The painting captures the golden glow of warmth, hospitality, and spirit of Jerusalem, as we witness the rebuilding of the beloved place of our dreams. The Old City is surrounded by walls that invite us to come inside—into the innermost place of light. The walls look like Torah scrolls and ornaments, as the words of Torah echo once again from Zion. The candles in the sky, like sparks of holiness, ascend from Jerusalem but also descend from heaven. Jerusalem, our innermost sanctuary, is the gateway to heaven.

—Meira Raanan

Yoram Raanan, *Jerusalem Inside*, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 120 x 160 cm

In the third millennium they will take ship:
Millions of leaves
And a great calm

And a peach will open its heart
And its knobby kernel
Will be a crystal of love
A treasury of magnetic resonances
From the great sphere

In the third millennium the cypresses will roam about
An ocean floor of wheat will open up
And a green stone into whose center
The waters drip
To be poured out around us
From the place whence are waters without end.

—Ruth Netzer
CONTRIBUTOR EXCHANGE

Below are titles of books (mainly poetry collections in English) by contributors, as well as URLs. * indicates a page in the “Hexagon Forum” of www.pointandcircumference.com. ** indicates a page in the “Kippat Binah” section of the same site.

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Vera Schwarcz, Ancestral Intelligence (Antrim House, 2013), Chisel of Remembrance (Antrim House, 2009), and A Scoop of Light (March Street Press, 2000). Other works listed on her website, between2walls.com.

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David Weiser, Jerusalem Sonnets (Targum Press, 2000)
Kelley Jean White MD, Living in the Heart (WordTech, 2006), Toxic Environment (Boston Poet Press) and Two Birds in Flame (Beech River Books, 2010).


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I. Seasoned

PEOPLE WALKING IN THE SNOW

People are walking in the snow
In Sacher Park,
In its snowy expanse.
In the face of the white vision
That dances before them
They smile at
The clumps of snow on the trees,
They smile at each other
As if for a minute
They were exiled from themselves
And had reached a different region,
The district of most dazzling white
Within them.

— Ruth Gilead
translated by Esther Cameron

SEASONED

1. The nature of spring
newly alive and spreading green—
grimy winter windows whitewashed
to May, a sunset-breasted robin
across the yard
holds me astonished.

2. You’re old,
my grandson observes,
his short history sweet-scented curls
that fall over leaf veins
on the backs of my hands
he traces with a stubby thumb.

3. It is often on the way down I think
the sun makes my day
light’s great swell glazing hills
wild with the possibility
of even so—
of yet.

— Ilene Millman

A GARDEN WHERE ONCE MY MOTHER WALKED

Bees burrowing deep into each flower
this late afternoon,
as if to make visible the world of things:
petal, sepal, leaf;
finely filamented anthers burdened
with hymnal hum;
a bee’s hind tibia smothered in pollen.

Jubilation of manyness, a busy thrum,
as she walks among
the flowers. No threats, no stings. A few
fluttery encounters.
She longs for more. More murmurous bees
humming in her hair.
More warmth of flesh paired with flower—
less brevity, more hours.
The bees continue to work the garden,
sipping from quince
and plum, the purpling sage. She lingers
in the dusk.
The coo, coo-coo of a morning dove blues
the air like a sorrow.

— Constance Rowell Mastores

WILD ANISE

A wild anise that grows on the slope
outside my window slowly merges
into a featureless forgetting,
a mythic world that does not hold
its shape. I close my eyes, drift
away, lose sight of leaf and flower.

Startled from a dream, I wake,
gaze upon a structured world
of cedar, redwood, pine.
The wild anise on the darkened
slope recomposes, comes alive:
Toothed leaves. Clusters of small
white flowers. Stark. Bright.
Particular. Never so white as now.

— Constance Rowell Mastores
THIS HOUR IN SUMMER

White lilies lean over the soft dark grass of a summer evening
and hums unsettling
in this hour, in this only hour
all whispering of love and loss and desire
swift and strange as fairy lights
translucent and vertiginous the milky swarm of stars
the purplish shadows of the past lurking through the trees
spilling like a dark hood
this hour gives one more moment with the moon
lending her light
and the ghostly forms of flowers close their mouths
and bend and pray
in the crying mists
and creatures fly their fantastic ways
and we leave to restless lives
such is this hour
if you follow it
in summer.

