Works (6 vols.) are available on Amazon. Also see www.pointandcircumference.com

Roberta Chester, *Light Years* (Puckerbush Press, 1983); *A New Song: Poems Inspired by the Weekly Torah Portion* (Mazo, 2023).

Paula Goldman, *The Great Canopy (Gival Press, 2005), Late Love* (Kelsay Press, 2020), *Late Flowering* (forthcoming, Finishing Line Press)

Alyssa A. Lappen, *The Minstrel's Song* (Cross-Cultural Communications, 2015).

James B. Nicola's latest three (of eight) poetry collections are *Fires of Heaven: Poems of Faith and Sense* (Shanti Arts, 2021), *Turns & Twists* (Cyberwit.net, 2022), and *Natural Tendencies* (Cervena Barva Press, 2023.

Susan Oleferuk, *Circling for Home* (Finishing Line Press, 2011), *Those Who Come to the Garden* (Finishing Lines Press, 2013), *Days of Sun* (Finishing Line Press, 2017), and *When There Is Little Light Left in Late Afternoon,* ( Kelsay Books, 2022).

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).

Ellen Jane Powers, *Toward the Beloved* (Finishing Line Press, 2013), *Celestial Navigation* (Cherry Grove, 2013).

Michael Roque, *Writing to a Raid Siren* (Pomegranate Press, 2026).

Vera Schwarcz, *Ancestral Intelligence* (Antrim House, 2013), *Chisel of Remembrance* (Antrim House, 2009), *A Scoop of Light* (March Street Press, 2000), *Fresh Words for a Jaded World, and Selected Poems* (Blue Feather Press, 2000). For other works see between2walls.com.

Nolo Segundo, *Soul Songs* (2022), *Of Ether and Earth* (2021), *The Enormity of Existence* (2020), all with Cyberwit Press.

***ACKNOWLEDGMENTS***

The poems on the cover are from Tamarah Touvian's book *Rei, Psi'otayich (See, Your Steps)* (Emdah, 2022).

---

THE DERONDA REVIEW (www.derondareview.org) Editor: Esther Cameron, derondareview@gmail.com. Co-editor: Mindy Aber Barad, POB 6709, Efrat, Israel; maber4kids@yahoo.com

## *I. Very Good*

CHIAROSCURO

*And God created man in His image (Gen 1:27)*

and God created light
and He saw that light was very good
it illuminated the whole world
its luminosity so intense, so brilliant
and God hid away the light from man

and Rembrandt found the light
that God had hidden away
and God commanded Rembrandt saying
use the hidden light
to illuminate mankind

and Rembrandt painted with the hidden light
and he painted darkness and he painted light
and Rembrandt saw that the darkness was good
and he saw that the light was very good
and Rembrandt created The Night Watch

and Rembrandt saw that the earthly host
half in darkness was good
and Rembrandt saw that the light of Captain Cocq was
very good
so too, the light of his lieutenant
and the little girl with the dead hen, was very good

and Rav Kook saw Rembrandt's paintings
that he had painted with the hidden light
and he perceived that Rembrandt was a *tzadik*
for Rembrandt had painted with the light
God had hidden away for messianic times

— Julian Alper

[Note: Rav Kook - Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (first Chief Rabbi of Israel) saw Rembrandt's paintings in London, where he lived from 1916-1919.]

[untitled]

jackal
crossing the night
road under our headlights
shadow moving from shadow to
shadow

— Esther Cameron

THE WATER CYCLE

S P L A S H !!
As the word erupts into the air —
A massive rock vomited explosively
From the dark cauldron of the world's seething guts,
Cooling exponentially as it plummets,
Smashing into the sea and sinking
Without trace,
Unheeded
For millennia,

But raising great daughter-plumes of water,
Fracturing into a myriad of
Glittering crystals, smoothing as they fall
To glowing satin-lustre pearls,
Salting the mountaintops,
Cascading into tinkling runnels and streams,
Launching over cap-rocks
As sparkling waterfalls into deep plunge-pools,

And mists of glistening droplets drenching tree-
canopies,
Down hundreds of metres of
Convolute vines with dripping leaves,
Onto crowning cycads
And into thunderous chasms with sodden fern banks
And steaming sunless glades,
Saturating the lush soil,
Seeping and filtering through the shales and mudstones,
Distilled,
Clear,
Pure.

— Miriam Alper

WESTERN SKY

Look at the western sky
Fading from reds to grays,
Souls like the sunset die
Worn out by their days.

Fading from reds to grays
Losing their vital zest
Worn out by their days
They sink into the west.

Losing their vital zest
Souls, like the sunset, die,
They sink into the west –
*Look* at the western sky.

— Judy Koren

FLOWER MOON

Change comes along with everything now
so much so I want to emulate June's flower moon,
a month for blooming as if there is no end to opening up.
Change works easier this way. With a willingness to move
with it whether I am exactly ready for it or not.
whether I have a clear plan or a teacher's lessons.
I am walking further than I usually do and praying
for rain even though the desert is covered with flowers,
the yucca's white petals exactly like angel's wings.
And in such a time as this with our leaders throwing
the familiar overboard willy nilly, what we know that works
gone as if we can live this way, without any touchstones.
I depend on the feel of the bark on the palm of my hand,
Aloe, what grows fatter and greener and taller than I
expected,
parsley green and lacey and ready to use for dinner.
So I stick to what I know inside me, how I imagine I will
bloom like lavender in the dark of night, take each job
and breath slow and easy, try to love again because
change
always comes with it. I'll give back, give over, try again.
No end to the flowers blossoming now in a season like
this,
familiar and new at once, so many petals blooming and
I try to do the same, a woman growing older, going for
more
as I have always done, stepping slowly, leaping with
abandon.

— Charlene Langfur

OCTOBER PAST

*"He has made everything beautiful in its time." Eccles 3:11*

Standing at this same window
I remember these October
leaves from last year
sated with smoldering orange

and again
the fire orchards bloom,
shawls of dove-white frost
are cast over gold and crimson.

No fuel in the old sun,
yearning out of tune -
still this sienna healing
seasonally resumes

at the gates of the
year's cold tomb.

— Hannah Amit

BENEATH NOMADIC STARS

I love the slight breeze
that slips beneath
the window
and wraps itself
around me
like a mantle.

At night
when the secure
house slumbers,
it's then spirit
finds fissures in casings
presses in with visions
of tree shadows dancing
like tall thin maidens on snow.

It's when I'm swaddled
in coverlets and safety
and think journeys
are surely ended
that beneath nomadic stars
from late November's glade -

I hear whispered invitations.

—Hannah Amit

SOMETHING LINGERS

It was an old woods on a damp winter day
the trees grayish green moss and vine
bark scarred and dented
like armor battered in battles as one tree leaned on
another
hurting and old
history lingers when the time gets cold

It was an old stone wall
tumbling on one side like cannonballs
tiredly separating who knows from what
a war was fought here
but that was long ago
history lingers where little grows

The squirrels had nests high in the trees
the chipmunks hid in the holes in the wall and under roots
the path was well-worn
a cold wind came to blow
it started to snow
history lingers in dreams of lost homes

My young dog began to play
the trees sprung silver wands
the old wall an ancient castle and a rock a dragon to slay
the path a way beyond
it changes, it always changes
but something lingers on.

— Susan Oleferuk

BRINTON BROOK

The day started sunny
the trail packed with ice and snow shone
then the sky darkened, darkened as if turning to night
a wind ambushed fierce and sharp
the snow came swirling wrapping white birches into
ghosts, but I felt no fear
all was apiece, in place, at peace from a larger
somewhere

I thought of all the places I had been
long broken streets I still fled in dreams
places I didn't belong
and so many places closed, blocked, locked
not free, not for many, not for me

The squirrel that ran before the snow belonged
the wind, the birches, the cold, the dark belonged
all of us made part of a complete
a composition of ground, sky, trees and snow
the borders life and death.

—Susan Oleferuk

THE WREN'S SONG

In the darkest days of winter
right before the dying light
a woman plays with her dog
and a wren sings

The woman and the dog hear the wren
singing the notes of the curves of time
harmonic motion rising and falling with the wintery ways
every evening before the coming of the night

When the dog is long gone
and the woman no more
the wren's song will still be heard
a syncopation of the season's shadowy light.

— Susan Oleferuk

STANZAS: COMPOSED WHILE WATCHING
A CARDINAL IN A SNOWSTORM

Forlorn sits a cardinal upon a bough
And naked are the branches on the tree,
Although the driving sleet, ice and snow
Has capped a winter stamp upon the lea
Still sits the cardinal upon a bough
Statue-like sits he still within the tree.

Within this barren season sits nobly
A figure abandoned waiting for spring,
A sudden side movement is but only
A trivial shedding of snow from wing,
Then resetting assumes a dignity
Of a lonesome, mute, longing for spring.

Fashioning himself with a thoughtful mien,
For whom shall he sing? Who shall seek to know
Him? Loneliness touches this winter scene
Assessing an inward hunger to grow
Scaling to point, passion and pain convene,
Waiting and yearning for someone to know.

But the quiet stillness is unbroken
And the cold, winter fury still unwrought
Of a white season that sheds no token
Of a bosom resting with joyful thought,
Perched upon a branch with song unspoken
Of a longing whose days are yet unwrought.

— Clarence P. Van Dyke

[untitled]

Green nature
Opens in me
Unknown pores
In my mumbling, confused soul
Hum of insects, dazzling sunlight
Clumps of olive trees
Running streams
Everything grows, shines
Cows lowing
Everything fruitful and multiplying
Everything perfect and beautiful
In many colors and shades of color
Quantities and directions
Vegetable and animal
Sharp and soft
Flying and crawling
Rustling and gushing
Silent and noisy
And between the stones and the soil
Edges of pale reddish potsherds
And a fragment of some vessel, sharp and dark
Silently testify
That here once walked a man or boy
Plowing a furrow
Waiting for some girl
To find earth in his eyes

—Araleh Admanit

RESURRECTION

My babies had towels
with round polar-bear ears,
a crib bird-decorated,

their night-lights were owls
to assuage midnight fears;
on their mobiles rotated

bright flowers and bees
to teach them the world
harbored treasures like these.

Will those born today know
of bees, owls or bears,
turtles scrabbling to sea

arctic foxes in snow,
so many creatures that now are so rare,
or have ceased to be?

So blinded we were, never counting the cost
of 'progress', that magical, devilish word:
can those yet unborn resurrect what we've lost?

— Judy Koren

THE GREAT EXTINCTIONS

Hail Planet Earth! You spin between bare neighbours,
Give birth to life that puts their deserts to shame—
From whales to humans, roses to giant cacti,
But to be their forever-home you cannot claim.

Five times you've let most of your creatures perish,
Though you've left enough alive to evolve again.
Perhaps to human protests you'd reply,
"Moral reasoning is *your* domain."

Yet, Planet Earth, with all your imperfections,
Your horrors even, still you touch our hearts.
Though you destroy, you also bear and feed,
And in you are rooted our sciences and arts.

—Henry Summerfield

DODO

They laughed at the curve of its beak,
at the belly soft as unmailed clouds,
at the idiot dignity
with which it greeted sailors.

No cathedral warned the bird.

No prophet descended
through Mauritian rain
crying:

***[Beware the species that names everything]***

The dodo had evolved
without a grammar for fear.

No wolves.
No gunpowder.
No Portuguese syllables
dragging iron through mangroves.

Just fruitfall,
salt wind,
the long blue mathematics of tides.

Then came men—

their ships swollen
with rats and hunger.

History entered the island
wearing boots.

The bird vanished stupidly,
which is to say:

trustingly.

And now children draw it
with cartoon eyes,
as if extinction were adorable,
as if the dead owe us charm.

Somewhere beneath museum glass
its bones still rehearse
the oldest equation of empire:

**[Discovery = Permission to Destroy]**

—Tushar Sen

FRANKLIN TREE

The last wild one
disappeared quietly.

Trees prefer that.

No headlines followed
its extinction beside the Altamaha.

Only wind
cataloguing absence
through Georgia marshes.

Yet the species refused
to die completely.

A few cuttings survived
in botanical gardens,
trimmed and watered
by careful human guilt.

Imagine the humiliation:

to exist only because
your executioners became sentimental.

The Franklin tree blooms now
like a memory on life support.

White petals.
Golden center.
A floral ghost rehearsing itself
for nobody ancestral.

It has no wilderness left
to return to.

Only fences, labels,
curated soil.

Only the sterile mercy
of preservation.

And every spring it flowers
with the exhausted grace
of something asking:

***Is survival still survival***

when the forest itself
has forgotten your name?

—Tushar Sen

THE WINDS SURROUNDING THE FIRE

This gentle land I know
changed I know not why, not slow
unlike the seasons in their holiday dress

Trees are broken, bent and charred
smoke speaks earth to harmed and psyche scarred
smirking looks of money passed, burnt books
amnesia of depth and complexity
only left is the enemy
you against me
not war blaring rage
maws open
lies mechanically spoken

Ignorance was ever lauded
never the route to progress or goodness
the ten brought down from a mountain
let's add to the count
who and what is left out

History praises the conquerors of lands
history derides the conquerors of their lands
someone always wants what is not theirs
someone always wants to control :Black, Brown,
Women, Weak and Poor
their soul is twisted by desire
but they can never control the winds surrounding the fire.

— Susan Oleferuk

RFRC

Online I had
ordered the way cool kit
with a self-assembly algorithm.
The drone conveying
a cryptically wrapped egg carton,
full but almost buoyant in air,
alighted on my stoop.

Bubble pack vaporized on touchdown,
one oval titanium shell silently slid open,
and out popped a downy proto-droid,
within hours blossoming into a full size
Radio Free Range Chicken,
Model 83W529FX3N6-7.

Sweet Chicky and I headed out
to my wireless coop,
where she convincingly
pecked, preened, and also
Fourier-transformed signals
from my hand held
official 4-H fob.

But then I noticed a
suspicious metallic ticking,
barely audible beneath all the lifelike
clucking and squawking.
Who would embed such a thing?
Was my new purchase
the latest link in Russia's
autonomous kill chain,
tempting geeks like me
with faux reminders of
Mama's matzo ball soup?

—Donald Mender

THE FAIRYTALE'S OVER

The credits rolled
on a predictable "happily ever after" note.
Bambi, triumphant, stood with his dad,
seven dwarfs chased the Evil Queen
off the mountain's ledge
and a generation of kids
were tucked into a million little racecar beds.

A generation adrift in dreams,
snoozed through their fairytales
flattened by the collapsed walls
of a caved-in 20th century,
AWOKE to mounting debts.
AWOKE on sidewalks.
AWOKE to the reality
that this movie was never Disney,
but just a handful of happy little scenes
in a bizarre film by Fellini.

—Michael Roque

WARM BREEZE

Warm breeze, where have you been so long
were you in mighty trees watching an eaglet born
and in joy sliding over sky, plains and sea

Warm breeze you are needed
for many a head is low in despair
somewhere geese are flying on your paths
and the cottonwood flies like fairy spells
bare dirt is not enough to hold a dreaming soul
so one must look up

Warm breeze, so many messages you carry
I know which one is for me
its smell, its feel, its memory

Warm breeze, fare thee well
mercurial, flirtatious, capricious perhaps
powerful still
we will hold
earth and sea we will hold
till our hours run out and we can no longer feel, we will hold.

— Susan Oleferuk-

A PRAYER OF PLANET EARTH

At first they were weak, far-flung,
at first they were very few
and scattered thinly among
my rivers, grasslands, trees:
I could shake them off like fleas
from a dog's back. But they grew
in power, cunning, might:
more numerous than the stars at night.

Then they eclipsed the stars
with their artificial light,
made weapons, started wars:
proud, foolish, vain, headstrong,
whatever they did was wrong
and in their eagerness to fight
each other, they couldn't see
that what they were destroying was me.

I prayed for a clean sweep,
for the broom of evolution
to fling them onto the rubbish heap
of the universe — a solution
arrived at, unhappily, too late:
even the Lord can make a mistake,
(at least so it appears)
once in a couple of million years.

Dying, I dream of recreation,
the miracle of rebirth:
the joy and exultation
of a newborn Planet Earth:
surely You can do that, Lord?
all that's needed is Your word—
but please, take my advice:
don't create humans twice!

— Judy Koren

RIVER REFLECTIONS

Under deep-linen water
in-the-midst of a copse,
that which is heavy
such as a hickory limb
felled by wind and
fallen into soft chalk arms,
sinks and remains
a part of things

that which is weightless
though not scorned,
first kiss or a fairy charm
is danced down the estuary
around corners
and into campfire reflections
on a distant shore.

Such things insubstantial
will come around again
wet and useless in late autumn
perhaps in winter,
seeking pity and comfort
in the arms of a mother.

And she will run
from the edge
of a grace-filled river
to embrace them.
She will hide them
in the heart of a
drowned shellbark
never to be forgotten
or again taken lightly.

—Hannah Amit

**BS"D, 1 Nissan 5786, between sunset and starshine**

Ten
Crowns of radiance wait to be revealed
Wait for a sign
For the time

A ray of East ignites the heavens
Light clothes itself in a vessel

An arrow cleaves the firmament to smite wickedness
A steadfast home front murmurs prayers anticipates deliverance

The humbled
Their outcry bursts
From sealed cellars of falsehood

— Tziporah Faiga Lifshitz

---

## *II. An Endless Gift*

MAP OF ISRAEL

I gaze at the map
and picture the snow-capped Hermon
rising above God's own country
like a rampant blue and white lion.
My eyes take in milk-white water
gushing through the folds of the map
filling a blue harp.
I see fields full of honey-sweet
freshly baked bread, cake and cookies
red and white wines growing on vines
and bees and birds thrumming praises to God.
My lips taste the salt of the Med
as its surf laps the edge of the map.
My fingers feel the smooth stones of the
ever-touched Wall, separating
the wailing of yesteryear's sorrows from
the golden light of the modern State.
My ears are struck by prayers
and tears of the sick and needy
ascending heavenward
knocking on God's ever open door.
And I smell the savoury aroma of freshly
cooked meats and fish
welcoming the Shabbat queen.

I fold the map
and place its well-worn warmth in the
inside pocket of my jacket -
Jerusalem touching my heart.

—Julian Alper

[Untitled]

Ecclesiastes offered us a value system;
but who has spoken of birth? Itself
a true miracle. The gift of my body
pushed humans into this world who
could see, hear, cry, grow up, think, speak.
In 1948, as a young teen, a different birth:
I strutted around the one room synagogue
set above a shoe repair shop until funds later
allowed its congregants to buy a house to transform
into a shul. The prancing was the birth of Israel.
Words, mimeographed with its purple ink staining,
spoke of this birth of a country where Jews would
sing and grow minus pogroms and death camps.
A speck of land surrounded by hostility was a gift.
While birth ultimately leads to death, and we're not
really taught about life cycle by parents or teachers,
it is always a 'beginning', a chance to enrich and
realize that only G-d can allow such an extraordinary
event.

— Lois Greene Stone

*TWO POEMS FOR "HILLTOP YOUTH"*

SOMEWHERE IN THE HILLS

I saw something different,
I saw something new,
I saw something beautiful,
I saw something moving.

I saw youths focused on their goal –
To settle the hill.

No house, no door, no windows,
A structure open to the four winds.

The landscape similar to their souls:
Everything open, everything broad, everything
breathing, everything alive.

A moving coordination between the landscape and
those youths,
From the landscape they learned the colorful expanse of
spirit and feeling.

They aren't disturbed by the difficulties of the terrain,
The main thing is to live on the hill.
The main thing is to breathe the air of a hill in the land of
Israel.

Somewhere on the hill time has no meaning,
They're not running, no one has a stop-watch,

They are learning to enjoy what there is, what is developing.
They build knowing that at any moment destruction may arrive again and again.
They do not give up,
They are like the baby learning to stand on its feet –
Falling and getting up again, till he's stable, till they're settled.

The hill is their refuge.
Where the enemy watches them with intent to hurt,
When the shepherd walks alone in the space with the sheep.