—Susan Oleferuk

HYDRANGEA

These deciduous plants adorn
the lawns on which they lavish panicles,
large white flowerheads, growing
among spear-shaped evergreen leaves.
The bushes are as showy as their flowers
that are often thought
to resemble pom-poms.
Every spring and summer, I observe
their enormous blossoms bob among
their greenery as if noticing
someone one hasn’t seen for however long
and whose name is momentarily gone,
as I forget their names every season.
The flowers bloom steadily through
midsummer into August lushness,
then begin their pink
blush in the late summer coolness
among the first harbingers

of the frosts of autumn.
Each year the flowers are dried and sold
on roadside stands to celebrate the turning
of the great wheel of summer.
And each year I finally remember, then forget
until next season, when the hydrangea
bloom so whitely, while my memory slips
away ever so much from year to year, until
it maybe lapses entirely:

Hydrangea, may I remember your name,
as I might inhale your spicy fragrance;
may I recall in winter
the murmur of your petals
whispering on the summer wind.

—Wally Swist

THE LAST WATER LILY

The last water lily
of the fall butters
a browning pond,
a single gold fish
fell asleep beneath
the shrinking sun spot,
two morning glories clamber
into the noon hour of this—
their last day,
and their first.

—Vera Schwarcz

CASCADE

Seen on a night in November

How frail
above the bulk
of crashing water hangs,
autumnal, evanescent, wan,
the moon.

—Constance Rowell Mastores
NOVEMBER

Dark comes earlier and earlier now; night sooner in a thick winter jacket.

From a nearby hillside drenched in shadow, wild turkeys, with a great flapping of wings, head back to the same old redwood, the same old roosts. And I, who only a month ago could sit outside with a glass of wine and marvel at the turkeys’ embrace of sky, now peer through a kitchen window, see no more than my face mirrored by darkness, pale and odd, startled by time. And I, who only wished to be looking out, must now keep looking in.

— Constance Rowell Mastores

FOX ABANDON

Awakening to the motion detectors going off in the barnyard is not anything new but detecting motion within those parameters is, sensing there was something more to it than the feral barn cat stalking rodents. Raising the shade, the fox must have heard me, or seen my reflection in the window; and it wasn’t as if I didn’t have to exercise patience, knowing how long the lights stay on out there, aware that because they stayed on, something slinked in the shadows of hedge or barn.

When she appeared in her regal red finery, not without decorum, her tail nearly as long as she was; the whimsical, wry smile; the ears perked; her exquisite gait that of a dancer, her legs and feet propelling her smoothly across the ground in more of a glide than a trot or a brisk bound, as she ran to the peaked shadows and between them, darting from one point to another, possibly running down a mouse, before cavorting into the winter grass north of the barn, the brilliance of her coat catching different tones of color, from a glistening blonde to a wizened fox red, in the glare of the spotlights, as she eventually sprinted into the darkness several hours before the early spring dawn, which would break over the ridge she must have tracked over by then, igniting the full palette of her coat, as if she had dragged it behind her across the hills, and it caught on the edge of the treeline, lighting up the edge of the sky with a color as bright as her quickness.

— Wally Swist
SEVEN STAGES OF DROUGHT

the drought was worse than any that came before it
or, does memory elongate it like summer shadows?
we do not speak of it
though between us words hang as heavy as over—ripe
fruits straining the vine
we step carefully around them
to acknowledge them might lend them validity
in the beginning, we recall the first condition of growth
the insistent refrain of the first cell
pushes and pulls its way toward water
we do not say so
to say so might prevent it
separately, as if in private grief,
we stand vigil over the dry, cracked earth
peer down on its mute lines
as if we could decipher a forgotten language
we do not share this hope aloud
we might extinguish it

we grow sullen as hot wind
we think of dead things
dried shells, limp wings, empty cases fill our minds
we do not refer to them
naming them might give them power
we identify ourselves as do orphans
by what we lack

when the drought finally ends we run for cover
we run from the cool rain scented with the fragrance
of blossoms it has drenched before it reached us
we distrust the rain
as if it threatens our identity
but in the night
we hear it throb against the pulse of fear
we listen until we distinguish one beat from the other
when we recognize the heart of rain
we embrace like old friends

and we are careful to speak of it
as if that will make it last

—Judy Belsky

II. Waiting for Morning

TWO EIGHTEEN A.M.

A train intrudes into the open house of night,
spilling snatched miles on a track.

Just before city limits,
its long wail pierces the air...

owl's sharp talons strike; will not let go . . .

Perhaps the multitudes wake and hear this—or
maybe not.

I contemplate my own dream's unintended
stop, after which

my meandering journey of sleep
continues.

—Cynthia Weber Nankee

THE OPPOSITE OF NIGHTTIME

Awakened by thunder, I lie in the dark
Yet here in the dark I cannot lie.
There was a dream but I can't recall
what I was doing there at all.
I was in a dream but lightning caught fire
on the hem of the dream and I awoke.
I tried to remember, but no longer tired,
forgot the dream as the thunder spoke:

“What are you doing? Where do you stand
among all the dreams that by day you planned?
There was a day but you can't recall
what you did yesterday at all.
Thousands of words in a drift of sand.
Thousands of deeds in a drift of sand.”

The clock ticked its questions, the skies told time.
The stars behind clouds called my bluff, and this rhyme
got twisted up in my blankets. All asunder
went my plans for tomorrow.

Continued the thunder:

“Your dreams are but dreams, by day or by night.
How is your wrong all that different from right?
Wake up! Go to sleep! It's all the same thing.
You dream you're awake and awake when you dream.
Your days fly by on ego's wings,
Your days are filled with empty things
Thousands of thoughts in a drift of sand.
Thousands of moments in a drift of sand.”
I switch on the lamp and Reader's Digest fills up my mind with American dreams. At last, determined to get my rest I turn it off.

It's strange. It seems that what in the light is easily denied in the night's too bright for me to hide: The only kindness I do that's kind is the kindness I do with You in mind, my only words less false than true are those I know are heard by You, the only ground that does not slide away from my feet like sand on either side is the ground I walk in search of You.

The hours drag by, but at last—what's this? The darkness is blowing a goodbye kiss

and now at the window a tentative dawn is whispering greetings. The stars are gone.

As morning gropes softly with long pale gloves I linger back to the sleep my heart loves. and when I awake, curtains lifting on a breeze inform me the day has arrived.

Oh, what a tease that darkness! How heartless thunder's anger, scaring me like that when there was really no danger.

— Sarah Shapiro

DREAM

white horses jumped from the black thoughts closed in the open window they rush play grow in a dream sharp words fall into memory wound outside the existence white horses run helpless in infinity

— Anna Banasiak

UTOPIA

Google: an imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect.

I remember winter before we fled, my bed womb-warm and welcoming, soft and soothing—a comfortable cocoon that I snuggled into, wearing night clothes and thick, warm socks, eyes already closed.

I imagine the quilt top tucked under my chin, in a room with a door and a window, a light bulb hanging from the ceiling.

I pull the thin blanket around me in our plastic tent surrounded by mud, our home in this horrible refugee camp so far from my home in Syria.

I shiver, clutch my rag doll, huddle close to my mother, shut my ears to the pounding rain, tent walls flapping in the cold wind, try to sleep and dream of that remembered utopia.

— Rumi Morkin

RESETTLEMENT BLUES

I begin me days in Nobbin's Cove, Then Smallwood said no thanks. So I sold me house and moved to town, Takin' cod out on the Banks.

Till one day, it was all gone, And I end up sitting about. Feeling my days is numbered, That I'm just set out.

My old punt, no use no more, Laid up and rotting through. Spend my days with old ones, There's naught a drop to do.

Today, went back to Nobbin's Cove, And walked across the place. Nothing there but weeds, They'd nary left a trace.

Then, I's standing by the bay, A-listening to the sea's sound. A-thinking and a-wondering, How this all came round.

— Tony Reevy
THE SLAVE GROUND

This field
is not laded
with Arlington's
massed markers.

Hemmed in by forest,
the little-used path
waves with uncut grass.

A nest for chiggers.

At the end
of the walk,
matted wildrye,
clover, periwinkle
cover the rocks
marking each place
of free-at-last
rest.

—Tony Reevy

ESAU AND JACOB

Esau and Jacob,
met after decades,
grey streaking
their beards,
brothers embrace.

different,
old hatred latent,
pointless,
a shadow
yet indelible.