This refuge is where anarchists will come with the enemy,
To support the enemy.
This refuge is where policemen and soldiers will come to evacuate them with violence,
Seizing the basic equipment they need to survive in primitive conditions.
And all these paradoxes do not impress them,
Do not affect them.
For somewhere on the hill a whole world is developing,
Growing and being destroyed again and again,
And being rebuilt.
Somewhere on a hill they are building a rectified world, a Jewish world,
With deep roots in earth and soul.

Somewhere on a hill progress has no meaning.
Somewhere on a hill they know what to do and how to do it
In the face of innumerable obstacles.

For somewhere on a hill light and darkness mingle and confront each other
Till the infinite light shall conquer the darkness.

THE HILL AND THE YOUTHS

The youths watch the hill from afar.
With a happy heart they say to it quietly:
"Soon we will come and set up an outpost on you."
The hill smiles at them and gets excited.
"Come, but be aware –
They will come many times to destroy
All that you will build."
The youths are not afraid:
"They can destroy shacks and fences,
But who can break our spirit?"
The hill is so happy, it answers them:
"I'm waiting for you, come and build."
And they ascend.
They begin to build little by little, step by step.
No electricity, but the light in their hearts illumines everything.
No heating, but they warm themselves with words of Torah and a small fire.
No beds on the outpost –
They manage with a thin mattress like a royal surface.
No guns, for they are forbidden to carry guns; but faith and alertness are their defense.

They don't really sleep, either by day or by night.
They tense at every noise. Flashlight in hand, they guard the hill.
They have no "permit" to be here, but they remember the promise
That the Creator of the world gave to Abraham:
"To your seed I will give this land."
The hill has already been conquered with love.
It knows that there will still be days of destruction,
Blows, humiliations, perhaps arrests.
But it knows that nothing will defeat their devotion to their hill.
Not cold, not rain, not mud, not thorns and not the enemy —
Nothing will change their decision to live here.
Through fire and water, the youths will always return.
The hill and the youths have signed a soul-contract
And on the seal, in letters of gold, is written:
"We will settle the hill to all eternity."
And from that day
The hill and the youths were never parted.

— Simcha Bakshiel

WHEN TORAH WAS EVERYWHERE
דָּרַשׁ עוּבַר גְּלִילָאָה: בְּהֶמָה שֶׁנִּבְרֵאת מִן הַיַּבָּשָׁה -- Chullin 27

Once upon a time (and before too long,
again), Torah knowledge spread widely,
like water upon the face of the earth.

Ancient rabbis learned from a passing Galilean
the art of kosher slaughtering for animals.
Birds and fish are different. But this traveler
taught that mammals come from earth, hence
need to have a clean cut to both
trachea and esophagus.

Even if we know more about the genetics
of evolution than a long-ago itinerant Jew,
we still quote and follow his views.
Knowledge of Torah is no elitist pastime.
It is a democratic privilege which we would
do well to embrace and refine so as to prepare
the world to be enveloped by wisdom once again.

— Vera Schwarcz

JUGULAR OF CONSCIENCE
מִשֶּׁנִּבְרְאוּ לָאָדָם נֶאֱסַר לָהֶן בְּשַׂר נְחִיר – Chullin 17

Meat! Oh the cruel desire of humanity!
Permitted first to Noach, survivor
of the world's destruction.

Jews, survivors of slavery in Egypt,
also longed for, complained about
fleshpots. Drowned in quails and disfavor.
Still, meat we seem to crave. While
wandering in the desert, stabbing
sufficed, so Rav Akiva tells us.

When we finally entered the Land of Israel,
a new standard for morality kicks in.
We use and endlessly check knives!
We are challenged to become more than
we were. To grow conscious of the animal's
pain and cry. We eat meat, and sometimes
merit to cry for the life taken for our satiety.

Look at the sharp, ever sharpened blade.
It cuts close to the jugular of conscience too.

— Vera Schwarcz

UNDER THE ROTEM TREE
"וְהוּא הָלַךְ בַּמִּדְבָּר דֶּרֶךְ יוֹם, וַיָּבוֹא וַיֵּשֶׁב תַּחַת רוֹתֶם אֶחָד.
מלכים א' יט:ד
"And he went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under one rotem tree."
1 Kings 19:4

Eliyahu haNavi
was sitting under the rotem tree.
From the wicked queen and king he fled
with the shade of the rotem on his head.

> Oh, you wicked queen and king,
> why do you do this evil thing?
> You treat our prophet with no respect.
> Your spark of goodness I can't detect.
> Eliyahu is a man so fine.
> He comes every Pesach to drink some wine.

But the queen and the king didn't care at all.
They just worshipped their stupid Baal.
But the prophet can foresee their fall.
When Mashiach arrives he'll sound the call.
Then we'll go to Gan Eden and all will be well,
and the queen and the king can go to Hell.

— Pesach Rotem

A TALMUDIC BALLAD (Bava Kamma 117)

To Yavneh Rav Kahana came,
Preceded by renown
Which he had earned among the wise
Who taught in Babylon.

Rav said to him "You are welcome here,
For we have heard your praise,
But though you are great in Babylon,
You do not know our ways.

"Therefore I bid you promise
That you will sit and hear
And ask no questions of the rav
For the space of seven years."

He vowed, and thereon made his way
To Rav Yochanan's study hall,
Where sat before him in seven rows
His diligent students all.

Seven cushions had those students brought
To make Rav Yochanan's seat,
That from above them he might teach,
As surely was most meet.

They seated Rav Kahana
With the foremost and the best,
Looking to hear wise questions
From the distinguished guest.

Rav Yochanan gave his lesson,
He clinched his point, and ceased,
And looked at Rav Kahana—
Rav Kahana held his peace.

"And have you then no questions?
Is there no more to know?
I think, dear Rabbi, that your place
Is in the second row."

Rav Kahana got up and changed,
Though it grieved his heart full sore;
And since he would not break his word,
This happened six times more.

And when he sat in the seventh row,
He said, "It seems to me
That seven rows are seven years,
And therefore I am free."

Then up got Rav Kahana,
He stood up on his feet
And called unto Rav Yochanan,
"What you have said, repeat!"

Rav Yochanan fulfilled his wish
And his first lesson retold,
The questions Rav Kahana asked
Were hard as iron cold.

"Well asked, well asked indeed!" declared
Rav Yochanan forthwith,
And bade his guest move up a row
And listen from the sixth.

Rav Yochanan spoke, Rav Kahana asked,
And each time changed his place
Until once more the two of them
Were sitting face to face.

When the eighth time Rav Yochanan spoke,
Rav Kahana questioned fair,
Rav Yochanan got up and gave
Him a cushion from his chair.

And as six times the same recurred,
Rav Yochanan sat on the floor.
Then he looked at Rav Kahana straight on,
Which he had not done before,

And lo, Rav Kahana's lip seemed curled
With a sneer of scorn and pride –
Rav Yochanan flashed him a look of fire
So he toppled down and died!

Then someone rushed up to explain:
"It was no sneer you saw.
Rav Kahana's mouth was ever wry—
It is a facial flaw."

Rav Yochanan revived him then,
But still the lesson's clear:
Whomever sits up front to teach
The student must revere!

— Esther Cameron

*from **BAR NONE***

**NATHAN & CHORUS:**
*Judea's my home; aromatics, my Rome;*
*A fine reputation, my aim;*
*Abundance, my well of relief; the gazelle,*
*My patroness; Nathan, my name.*

**NARRATOR:**
There once was a Jew in Jerusalem who,
One classily desolate day
Beset with a tea-&-tobacco ennui,
Decided to host a soirée.

His appetent hands & irriguous lands
Were full with phenomenal wealth—
His gamekeepers, aides & young scullery maids
Proceeding with servile stealth.

He wanted a board (therefore) fit for a lord,
Remorselessly heavy with fine
Iberian plates of Samarian dates,
Soufflé, & Falernian wine.

Content with his clout, he was thinking about
The guests who would enter his door.

**NATHAN:**
Selecting them has as much urgency as
Selecting the vintage to pour.

**NARRATOR:**
This prosperous peer soon dispatched his vizier
Across his demesne to request
In sumptuous speech the attendance of each
Uncommonly fortunate guest.

**NATHAN & CHORUS:**
*Prestige is my mirth; gold & silver, my hearth;*
*A hint of compassion, my shame;*
*An impulse, my don; the ĭndĭffĕrĕnt swan,*
*My patroness; Nathan, my name.*

**NARRATOR:**
Ascending a step to determine that prép-
Ărátĭons were well underway,
The man had to laugh: riches choreograph
The Lord of the Manor's ballet.

This frankincense thinned in the citrusy wind.
Vibrato was taught how to stir
An atmosphere blued with galbanum & oud,
Ŏpópŏnăx, nutmeg & myrrh—

An atmosphere sweet with Jordanian heat,
Darbukas, æstheticized sprigs
Of olive & shapes reminiscent of grapes,
Flamingo tongues, custard & figs—

An atmosphere fine with persimmon & pine
Acacia, bassoons & effete
Varieties of prototypical love.
The builder regarded it meet

Thereto to convene a rare traceried screen
Of ánĭsŏtrópĭc'llў queer
Mahagony wood. It was there Nathan stood,
Observing the people appear.

There once was a Jew in Jerusalem who
Looked up from his goblet, surveyed
His guests in the round & indignantly found
A dire mistake had been made.

Annealing his face in malevolent grace,
Attention aloof as a spear,
This Nathan proceeded immediately
To rémŏnstráte with his vizier.

**NATHAN:**
I've long known a Jew in Jerusalem who
Is warmed by Civility's flame.
Unreason's his reasoning; elegant ease,
His currency; Kamẓa, his name.

There's also a Jew in Jerusalem to
Whom infamy passes for fame.
Chagrin is his wine; old resentment, his mine
Of amber; *Bar*-Kamẓa, his name.

As always, my clerk, simply brilliant work,

**NARRATOR:**
The vicious aristocrat un-
Forgivingly sneers,

**NATHAN:**
_____—for you have, it appears,
Invited the incorrect one.

— Jeffrey Burghauser

[Note: this piece is based on theTalmudic story of Kamza and Bar-Kamza, in which "causeless hatred" started a chain of events that led to the destruction of the Temple. -- EC]

FUEL

Incendiary headlines
begin the
Book of Esther 2.0:
*Haman Mines Hormuz!*

So suddenly, just now,
an entire fired up globe,
craving oil,
is writing its own
Megillah.

But will today's scribes
red-pencil the part about
flaming high tech arrows
poised to barbecue
the rib cages
of Mordecai,
Mattathias,
et al.?

Beating hearts
within those
storied chests,
targeted by
a legacy of
rogue grill masters,
have already outlived

Antiochus's
siege,
the auto-de-fe's
pyres and,
while the world
shrugged,
24-hour-a-day
smokestacks.

—Donald Mender

WHO THE HELL ARE THE HOUTHIS?

Who the hell are the Houthis,
and why do they act so mean?
We had enough problems already,
before the Houthis arrived on the scene.

We had enemies a-plenty,
enemies all about.
We had Hezbollah to the north of us
and Hamas down in the south.

Then all of a sudden
the Houthis appear.
They came to sow chaos,
mayhem, and fear.

They came out of nowhere
to add to our woes.
They came out of Yemen
and linked arms with our foes.

One shot to the airport
was all that they need
to make the airlines cancel flights
and the tourists to stampede.

Donald Trump extols their bravery
but I must disagree.
They are just a bunch of cowards
as far as I can see.

How I hate those horrible Houthis!
I hate them with all my might!
I would like to catch just one of them
and beat him in a fight.

>>>

I'd kick him in the *tuchus*.
I'd punch him in the nose.
I'd call him lots of dirty names
and stomp down on his toes.

That would teach him a lesson.
I hope he learns it well.
I hope all of those goddamn Houthis
drop dead and go to hell.

— Pesach Rotem

THE KABBALIST
*after lines by Pär Lagerkvist*

What nourishes the soul like longing for
what can't exist, knowing it can't exist?
You are not light, for You created light.
You are not dark, for You created dark.
You cannot be, for Being comes from You.
Let gentiles dream their way into Your arms,
burning themselves away in ecstasies.
What is their bliss against this emptiness?
What union ravishes like loneliness?
I reach for You, and find that you are Nothing.

To seek for God, knowing there is no God,
is holier than faith held to be true–
more wondrous, strange, than any God could be.
Why should a creature cry out in the dark,
petitioning a void that does not hear?
Why should that be? It is this mystery
which makes the cry itself a holy thing.

I pray this cosmic heartache never fades.
I pray that I may never be at peace.
May neither death nor life be solved for me.
O let me search unendingly for You,
with death forever biting at my heels.

— Elijah Blumov

THE SABBATH

To build a shrine of time requires toil.
We rest so we may put ourselves to work
constructing stained glass visions of attention,
and when we rest, we rest from all distraction.
Tonight, the world becomes our synagogue,
the house where we are married to our God,
and every act is prayer, means to caress
this bride whose body we cannot resist.
She is the beauty of a blade of grass,
she is the rot which makes us grass ourselves,
the lurking fear of death, the awe of living,
an endless gift demanding endless giving.
Tonight, *Shalom* is not a dream we've missed,
but fierce embrace of all that must exist.

— Elijah Blumov

HIDDEN/REVEALED

what was hidden was or is latent
from Dead Sea Scrolls to *Oyneg Shabos* Archives
with other momentous discoveries of many kinds
The Aleppo Codex the Ark of the Covenant and such

Hashem hid the first light and leviahan's meat for
tzadikim
hidden forced *anusim* have come to light
and no person knows the Name of G-d
all of these share the common thread of Israel's survival

the mashiach will be born
nobody knows exactly when and how
what was or is latent waits the right moment

—Hayim Abramson

---

## *III. Coming to the Mystery*

TOMORROW

"tomorrow the war starts"
And I'll give birth
In the parking lot
Meters below
The battlefield

This country
This place
Trying
Seeking
To be born
To thrive

Wars raging
And I teach my children
About
The importance
The magnificence
Of life
Life here
Israel
War
Or not
Birth
Or not

—Mindy Aber Barad

THE BIRTH OF SAMUEL

"And he had two wives: the name of one was Hannah … and Hannah had no children." -- (First Samuel 1:2)

I.

The poorest servant-girl can have a child,
A beggar's daughter can give birth — not I,
Who listens as they sing a lullaby
About a vineyard, lush and undefiled.
A bear, a wolf, a leopard — every wild,
Ferocious beast can nurse its young — not I,
Who once had seen a dreaming baby cry,
Then smile, recalling how his mother smiled.

A crab can reproduce, as can a vile
And loathsome snake, as can the smallest fly —
Not I. The fecund earth explodes with life,
With progeny, with sons and daughters, while
Bereft of leaf or root, I slowly die,
A withered plant, an empty, barren wife.

II.

A month goes by, another month goes by,
And then a third, a fourth, without a sign
Of blood; a fifth — can they stretch out to nine
Full months of pregnancy? At night I try
To sleep, but cannot sleep; instead, I tie
My dreams with stems, imagining the vine
My little girl will plant, or Sabbath wine
My little boy will learn to sanctify.

What miracle is this, O Lord of life,
That in my womb, I cultivate a child,
The seed for whom I prayed. My husband's eyes
Are filled with tears when he beholds his wife,
When he embraces me; his voice is mild
And very soft, while by my side he lies.

—Yakov Azriel

BIRTH

And we got to the hospital
And she writhes in great suffering
"Epidural" I yell to the nurses and there are no delivery rooms
And all night she screams in great suffering in the pupils of a little girl
Our father in heaven Rock of Israel
Women pass through the delivery room like Rebecca like Rachel
I hold the lands of a doe whose womb is narrow
And cry like her from dire straits
I summon for her the serpent the dragon who will bite and open her
And there are no delivery rooms in the rooms of the heart that are so closed
In the end the pulse failed
In the end emergency surgery
In the end
The sea was split and an angel was sent
In the end a beautiful baby girl wrapped like a bride
Whispers to me the mystery of the doe

—Chana Kremer (tr. EC)

[untitled]

You peck the egg of the belly
And hop forth from your mother's foliage

And now – the circle of a head
A body, oval, like a pebble from the brook
Vibration of the yo-yo string of the navel-cord
And your own tune
To a weeping already wept.

—Tom Hadani Nave (tr. EC)

PROVISIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

Tonight is already Nissan, my mother is on the birthing-stool
And I must be born.
I shall have to complete the daily quota of bricks
For the dough of my fathers who are wearing out
Has not had time to rise to words

Tonight is already Nissan a night of legend
I prepare the quota of song
From the dough that has not yet risen
To bake the image of myself

I take the quota of bricks
From my ancestors men of time
I prepare the plan of my birth
I speak to them softly.
I prepare my own provisions for the journey.

I walk among them they are calm in their being.
I walk among them now.
I take from them my provisions, my placenta,
So as to be born.

—Balfour Hakak (tr. EC)

[untitled]

After I was born
Light palpated
Drouth scorched
Emptiness grated:
Wrap yourself in skin
Be one

Alone
An alien teat
Where has the Presence gone?

—Sara Friedland ben Arza (tr. EC)

THE SOUL'S JOURNEY

I am a soul
Behind the hard shell
In the past

I am the light
That pierces the dark
Of alienation.

Above me
The dark smoke quickly
Disperses.

Below me
A piece of earth –
Everything passes.

I am the beginning
Of a new era,
A different story.

—Eva Rotenberg

ETERNAL COVENANT

A river of love flows
Through me to my daughter,
Through her to her daughter – my granddaughter.

This is a covenant of a heart that melts
At every wail and hint of smile;
A covenant of pacification
Of bleary eyes
After a sleepless night,
A covenant of eternal servitude.

I dip my head
In the tiny body of my granddaughter
And a jasmine milk is absorbed in me
Addictive
As the fragrance of the Temple incense.

She is calm, my daughter,
An angel of compassion and tenderness
Has touched her face
So that her eyes shine
Her heart widens
To wonder.
A single navel-cord
Is strung from me to her
From her to her daughter
And all that will come after her.

—Iona Tor (tr. EC)

AFTER THE BIRTH OF JACOB AND ESAU
"When her [Rebecca's] time to give birth came, behold — twins in her womb." (Genesis 25:24)

My grandsons sleep. And as they stir, the years
When my wife and I could not conceive a child,
When my son as well seemed cursed, bewitched, beguiled,
When our lives were ruled by sterile, barren tears,
Are pushed aside. My grandsons sleep. My hairs

Are gray and few; my voice, now soft and mild,
Has lost its former force, when words were piled
Like stones on walls erecting forts of prayers.

My grandsons sleep; I look at them and cry,
Then bow before my God who's shown me grace,
Who let me know today that all the pain,
The sacrifices made, the scoffers' "why,"
The stubborn faith that God will show His face —
It hasn't been in vain, no, not in vain.

—Yakov Azriel

THE HIGH PRIEST BESIDE THE BLOODY PLACENTA

On Shavuot of 5701 (June 1941) there was a pogrom against the Jews of Baghdad (the "Farhud"). It went on for two days, with the encouragement of the German ambassador, Fritz Grobba. Among the murdered were the two older brothers of Saida Hakak, the mother of the twins Herzl and Balfour Hakak. Their birth seven years after the pogrom was received as a compensation and replacement. The wise men of Baghdad said to Yitzchak Habshah, our bereaved grandfather, after twins were born to his daughter, "You have received two in exchange for two." The family myth was revealed to the poets only when they were 29 when they read the book *Golim VeGeulah* (Exiles and Redemption) which was published in that year. – Herzl Hakak

My grandfather dreamed that someday he would be
seen sitting
In the council of the Sanhedrin. To bear witness as one
who had studied Torah

With the descendants of Amoraim. And the testimony
oozed blood.
For his firstborn sons had perished in the Farhud.
His holy heart saw the palace, and also the palaces
That stood above it. The congregation of Baghdad
waited for the rectification
That would tell deliverance and arise. For coming
generations.
His father, Tzion Habshah, clutched a dripping
document.
Rabbi Meir, light of the Tannaim. Hath given and taken
away. Such Torah.
The whole congregation came to the wedding of his
eldest daughter
To bring back life from bereavement. To bring back the
glory.
The grandfather whispered a longing spell. The wind
threatens to sweep us away.
And who will tell the bleeding testimony. The holy
wedding will slake
Souls from the water-bottle.
And to the congregation came the day of replacement.
Two born in one placenta.
To give light to sorrow. At the wedding they saw: the
rabbi of Baghdad
Came back from Sheol. From the blood.