— Michael E. Stone
2018

ROOT-FIRE

The earth opened and he came to me in an iron
chariot drawn by a team of stallions black
as crude oil and breathing sulfur; at his heart
a tiny golden arrow. He offered me a narcissus
with a hundred dazzling petals that breathed
a sweetness as cloying as decay. I went with him
because he placed his hand on the small
of my back and I felt the tread of honey bees.

The place he took me to — dark as my shut eyes,
where I ate bitter seed and became ripe,
and from which my mother could not take me
wholly back, though she wept, walked the earth,
made bearded ears of barley wither, the blasted
flowers drop — is called by some men hell and others love.

— Constance Rowell Mastores

FROM THE WINDOW OF THE EXPECTATIONS,
THE LONGINGS OF HUNGRY MOTHERS ARE SENT FORTH

Through the window of the expectations I look down
Push them away from me to the wind
The bars cut them into slices
And they grow smaller.
Only love even if you press it through the bars like a
hard-boiled egg
Does not get chopped or lopped
Like an umbilical cord which the children don't want
to be tied to anymore

— Tirtsa Posklinsky Shehory
translated by Esther Cameron
TWICE

And the moments of stillness in the eye of the storm
would get longer
All those in pain are waiting for morning
As if it'll be the Messiah coming at last
As if there is a Messiah

As if someone will bring them a bouquet at the end of the show.

—Tirtsa Posklinsky
translated by Esther Cameron

WITHOUT WORDS

Among the sharks that swim
In the ocean of language
Hides a little fish whose name is “love.”
With his life he blocks from the world
The next deluge.

—Ronny Someck
Translated by Esther Cameron

SOMETHING’S NOT RIGHT

You have the feeling that something’s not right.
We made a wrong turn somewhere back there.
If we could step back we might see the light.

I guess you could say that we’ve lost sight of what’s important and who we are.
You have the feeling that something’s not right.

Once we had dreams; we knew what was right.
We knew where to look for a guiding star.
If we could step back we might see the light.

The world’s upside down: day’s become night.
If there’s a way forward, it’s no longer clear.
You have the feeling that something’s not right.

Some are determined to rely on might,
but endless wars won’t clear the air.
If we could step back we might see the light.

We can’t let ourselves get mired in spite.
We can’t live our lives based on our fears.
You have the feeling that something’s not right.
If we could step back we might see the light.

—Ed Meek

THE MESSIAH SHOULD COME ALREADY

All those who are in pain are now shrinking themselves
Closing themselves up against the storm outside
Inside the house they are alone
Trying to feel less pain
To pour out the ache
To squeeze one more drop of it out of themselves
As if there could be an end to it as if it could be finished
All those struck by toxemia, scorched by panic
Are drawing the curtains
Depriving themselves of dawns
Wrapping themselves in darkness
Stammering and swallowing stuffing it down
As though if they fill themselves with enough of it
There would be an end
And maybe we’d finally have peace

—Duane L. Herrmann
WAITING FOR ORPHEUS

Loneliness smothers soft
a shawl, a shell of window glass
a few steps here and there
to the chair
and it grows in the night
mold leaving a dullness century old on shoes and eyes
in the afternoon hours
a hole

There are silhouettes of trees blackened on the hills
under dark skies
skeletal buildings sagging over a tired river
cement plants holding out lost arms
I am patterned here, placed as firmly as the concrete blocks
molded in the clay and rubble where stunted sumac fights for its share
I am waiting for Orpheus
sleek and brown
I met him once
when I was young.

—Susan Oleferuk

YELLOW ROSE

When I could see again
The rose
Beside the road
Flowering
Yellow,
I knew I had returned to myself,
And like a sorrowful bird
Which at the touch of the sun
Flaps its wings once more,
I strode along the path of the yellow rose
Once more ready to soar, to soar
Into the golden heart of life.

—Ruth Gilead
translated by Esther Cameron

YOUTH ELIXIR

Saturday morning, cleaning house,
the sun streaming in.

I find it tucked away, in the back of
a shelf of dusty old books.

Slowly releasing it from its place,
it falls open to the precise page.

There lies the white rose pressed flat, now
browning from a time almost forgotten.

Memories flood back to that day, I can still
picture your face smiling at me with green eyes.