Grandfather was uplifted, the sandak of twins. In a
whisper he heard
His two dead sons above with a sorrowful heavenly
voice:
Father, now we have seen you return to holiness. To the
Ark.
Beside the redeemed and the rolled parchments, a
sandak whose voice cracked.
And it is written in the words of the Sanhedrin: days are
coming.
And they so fear His face without its fearful garments.

—Herzl Hakak

THE DAY MOTHER GAVE BIRTH

The day Mother gave birth
I came to the world
The angel struck me on the mouth according
To the Word
The world was broken then
And I saw the light.

The light of dawn came to me
When I came to the mystery of the whole world
And the waters washed me
According to the navel.
And I was mute.

When my mother give birth
The sun stood still
I found myself
On the edge of a dream
On the edge of the abyss.

On the day of birth
The world trembled
On the day the mother gave birth
The broken world was
Whole.

—Balfour Hakak

***BEN-ONI***

"And as her soul was departing — for she [Rachel] was dying — she called his name '*Ben-Oni*' ['the son of my sorrow']. But his father [Jacob] named him 'Benjamin' ['the son of my right hand']. Thus Rachel died; and she was buried on the way to Efrat, which is Bethlehem." (Genesis 35:18-19)

*Ben-Oni*, do you hear me? It is I, your mother, calling
out to you;
I want to kiss and cradle you, little one; — but I cannot.

*Ben-Oni*, I am singing a lullaby to you; can you hear it?
A lullaby of a little goat fed raisins and almonds.

*Ben-Oni*, the raisins will help the little goat grow strong
And agile enough to leap over all fences.

*Ben-Oni*, the almonds will nourish him and let him hear
voices
That sing lullabies in his dreams.

*Ben-Oni*, you are my little goat; jump this high fence and
come to me
If only for the fleetness of a dream.

*Ben-Oni*, do you hear me singing in your dreams?
Do you dream of me as I dream of you?

*Ben-Oni*, I stretch out my hands; can you stretch out
your fingers
To grasp my raisins and almonds, my songs, my
dreams?

If only I could hold you, little one —
If only for a while — if only once.

—Yakov Azriel

LEAH'S EYES

"And Leah's eyes were soft …" (Genesis 29:17)

Soften my eyes, like Leah's, who used to look
At each child as if he were her only one,
He alone her evening moon and morning sun,
A page inscribed to her in a treasured book.
Soften my eyes, like Leah's, who never took
A child's hug for granted, but used to run
To bake her children bread when there was none,
To hold each frightened child when forests shook.

Grant me the skill to love — a mother's love,
To see my sons with Leah's eyes and grace;
To hear the silence in my daughter's sighs;
To put a father's hand in a mother's glove;
To accept my children's flaws; and in each face,
To find, reflected, the light of Leah's eyes.

—Yakov Azriel

UNLOCKING THE SKY

*from Celestial Navigation (2013)*

Each year you reminded me of the black
and blue cry of my own birth, the breech
delivery that pulled your pulse toward it.
You told me my wailing was a bitter awakening
to a human form separated from everything,
and you knew from the sound I wouldn't stay easily.

This year on your birthday, when I call and sing to you,
bless you for your presence that's held me here
since birth, and recall to you, mother,
how I cried, how I wept at my own
coming, you had forgotten the story–
the stroke having blocked it from your own body.

But you had told me I cried, mother! How I cried
at my entrance into this world of sharp-eared
dogs that chase and bite small children mailing letters
at the corner postbox. You heard my wound, mother,
not from you, but for the heaviness of walking
on pavements to schools, to playgrounds never having
enough green–never enough green.

Don't you remember, mother, telling me this sorrow,
your tears for the child who didn't want
to arrive to hairbrushes and dull brown coats
and mittens, who wanted to jump instead
into an empty sky, the seat of the swing
twisting from its sudden loss of weight,
swinging, alone, earthward, as I let go.

—Ellen Jane Powers

CHILD OF THE STORM

She remembered the night
He was born, in the midst
Of the fiercest thunder storm
Of the season

Surely, the storm did not
Portend his eventual outcome
For both parents loved him,
Cared for him, nurtured him

Perhaps he would be famous
With his wonderful singing
Voice and beautiful songs
Songs all written by him

Perhaps, he would be president
But, no. He chose instead to
Join that group, where he became
Fully radicalized

And, in time, he learned to kill
By many different means, always
Eager to inflict harm on his
Perceived enemies

So now he sits in prison,
Proud of the acts that he
Committed; proud of the
Harm that he's done

And, while his father still
Visits him at times, his mother
Cannot bring herself to look upon
Him. No, she can only weep

—Dawn McCormack

BIRTH IN THE STORM, AND THE TIMES CHANGED

Birth of a world in the immigrant camp. A new age.
Mother senses it.
Remembers birthing in exile, sensation of redemption.
Feels the pang breaking.
The foundations of the world on the birthing stool. In
the eye of the storm. She saw.
To the right of them and to the left. Like a serving-maid
beholding the nation in its hour.

A world of redemption dawned, the birth hastened its
bursting-forth.
With the returned from wandering. To restore to the
homeland its lost
Voices. Here in the tents of the immigrant camp Mother
arose

From her breaking: you children will sing of the wonder,
A heavenly voice asked, her voice restored: who has
borne me these.
Her lips gave voice to the sleepers. Dreams, the
rectification of worlds.
There is nowhere to go back to. This is handed on from
generation to generation.
The shining secret: there is life that is potent, that will be
revealed
Only in art, only when the song is composed.
The Redemption knew generations that rose and died
In constriction and effacement. A nation is born.
The remnant and the lost like a bird that escaped.
Mother knew: the world is broken, the immigrant camp
Is a broken revelation, a land beyond.

Light and darkness touched each other by turns.
You were born as the times were changing.
My children, this is the rectification of a dream and a
name, write in your poems.
In a time of shuddering and trembling a foundation is
created a mystery bears witness.
The record of days will settle what was crooked. And
also the future.

—Herzl Hakak

MODEH ANI

At night? Exhausted. Grateful to be gone.
My mortal thoughts come morning: shuddering breaths,
the vision spilling in. Old novelties:
the cracking, aching limbs, the creaking yoke
of sentience returning. Reeling on
this mandatory carousel of days,
I wake to the raw strangeness Being is.
And you shall know the true God by the fact
that faith is not required. No, you veil
His brutal presence just to stay intact.

—Elijah Blumov

[Note: "Modeh ani" (I give thanks) are the first words of the prayer said upon waking]

THE BIRTH OF VENUS BY SANDRO BOTTICELLI
(c. 1484–1486)

She arrives
before the world has learned
what to call her.

The sea releases her slowly,
without struggle,
without storm.

Water still clings
to the edges of her body
as if unwilling
to surrender its shape.

She stands upon the shell
not balanced,
but suspended—
held by a moment
that has not decided
whether it belongs to earth
or myth.

The wind moves toward her
before touch exists.

Hair lifts across her skin,
gold drawn into motion,
covering and revealing
at once.

Nothing here hungers yet.
Desire has not entered
the body as possession.

Beauty remains
without consequence,
seen
before it is wanted.

The figure waiting on shore
extends a cloak
like the beginning
of history.

Fabric prepared
to name, contain,
and place her
inside the human world.

But not yet.

For now,
she remains untouched—

not innocent,
but unclaimed,

standing at the edge
of arrival,

where beauty first appears

and does not yet know
what it will awaken.

—Tushar Sen

PLATO'S CAVE

In the beginning – all tales of creation
start so – there's a thought, or perhaps an idea,
a tale that demands to be told – now, here!
a picture that forms in your imagination
or the notes of a song, begging to be heard,
an image – a tree, a view, a bird. . .

Or your love-child, a poem, takes shape in your mind
entrancing as shadows in Plato's cave,
but pinning her down into form, into line,
into free verse or metre, is hard to achieve –
like a fractious toddler, she *will* not behave,
the web that you're weaving she wants to unweave.

Still births and miscarriages, then, are rife,
parenting years after birth not unknown,
launching her into the world causes strife
and heartbreak – this child that you thought was your own
they reject, or read into her views you disown
and never intended: she's theirs now for life.

But despite all the setbacks, you persevere
in tempting her out of her shadowy cave
to the world of reality: yes, you fear
she may be forgotten – but what if she's saved?
through her you may know some small measure of fame:
perhaps she will live, and preserve your name.

—Judy Koren

LOT'S WIFE

When Lot's wife hurriedly left her home in Sodom,
a pot on the hearth, the bowls on the table for the guests,
the door was ajar just a crack, but enough
for her memories to escape, haunting her
with tender moments with every step
as she ran as fast as she could were too explicit
behind Lot and her daughters on their way to Tzoar.
She was severely warned to keep up, but she was being
pulled
by those sweet, compelling images to take one last look,
even as two angels pulled them, racing them
to the outskirts of the city,
till finally she could not resist looking back.

Beneath the dark and threatening sky,
the deafening thunder and bolts of lightening
were fast becoming the sulphur, the rain of fire, and
brimstone
that would utterly consume Sodom and Gemorrah.
The angels, escorting them, pushed and screamed to run
for their lives.
The earth trembled beneath their feet and Lot's wife
choked on the smoke
as she struggled to keep up until she turned her head
and became a pillar of salt, thus initiating another
turn in the wheel of our history
in which each event has its foreordained place
as we move towards the final redemption.

It was not until they were safely in Tzoar,
that they dared to look back to the ashes of the cities,
that were totally destroyed, their inhabitants punished
for their despicable behavior towards each other.
Lot was without his wife, whose absence was
necessary.
The daughters remembered the flood
And were sure they and their father
were now all that remained of humanity.
Lot's eldest daughter called her son "Mo'av"
"from my father" who would initiate a tribe from whom
Ruth,
a Moabite princess, would become the great-grandmother
of King David, and whose distant progeny
would be the long awaited one whose footsteps
we swear we can hear on the cobblestones of Jerusalem.

—Roberta Chester

**WE, THE UNBORN SONS OF ABEL**

"And the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is Abel, your brother?'
And he answered, 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?'
Then He said to Cain, 'What have you done? The voices of
your brother's bloods are crying out to me from the ground.'"
(Genesis 4:9-10)

We, the unborn sons of Abel,
Mourn
The sun, whose warmth we will never feel,
The sea, into whose waves we will never wade,
The shore, with whose sand and shells we will never play.

And rain — what is rain,
That might have fallen on cheeks
We will never have,
And which makes puddles
We will never step into?

Milk — what would milk taste like?
Is it sweet or sour? And its color,
Is it brighter than the dull white fog
In which we float?

We strain to listen —
Is that a bird flying by?
Or is it only the echo of bird-song
Coming to us from far away, from beyond forests,
Beyond mountains and oceans?

Or is that a small dog barking
"Come out to play,
To play;"
Or perhaps it is a cricket at dusk
Reminding us, "Go home to sleep,
To sleep."
Or is that just the croaking of a frog
That echoes the pounding of hearts
Which will never beat
Inside our chests?

We want to stretch out our hands
(But fingers, we have no fingers!)
To reach the clouds
Which hide the sun from us,
Which hide the blue of sky.
(What is blue? What is sky?)
And stars, where are the stars
That cannot kindle their flames
In this dull white fog in which we drift?

We, the unborn sons of Abel,
Try to remember;
But memory never comes to us;
Our memories, unborn like us,
Lie buried far away,
Beyond forests of snow,
Beyond mountains with glaciers and oceans of ice.

Is that the warmth of sun?
Or is that a wind
Which has come to blow within our dreams,
A warm wind which pats our head
And our cheeks which will never feel the rain?

Or perhaps this is a whisper,
A mother whispering our names.
But what is a name?
And what is a mother?
We strain our hands to touch her eyes
(But fingers, we have no fingers!).
We want to laugh for her,
But we have no voice,
No voice; we have no joy,
No joy.
Where is our mother
Who will never kiss us,
Never embrace us,
Whose smile
We will never see?

The dull white fog in which we sink grows gray.
Is this the coming of night?
And in our night, will stars blossom
Like roses we will never smell,
Or like yellow dandelions we will never pick
As a present for our mother, for our father?

We, the unborn sons of Abel,
Mourn
Kittens whose soft fur we will never stroke;
Cool water we will never drink;
Words we will never say;
Songs we will never sing;
Our father's love we will never know.
But love, what is love?

The gray fog we shiver in grows black
And colder than the icicles we will never suck.
Darkness is swallowing us;
Is this our father's death?
What is death?

We, the unborn sons of Abel,
Mourn
And would cry for our father;
If only we had eyes;
If only we had tears.

—Yakov Azriel

---

## *IV. Stages*

YES, NO, MAYBE SO, OR IN THE BARREL

When I was a kid we had fun with some sayings
We clapped hands in rhythm and said without failing
"Yes, No, Maybe so, or in the Barrel"
We had to choose one at our peril

I chose the barrel
I chose too narrow
I could barely move
So I don't approve

So I tried out Yes
But I must confess
My "Yes" fell flat
And that was that

No then seemed the safest choice
And I began to give it voice
But all I got was frowns from all
So now I'm lost within a hall

I'll go with Maybe So I guess:
I really think it is the best!

—Katherine H. Burkman

UNIVERSITY DAYS

I read a book review in the *New York Times* recently.
It was a review by Sandra Simonds of a book by Jorie Graham
and in the last paragraph it said,
"In our historical moment, the question is not only what poetry can do, but whether it can make experience legible at all."
I read that sentence
and I read it again
and I read it a third time
but I still didn't get it.

And it brought me back to my university days,
when I would sit silently in the seminar room,
observing the lively discussion among my classmates
but never joining in,
afraid to open my mouth
and confess that I didn't understand something
lest they all laugh at me
and conclude that I was a dummy
who should never have been admitted into that fine university in the first place.

But that was a long time ago.
Things are different now.
I am a grown-up,
mature and independent,
brimming with self-confidence.
Shy no more.
I read the sentence out loud:
"In our historical moment, the question is not only what poetry can do, but whether it can make experience legible at all."
And I asked my question:
"What in the world is *that* supposed to mean?"
And the cat, who had been curled up on the chair next to mine, yawned and stretched.
She shot me a withering glare of disdain and,
tail held high,
she marched out of the room.

Like my classmates of yore,
Fluffy does not abide dummies.

—Pesach Rotem

ON THE FOURTEENTH OF JULY

*for Jimmy*

Please have a happy birthday, dear.
Just minimize all awkwardness.
You have survived another year.

Be thankful that you are still here.
There is no reason for distress.
Please have a happy birthday, dear.

Assume each greeting is sincere.
You heard from Jason, Jack, and Jess?
You have survived another year.

Would you prefer to disappear?
Not in a minute is my guess.
Please have a happy birthday, dear.

Attempt to feel a bit of cheer.
Rethink the meaning of success.
You have survived another year.

Would you like cake? Some wine or beer?
Tomorrow you can convalesce.
Please have a happy birthday, dear.
You have survived another year.

—Jane Blanchard

BECOMING US

I didn't think that anyone could know
you better than yourself, but someone knew
me, one time, better than I knew myself.

I don't remember who, but do recall
the revelation, back in second grade.
I'd learned what *obstetrician* meant and had
decided that's what I was going to be
when I grew up for O to bring a life
into this world—and every day! It could
not have been my mom; she would have been thrilled
for me to be a doctor. It could not
have been my dad; half-German, he would never
talk about feelings although, half-Irish,
he had his share of them. Perhaps an aunt
or older cousin; all my cousins were
much older and available to talk
on serious subjects. So when someone asked,

*How would you cope were you to lose a patient?*

when I was seven, I knew instantly
they had a point. And, notwithstanding how
much I loved science, and was good at it,
I realized that I would not become
a doctor. And only as an adult
I learned that Research might have been an option.
By then, though, I'd already become me.

Years later still I learned that in Research
they used a lot of animals, which would
have closed that door to me as well. And as

for losing a life, just the loss of you,
I can't get over. But at least you're still
alive so there is hope, or there might be,
if I can only get you deprogrammed,
out of that lynch mob, less fond of the noose,
to hear The Doctor, learn what you've become,
what it will take for you to be re-born,
if such a birth is even possible.

—James B. Nicola

**BOOK XXIV: THE GREAT ROOTED BED**

You move your sleeping body just enough
To cause a slight tectonic shift then sigh
Your rhythmic breathing so soporific
I give up reading, close *The Odyssey*
And settle into bed, the second spoon.

The clock glows; one day flows to another.
In one more week, we will have been married
For twenty years – one full generation.
Observing time like our clock, we will draw
A line in water marking twenty more.

Now, oh, in your exhalations I hear
What Homer sang of an epic marriage.
Not wound nor bow the figure of the thing
But an image standing outside of time
A life, like ours, nothing like a journey:

The witless interventions of the gods
The shipwrecks we survived, the shoals avoided
All our miraculous transformations
We have not passed them on some road to death.
They are not subject to horology.

Our adventures still are, not were
Are figures we accumulate like rings
Of time. We neither trudge, nor run but grow
Arboreally in all dimensions, at once
Remaining firmly planted in our place.

Here, always, in our own Ithaca
Our plighted troth, this lithe and breathing thing
Coalesces into limbs, into roots
Exerting its ever-strengthening grip
On this madly tumbling rock of earth.

My eyes fall shut; the lashes touch the skin
And stir the air resting on your shoulder.
And now I know I can succumb to sleep
As our commingling respiration
Exfoliates into the olive's leaves.

—Terence P. Paré

[untitled]

on our Wednesday half days
I drive
you take a book of my poems from your pocket
I will read it aloud you say

your voice caresses the lines
a slight hesitation as you reach for meaning
your smile at the shock of discovery
as images reveal their layers

you follow my footsteps as if in snow
observe tracks
alert to nuance and direction

and I follow you as you follow me
the fullness of your silence between stanzas
I hear my words in new patterns
fresh from your mouth
at the final line you bow your head

I am twice blessed

— Judy Belsky

THE NARROW BAND

I wear this narrow band daily,
I've had four of them, falling loose,
misplacing, replacing. And my husband
stays by me wondering where I put them,
never angry, just knowing I don't pay
for the rings nor do I pay attention
to where I lay things down over decades.
The ring, now slender gold with petite diamonds
across the front, I paid for thinking
it was time to pay for my losses. The details
of his caring, providing, fathering, fixing
broken objects hoses, sinks, light fixtures,
"Daddy-fix it!" our young children cried out,
bringing him a broken truck, a doll's twisted arm….
Yes, the children are now past middle age, graying,
balding (our son), dyeing hair (our daughter),
has we walk through the autumn of our lives
through illness and health, as if we were taking
our vows once again. I hold this ring, dearest
to my heart. So many stages, passing from youthful
twenties to early thirties having no idea of death
before us, waiting patiently for our arrival.
It is no time for regrets. What's past is done.
The preciousness of each day overrides all
that's gone.

—Paula Goldman

CHRYSALIS

I have other things to do,
other places to go. Like
the monarch butterfly
that takes five generations
to make each major migration,
my soul seems to need a chrysalis
before it breaks into each
new stage of its journey,
a period of quiet, growth
and peace, a solo existence.

The epiphytes here hang
from that branch drawing
their water from the air.
Threatened, like me, they yet
still hang on, cling to life,
drinking each drop of moisture
sucked from humidity,
and mineral and other
nourishment with it.

Kind HaShem, grant me
the strength to carry on through
each of the forty-nine stages
of my journey. Help me
to peel open a new life
and fulfill its utmost
within each phase
that yet remains.

—Alyssa A. Lappen

HUSHED MOMENTS:

Sit by my side....Silence -
Enwrap my shadow with your greyness
And storm my memories with scents of roses,
Yellow and orange, perfumed ones –
Not quite blooming, but almost...
Reminding my essence of the brilliance of dawn
Before the inevitable arrival of evening tide ...

Have Memories value?
The pains, the sorrows and sufferings?
My being here - did it make a difference somewhere,
other than my valued space?
Leaving what?
For Whom?
Why?

Seasons have vanished in a glimmer
Seemingly oblivious, leaving signs....
Butterflies - from larva to exquisite creations -
Fluttering here and there, never settling down
Free, in fiery horizons at sunset....