You surprised me with my favorite flower.
The first of many to come.

I carefully tucked it away to preserve
for forever, well, at least for today.

Too many years have passed, and the
young hand that first held that rose is
now wrinkled with age.

But with just a single touch of that token of
love, I am once again young and alive.

—Ann Christine Tabaka

[untitled]

Let's do an exercise
Let's speak, me and you,
About what shines
Just
Forget the exercise
Just about what shines
Just me and you
Without speaking
Just let it shine

—Shefi Rosenzweig
translated by Esther Cameron

WATSU FOR TWO

The heart agrees
To put its fear to bed
To stroke it and lay it down to sleep outside
The heart agrees to make bubbles with its fear in the water
The heart believes that abundance is not limited.
You sing us to many tunes
You sing out of key with splendid authenticity
You change tones so often it's funny.
We two float at ease before the Creator
Diving transparent
You crack up
The good can go on for ever
We two are spoiled
And not at anyone's expense
And not bound in gratitude
We're a song of gratitude

—Shefi Rosenzweig
translated by Esther Cameron
THE DANCE OF LIFE

Pointing fingers is the dance
my child created when just three
Scott Joplin was his inspiration
Dave’s dance of life delighted me

I talk to strangers all the time
They dance their lives for me to see
They laugh and cry as if old friends
and then become a part of me

And every time I go to swim
someone leaving passes by
We always smile at one another
I say hello, they say goodbye

Hello to life, goodbye to life
It makes me feel that all is right
—Katherine H. Burkman

FRAGRANT GARDEN OF MELANCHOLY

I was always the one who
Encouraged perky persistence
Of Joy,
Pleading for all moods to
Smile for the camera while I
Handed out cheery dispositions
With my collection of
Utopic rose-colored glasses.

But one day I found a friend
Who wore her disposition for gloom and doom
Like a line from one of Keats’s Odes.
When I looked at her I ignored
Smudgy rings around the moon
And instead turned my head towards the sun
While offering her my rosy lenses.
She refused false perfection and
Invited me to visit sadness seated
On the cloudy charm of melancholy.
I hesitated, tried to armor myself
With fragrances of rainbows and sunny mornings,
Then finally took the plunge into her inner world.
I felt immense awe and respect walking through the
Fragrant garden of melancholy,
Open to the mingling scents of
Wistfulness, reflection, and
Windowsills sprinkled with
Wilted roses and tears.

And I finally understood that it really is ok
To experience sadness fully within Utopia
In order to feel authentic joy and
Just get on with life.
—Heather Gelb

IT’S HERs

Sometimes on the calloused path
She knows it’s hers
If she just makes a very little effort
She’ll crack the bindings of faces
If she just unwinds the shroud of skin
Perhaps the rules have changed

But it’s hers:
Firefly that bursts into light
Nightingale that sings

Doe that stretches her neck over pure waters

She is everything
She is everyone
She is nothing
No one sees
But it is hers
—Yudit Shahar

A LETTER TO SHOE

Botswana guide introduced you with a wink. I loved your name. Remember that fire-bright morning, Shoe? Can see full lips break over your white teeth. Hear language-clicks, your tongue flapping inside smiling mouth. Left eyelid scorched blue-grey closed on your dark-chocolate face. I wanted to put my head inside your mouth to catch every precious sound, every feeling.

Shoe clicks old story
on terrace, dark face aglow
savannah spills out

Last night we watched “The Gods Must be Crazy.”
The main character looks so much like you I began to believe in Bushman. That your people lived with Nothing like that which surrounds me.

But your abundant Nothing, Shoe. An African pink-yellow dawn feisty with animals. Nests swing from acacias like intricate baskets. Rhythms and incomprehensible sounds pulse in golden grasses. The river draws a great arch through your home. You drink rainwater caught in curl of leaves. Evening air releases acrid scents trapped by hot days. Your sunsets are night-blooming fauna in shades of rose and red.

Faint song of lone bird
flutes from distant acacia
does she have a mate?

I giggle now, remember as you pick your teeth with frightful thorn from Umbrella bush, sit on your
haunches, arms stretched over knobby knees, churning a stick into another, smell rises of smoke from rubbed dried grass. The beginnings of fire.

Everything you touch is a sacred miracle even the silence

I retrace our adventure yarn that early African morning. Mountains race like a tidal wave away from open plain. A light rain licks me muddy wet. Remember when the sun appears, the acrid smell of sage rushes into our faces? We listen to stinging song of grasshoppers. You hum as if you are related.

Wizened like a prophet you are, Shoe. I feel you were taking me back to first bright bone of consciousness, your earliest recollection, trying to teach me something that will take years to comprehend. I will remember your wrinkled bark face worn away by weather and patience, yet with a baby smile like an opened piano. I love your name, Shoe. I will repeat it like a mantra conjuring joy.

On some blessed days in those awakened moments I will sing your name

—Marianne Lyon

TO SAY DESERT for Yehuda Amichai

Your silent hand sketched for me a desert oasis green on green. As with communicating vessels hand touches hand through your eyes passed to me the greatness of the word and the wonder of the burning bush.

—Erez Biton

Translated by Felice Miryam Kahn Zisken

(On a ride with Yehuda Amichai, returning to Jerusalem from a joint reading in Arad, Erez Biton asked Amichai to describe the essence of the desert. Amichai held Biton’s hand and was silent for a few minutes. Biton then said, “Now I understand.”)

III. Panorama

ORCHID PARK
Kibbutz Bahan, Israel

Nature’s a magic slate— sleight of hand now you see it, now you don’t— desert frying the air and sand clouding light to the opacity of Roman glass— there cradled in the crook of this rock-strewn land a place they’ve named Utopia— curtains of monkey-faced orchids, skirts of succulent and rosebush, thrum of frog-song on a lotus-laced pond. Be still, some part of me at least— circle away from the puzzle of what it means to be me— to catch a leaf’s purpose seeping up behind my eyes— honeybee brain, mouse mind— now I see it now I don’t.

—Ilene Millman

RAINFOREST HYMNS

Looking over deep-green tree tops the clouds look silvery smooth like the gray and white of fish flesh.

A green kingfisher holds a small tilapia in its beak slaps it against a tree making it flexible enough to swallow whole.

Butterflies with their colorful wings are hard to see against red, orange, yellow flowers, their undersides pale as the sky They’re like teenagers who want to both fit in and stand out.

Bananas and mangos hang from trees as they did in Eden— all sing to the One Who created such a world.

—Adam Fisher
THE CREATION

1. Bursting forth from unbounded heights of Dominion and law above all form and precept, the dam of fire erupts and blazing bands of light explode symphonic scores expanding out on scrolls of verse, the glowing words unroll and stretch across the lonely barren fields of nothingness and time is born pervading all the fiery force, awakening every future gap, and words pronounce the core of wailing energy to spinning matter in whirling weightless tons agleam to plunge through pitch of lifeless empty night, and atoms search each the other out to form the searing stars in foundries of flame amalgamating matter for the potter’s wheel, stars seeking sisters to dance the spiral minuets and join their flame to light the black expanse, the galaxies in whirling waltz and twist of dance ecstatic cast forth from wombs their children to the skies.

2. The planets whirl about their star like atoms in their course, majestic and magnetic in their order under law, the perfect precept charging every pulsing quark and ordinances ruling every atom in a spreading cosmic scheme, rhyme and rule conducting every turn of glowing Earth alight by a distant furnace sun at bay, its scorching fire sterilizing those too near and freezing those too far away, founded in the providence of perfect place and time, the waters form and cool the spinning sphere of Earth to mellow fertile fields of fairest green, as divine desire’s moving spark enralls the stage, and living hosts come forth from seas of salt and tide, as life from Life and meadow grass and swamp and flowering fragrant fruitful tree await to feed the muscled pageantry, the fish and fowl and furry creature of the forest and camel in the parching wilderness oasis, a parade of beasts in furry coat and the feathered bird fixed to fly and cruise the bluing sky, a farfetched feast of fancy risen from the mud, its circulating blood astir with fire to pass the magic seed of life enrolled on scrolls with languages of wisdom, curled and cured in messages of memory, the song of pleasure hallowing the night, passing the baton to children’s children’s rolling dream genetic.