I

Instead, be I rather a tree, rooted and strong?
Eternally bearing fruit ..
My legacy.... Voices, Voices, Voices!
Incessantly bringing forth 'Soul Speak'...

Ancient melodies, crystal bells, silvery tunes
Unceasing, murmuring tales of past existences.
Is it time to go yet?
Or is there yet a new song that needs birthing?....

—Miriam Jaskierowicz Arman

RE-BORN

My father hoped I'd be a boy
but accepted me with unbounded joy,
new born I lay, all squeals and kicks,
a little sister for Ruth, aged six.

I married the man who stole my heart,
re-born as wife, a whole new start
in another country across the sea,
in time becoming mother of three.

For nearly forty years as wife
through all the ups and downs of life,
'til husband's illness - slowly worse,
I was re-born as thankless nurse.

I watched him fade for thirteen years
towards oblivion, hid my tears,
forgetting all he'd ever known;
re-born as widow, free, alone.

I met a gentle, loving man,
re-born, a full new life began,
deprived of "golden years" before
I had them now, and so much more.

My children married, *their* children too,
as years slipped by my family grew,
re-born as matriarch of them all
I'm keeping track of big and small.

I moved to a flat, compact, brand new
above grand-daughter, splendid view,
re-born as pensioner, duties shed,
now they all care for me instead.

At ninety-one, a ripe old age,
I've been re-born at every stage,
through joy and sadness, loss and gain,
I doubt more stages still remain.

—Rumi Morkin

BUTTERFLIES DANCE ME

Shabbat dance in garden
I wore butterflies
covering my head.
Or did butterflies wear me?
I was my own chrysalis.

*Hidur Mitzvah* for the garden,
my skull of joyous newly sprouted silver fuzzies.

My first grand social outing
in 11 months since diagnosis.

Rabbi and friends brought me chicken soup.

Butterflies danced on my head.
My first dance in a year.
My life celebration.

Shechinah danced me.
We met and danced in a field of flowers —
*Davenen* women, the flowers.

My biggest smile in a year.
Almost my only smile in a year.
I sparkled, flowers told me.

I did not turn down loving hugs
when the women asked permission
and knew closeness was vulnerable
with low/ no working immune system.
Hugs birth Life.

I face more treatments.
I need more butterflies.
Butterflies that represent transformation.
I have served as Monarch butterfly doula,
and *Shomer*.
Prayers also are very welcome.
Gila Rena Tzohara bat Leiba bat Etel bat Perl.

—Joy Krauthammer

[untitled]

I turn my gaze toward you
I/eye see a broken vessel

shattering my broken heart
Bend down to gather those scattered pieces
remnants of a wholeness
bringing light and joy to those who behold
I clutch them close
each reflecting a memory, a story
a subtle smile
a naughty nod
a reflective radiance
a melancholy murmur
a mischievous moment
all loving labor
I stop my steps
lost in the mind of eternity
and ask, can these pieces be reassembled
into perfection?
or will signs and scars
leave their mark on man?
the hurt heart will heal [perhaps]
and life
will reclaim its rhythm
plunging into uncharted places

—Golda Rivka Warhaftig

ON THE WAY TO THE BALLET

The old ladies march
Onto the elevator,
Steadied by their canes,
Each a shrunken frailty
Wrapping an unending
Soul—they are going
To watch young people
Dance dances of grace
And beauty, while re-
Calling their own beauty
Long dissolved in the
Acid of time. Yet, they
Are happy—I even joke
With them as I lean on
My own cane: "Come
Ladies! Let's have a
Foot race!" They all
Laugh, as the young
Girls within their
Tattered frames
Flirt with the potent
Young man hiding
Behind my time-
Marked mask.
For a moment
We all feel a jolt
Of that spark
We call life.

—Nolo Segundo

"THE DAYS THAT ARE NO MORE"

When I consider that the greatest share
By far, of my sublunar days is flown,
And that how long I shall remain aware
Of all that I have witnessed, is unknown,
Then friends and places pass before my eyes
As if glimpsed briefly from a railway car,
And though placed out of reach, the heart's surmise
Would have me think of them as things that are;
Or like some house where now I cannot go
But still it stands, while memory holds a key:
Its heaped-up goods, its windows still aglow,
Will vanish when the light goes out of me.
O could that world somehow obtain reprieve,
For breath itself perhaps, I would not grieve.

—Esther Cameron

END OF FALL

Leaves flowing swiftly to the ground,
as I fall into the winter of my life,
how did this all come about?
No more pennies. Where is my copper
hair. Dying it monthly to stay myself,
yes, potions and lotions can't remove
the journey of my life bringing me
to the end of fall. Warm and beautiful
fall's Wisconsin, deep reds, bold yellows,
life giving greens, all dying out. And now
color comes in tubes, lipstick, rouge, eyebrow
fillers added to a pharmacy of lotions
and potions which cannot erase
my life's journey. And why would I want to?
Because I want it back like lost keys, lost scarves,
lost shoes. I cannot dwell in loss. And now
"till death do us part" is hunkering
in the house with an ill husband.
What do I see next?
The news isn't good.

—Paula Goldman

LITTLENESS AND GREATNESS

I move my lips in the rhythm of your lips without your seeing
I engrave your explanations on my skin
Without your seeing
You who begot me you old gray sinking
And you know the whole Torah

In the beginning of conception was union
And then the drop issued in the aspect of ten kingdoms
And afterwards in gestation these
Ten spheres were perfected—
The external ones—

I quiet my demons with clown-like movements
Without your seeing
You were pleasant to me how pleasant you were to my bleating body
And you explain to me about the thickness of the root
About the issuance of a new countenance the male and the female in the body of the points
And about and about
You explain to me the general rule
And skip over the particular
Like the beloved skipping over the mountains unhurried fearless
And you say birth means the issuance of the second person to a countenance with a name singled to itself
And thus the wheel turns and returns turns and returns

And after the suckling
The second aspect, of love-judgment-compassion enters with nine joints
I want to grow old with you
To stride before you all flashing rejoicing
Your wisdom is braided into me fastened inside me hidden

And afterward in greatness
Enter Wisdom-Understanding-Knowledge in 9 spheres
And are gradually enclothed

O mind O greatness
Soul higher soul supernal soul — revelation!
Raising from the supernal illumination of the lower descent of Kingdom
Enclothing in the Ancient of perfect lights

I concentrate on the breath of your mouth the Urim and Thummim
Outside a dark dawn is rising elongated reddened cypresses
From the house a baby's crying
As she seeks consolation at her mother's nipple

— Chana Kremer

FIVE POEMS by JUDY BELSKY

in the end the calligraphy of strain, of illness
slides off your face like disappearing ink
Is there a message tucked in the folds of shrouds?
at the last possible moment
your skin is lit from within
with anticipation for
a new story

early on someone named you
named, you are released from the tight husks that bind
your DNA
but then you edit down your parts
hiding
overcome with confusion
lost in translation
lacking a bridge of words
now a second naming takes place
the whole of you marches out of your tired body
bold
you spring forward out of the shadows
as if there never was a secret

the banal the petty the spiteful the rages
interred easily like light pebbles among the inert stones
your powerful deeds form a golden arc
you ride it to Heaven

like stars against a clear night
you appear
your intentions organize constellations
everything makes sense now
finally you relax

your tiers crown you like the twelve stones around
Jacob's head

you leave
in the instant we get to know you
one glimpse and you are gone

you get to sleep safe from wars plague and tiresome
journeys
we are almost envious

*

today I find a small package of replacement buttons
even buttons tell a story
how your hand eased open the heavily starched hole
and no they never got it right
and no you never complained
you made them feel like royalty
and the tradesmen lined up weeping as you passed
the way the king's subjects line the road to catch a last
glimpse.

the pearly buttons seem to have grown
and must be pushed into place
a tale of struggle—arthritis and learned patience

year before
when we move to Memphis you are still pulsating on
New York time
in the parking lot of eastgate shopping mall
you ignore the vast, empty spaces
double park
leave your engine running
you shake up the staid atmosphere in the dime store
as you urgently request white thread and needles
you seethe as the molasses girl carefully wraps the
package
hands you change,
thanks you
and begs y'all come again.

that evening, I watch you sew a button on your shirt
you look bemused
do you after all see the charm in the scenario?
when you replay it
are you struck by grace in each act?

your heart is a magnet for kindness
you collect it as some do rare coins
your collection grows

when I see you sewing on that button
with wide masculine movements
I recall the midrash on Avraham
who repaired the rip in the world
and his character is kindness
he roots out their distortions and detours and false starts
and sews a true seam
and with circular motion pulls people into his sacred arc

you do not trip on the rough terrain of your own heart
the wild plains of pain, shame and rejection
you use these as signposts
to read the text in stymied hearts
you row hard against the current
pulling love and regard into your wake
against the current
you soothe and prepare hearts for the truth

*

I scratch at the layers

search through sheaves
dig for my last stanza

in the hopes it will prompt a new one

but the backlog of two years
stacks against me
leaves of frail volumes stick together
blue black veins stain parchment
text escapes transparent vellum

the pandemic misfires the code of his kidneys
quarantine arrests my pancreas
we dance in jagged rhythm

the ragged edges of pages
one for each friend who died
demand a line:
when will his when will mine
be ripped from the tablet
will someone gather them

bury them like geniza
fragments of sacred text
impossible to read
too holy to burn

*

in the film the woman is tone deaf
but longs to sing opera
she murders the score
she reduces the exquisite landscape to rubble
I cannot bear the sound attack
nor her pitiful denial
I never watch the end

at a funeral
as her husband is buried
a woman screams his name over and over
we cannot hear our thoughts
we hear nothing but his name
his name captures us in blindfolds
and pushes us toward a foreign country
I refused to be taken hostage

I have not written since my husband died
have I chosen silence?
grief cancels words
a push on the chest produces
harsh emission from injured vocal chords
it breaks any expectation

if grief is a language
it is buried below the level of speech
a groan is language
known only to God
no midrash breaks up the dark mass of despair
no crescendo rises
to that hint of redemption
that takes away our breath
then forces us to breathe again

*

the door

is deeply paneled
I want to fold into its geometry
rest in its grooves
like a bird concealed in a tree

the force of history
threatens to blow the door off its hinges
but it holds tight
I inch the door from its frame

air blasts out
the current repels me and beckons me
like wind that rushes off the sea
drenches me with salt and alters my features

I suck breath into parts of my lungs
that have lain in shallows like hungry orphans

the grind of my grief
the pull of low tones of bone chant pursue me
I push past them

lies drop around me
like samplers embroidered with worn out phrases
You are a widow
Defined by your loss
Your hour has passed
You are at an equinox
You count away from time
You walk into your shadow

lies shed like old skin

dust motes dance in beams of sunlight
I know this place
I know its contours
as well as I know the four- chambered mansion of my heart

the room is empty
unscripted
unpainted
it waits for me furious poet without words
ferocious painter without canvas
it bids me enter

my heart beats
I will
I will

DUST AND WATER

I poured dust and set the stone and since then
A riddle reposes in all the silent fields
When I help you to press the head out
The rescue rope tightens
In the form of a question mark
You tear your mouth open in a roar of mourning
You listen to the gushing of water
And the silence that comes afterward
My body is stretched out covered with seaweed
Ear pressed to the earth
Babies are like the dead they do not
Seek solutions
Your baby girl has beautiful eyes
She cuts corners for me

—Chana Kremer

A PRISONER OF WAR

Our parents die but they often don't leave us
alone. My father died, yet he's with me—
as absent as when he was here. And I'm
adrift trying to reach him. Trying hard

to figure him out — the distance he kept—
a far shore I haven't reached. I've always missed him
and still hope to see a faint smile of pride
in me (if just a trace). I ask him: why?

I've wondered if he buried a hurt too deep
to reveal, a void of loss he couldn't escape:
a prisoner of war held back by a great wound—
losses that haunted him and wouldn't let him heal.

He left me here alone, still waiting, wondering why
we failed to bridge love's chasm before he left for good.

—Amos Neufeld

DRAGONFLY

The dragonfly overhead could be Mom's
reincarnation, or maybe just sent
to remind me that she's here, inside,
always, with her loves of nature,
art, music and children. The kingfisher
calls, and that too is Mom, shot through
the whole out-of-doors. In the shade
by the quiet lake, she filters through
every leaf, every pine needle, pine cone,
through every bug, every bird, every
ray of light shining in the water,
every fish crow's call, even that yellow
butterfly winging overhead,
and the zebra butterfly drinking nectar
from the orange blossoms beside me.
The kingfisher—is it Mom?—calls
again, in answer to my notice.
Gone almost three years, she is,
but still here, within the anhinga,
within the bee, and deep deep within me.

--Alyssa A. Lappen
May 7, 2026

---

## *V. In Between*

**BS"D 6 Iyyar 5786**

I will climb on your wings
Raise me little by little
Lest I become dizzy in the heights

I will see more than my measure

Set me tenderly on this hill you established

A bird chirped

Silence
Wind
What now

—Tziporah Faiga Lifshitz

SEQUELS

I think I prefer the sky to land—
its amber lines and soft edges,
its dark passage and blue promise,
its aversion to remaining,
its desire for a sequel and
another and another
—a version
of redemption,
a night followed
by visions.

—L. Ward Abel

Swept along by the Holy Wind
to places I had never been
or only dreamed to be
while tossed upon the stormy sea,
and ports I never would have stayed,
had I the Holy Wind betrayed.

—Elhanan ben Avraham

ORDEAL

Remember what was shown on the darkest night,
secrets of a painful universe left unseen in the morning's light,
visions of oneself in the naked starlight
with curtain drawn on the flowery lands of sun
and countless days like webs of the spider spun,
expanses empty, filled by a word of the silent speech,
the ocean's treasures washed up, left on the lonely beach,
lest tides return to draw them back to the churning deep,
and make to forget the tears that the night had caused to weep-
then enter mercy's light of another day,
weighed with the salty treasures of gold to the grateful heart,
and send it beating forth on the untread way.

—Elhanan ben-Avraham

FIRE TONGUES

Hope springs up
it always springs up
like flutes in a forest
where the gloom is great.

When wills are too frozen
to finish the race
and the moon wrinkles down
on wheels that are stuck
comes a little tune singing
a little flame late.

By the heath, by a warrior
where the spokes lie crushed
and the hum grows silent
amidst slivers of rust
hides a locket, a mirror
a coin or a crust

or something to sing with
tongues of fire from dust.

—Hannah Amit

[untitled]

I'm surfing at high tide
With the conviction to conquer any storm that comes my way
I glance at hungry seagulls gliding and grabbing easy prey.
When suddenly I find myself at low tide, shivering, exposed
Black stormy clouds envelop me
And for a flickering moment I tremble before the thought of non-being
I pray not to be prey.
For if not for the mercy of the Merciful One,
we'd be swallowed by the swamps along the seashore.

—Golda Rivka Warhaftig

ICARUS REDUX

Like a bird at the edge of water,
I wanted to drink, but could not bend

to it. I wanted to fly, but could not raise
inflated wings without puncturing

them. I wanted to soar and dive, skirt
a pen and ink horizon moving farther

out to sea than I could ever reach.
On a pebbled beach, I stood shaking

A little, outstretched wings, not quite set.

—Paula Goldman

**where light goes**

a stranger's voice called you
appearing just to leave
a faceless day angled to view
lessons in suspended belief
weren't they standing there
forgotten by now
life in a series of doubt
was anything written within
don't you see we're in between
together and alone
where we learn to speak
not knowing when
to live and die apart from here
a sense given in reply
isn't there something of night
somewhere you can touch
colors in contoured innocence
following pleas of never go

—Kenneth Kesner

FACE TO FACE

How does a memory
out of decades,
particular, precise,
rise out of thought,
a thought out of sorrow
to urge you on
to make, to do,
to go where you may
not even know to where?

You try for your footing,
struggle to find
a set of words, a sound,
an image for a season,
a way to picture
the scene while maybe
standing among steaming pots.
alone in your kitchen.

When the absence of a great
love confronts you
you look for a way to say,
*I am here, Here I am,*
like Adam, like Eve
face to face
with all you've done
when God asks,

*Where are you?* And wherever
you are you are very small
and want to answer, be heard.

—Reizel Polak

UNIVERSAL CONQUERING OF NIGHT

*Ara, meaning "the altar," in Latin*
*was in ancient times the most remote southerly constellation,*
*and a meeting place of now vanquished pagan gods*

Portal at midnight - candle lit
pinions tipped
with wind and spice
then purest softest
southern flight
toward soul's deep longing -
victory's site..

Night flames darting
draw me on
past wave and starlight's
winsome calm.
I discern Ara's horizon -
God's pageantry at dawn

as darkness slips
into its fathomless grave.

—Hannah Amit

WHAT ASCENDS TO THE THINNESS

The black earth is heavy and in pain
The brook is clear the grass is pulsing
This morning the land filled up with the whiteness of mother's milk
The mountains dance as we ascend and descend
Don't step on the children
Pure-white crocuses burn with a flame
They light the festive candelabrum with the fragrance of milk and clover
They now spread before us a different land
And a God with uncovered face is given to us

On the mountain stands a stone and from it the spring
And it has a heart that longs yearns pines
We look into its flow
The man of lovingkindness is mirrored
In the waters of the cloud that weary dream awakens to life

All the hearts which burst into sparks of sparks
That were broken that were scattered
They blossom now in the spaces of the midnight prayer
They are with us they have left they are with us they have returned

I ask to see your soul and I gaze
The rocks the white grasses the oak they are your image and likeness
Innocent crocuses I will take you a feather in the inkwell
I will write a poem of tidings
About the land her joy and her sorrow
And a bird swells its throat and sings. Not everything is flung away and comes back here in echoes
Sometimes it ascends to the hidden thinness, disappears far far away. On the heights it is kept for coming generations

—Chana Kremer

---

**Postscript**

Could this
scattering yet
coalesce into a
Being of well-sorted souls, a
new birth?

—Esther Cameron

*Index of Contributors*

*L. Ward Abel 29*
*Hayim Abramson 14*
*Araleh Admanit 5*
*Julian Alper 3, 9*
*Miriam Alper 3*
*Hannah Amit 4, 8, 30, 31*
*Miriam Jaskierowicz Arman 24*
*Yakov Azriel 15, 16, 17, 18, 20*
*Simcha Bakshiel 9-10*
*Mindy Aber Barad 14*
*Judy Belsky 23, 27-28*
*Sara Friedland ben Arza 16*
*Elhanan ben-Avraham 29, 30*
*Jane Blanchard 22*
*Elijah Blumov 14, 19*
*Jeffrey Burghauser 12*
*Katherine H. Burkman 21*
*Esther Cameron 3, 11, 26, 31*
*Roberta Chester 20*
*Paula Goldman 23, 26, 30*
*Balfour Hakak 15, 17*
*Herzl Hakak 16, 18*
*Kenneth Kesner 30*
*Judy Koren 3, 6, 8, 20*
*Joy Krauthammer 25*
*Chana Kremer 15, 26, 29, 31*
*Charlie Langfur 4*
*Alyssa A. Lappen 24, 29*
*Tziporah Faiga Lifshitz 9, 29*
*Dawn McCormack 18*
*Donald Mender 7, 13*
*Rumi Morkin 24*
*Nechama Sara Gila Nadborny-Burgeman 1, 32*
*Tom Hadani Nave 15*
*Amos Neufeld 29*
*James B. Nicola 22*
*Susan Oleferuk 4, 5, 7, 8*
*Terence P. Paré 23*
*Reizel Polak 31*
*Ellen Jane Powers 18*
*Michael Roque 7*
*Pesach Rotem 11,13, 22*
*Eva Rotenberg 16*
*Vera Schwarcz 10, 11*
*Nolo Segundo 25*
*Tushar Sen 6, 19*
*Lois Greene Stone 9*
*Henry Summerfield 6*
*Iona Tor 16*
*Tamarah Touvian 1*
*Clarence P. Van Dyke 5*
*Golda Rivka Warhaftig 25, 30*

*Hilltop in Samaria*

*Graves still gape in many a heart*
*Swirled round by seven seas of enmity*
*Strife within and ominous skies*
*And still*
*The voice within the soul*
*The flag upon the hill*
*EC*