3. As cause and wonder green the land in harmony, the crashing falls of water lend their course of life from mountain to the plain, sweet molecule formations administering hope to all that would take breath, all astir with water and its gifts, await the crowning flight of fancy formed from mud beneath the sun, in patience squandered not in vain and efforts culminating all that rose before, charted ribbons of plan for leagues of cable laced and linked and conceived in complexity of finished form and purpose, a mirror of the cosmos tuned to stand upright and think and reign as servant—king and tender of the garden, unparalleled among the bounding beasts and birthed to exceed their every deed, to fly beyond the wildest dream of birds, and dam the river in envy of the beaver,
shaping cities finer than the hive
and electric skills of sonar sounding the bat,
all this sung on chorus grander than the birdsong,
the Man and Woman shaped in perfect complement
of pleased purpose
completing each the other's lack and need,
stirring in reflection of divinity
and clad in naked innocence,
only Heaven reigns supreme above them.

4. All thought and language quickly manifests
to each as partner to Dominion,
raised and freed above the soil,
crowned of honor to the heights of regency
and draped in garments of delight,
yet they gaze beyond the ordered squads
of flying fowl passing overhead
and yawn forbidden fairways for their own,
they clamber from their perch
above the spreading garden
where no fierce beast is there to fear
within their province and domain
of formulated harmony in rhythms of divinity,
and in their grasp the power of the seed
to raise the Earth to Heaven,
to bring forth men of image as their own,
nothing lay between them here,
no thing denied but one a single admonition,
and there they break the one forbidden law
to burst the fragile silver thread of trust,
both mired now in clay with haunted dreams,
veiled in perplexity.

—Elhanan ben-Avraham

GOATS AT ADYAR

at Adyar even the goats
slender as reed flutes
attain enlightenment
to the garden of meditation they go
an ancient gathering of trees
a cloud flock
patches of sunlight sieved through branches;
deliberate as measured monsoon rain
the quiet goats' souls enter;
watching them the mind empties and stills
as a large open—winged bird breaks flight
lifting its warm white throat
up into light.

—Wendy Dickstein

FIRST RAYS OF THE SUN

Splintered shadows give shape
to rock formations sprawling,
twisted cactus is revealed.

A lizard is inspired to run,
doesn't stop to measure malice.
Snake holes everywhere,
the true architects of sudden death.

Flowers I can't name are abundant.
Morning shivers gone,
I squint from the sun's glare,
my morning greeting.

Desert's cracked and listless.
The rain is welcome but absent.
Presently, heat prevails.
The terror of perfection rules.

—Joseph Brush

OH PRAYING MANTIS DO NOT PREY FOR ME

when I was but a child
I'd see you
in your green devotion on the farm
crawling up a stick
in blue ascent

I'd watch your monkish posture
transfixed upon the lithe divinity
of summer days
within the sacred branches
of a living elm you thinned
the edges of the dropping shade
like water cooling on the shadow darkened lawn

but with a closer look
I'd glimpse the exoskeleton
with hunger in its form
betraying the ravenous purpose
of your serrated jaw
that sawed away
the softly amber honey box
the sessile ambush or your kind
designed to make a ravenous crunch
that stilled the hapless drone

come friar bug
what's insect hagiography
among the katydids

the angel with his burning appetite
for flaming swords
brings fire to these aging bones
and though today
the evolutionary beauty
of the dead leaf butterfly
trace open heaven
to the infinite glory of a single hand
I trust my soul is both
the dying oak of autumn
and the glowing surface of an opening wing

— John B. Lee

SOJOURNER IN A MOUNTAINOUS LANDSCAPE

These thousands of tall, skinny spruces—
tracing the mountains like wicked staircases—
each enrobed in midnight green speckled
with pale aqua when the full moon
comes to rest atop her effulgent throne.
The living waters—those many streams—
are like veins under human flesh—
their silvered scintillation like
a half-hidden heartbeat.
I wish I could pour myself into this land,
or soar as metallic light above it,
or become the high-hung, whorled branches—

my needles forming a thousand spiral staircases.

— Bryan Nichols

PRAISE

“Praise the Lord for He is good
His steadfast love is eternal.”
Psalms 118:1

your eight-week
old
smile

un-furrows
winter
brows

baby
hands
clapping
at the sight
of the sea
sound
of the waves

new
to you
and now
new to us
again.

— Felice Miryam Kahn Ziskin

SOMETHING BITTER

Something bitter, some unexpected thought,
Some collapsing glacier wall, some discovery
Of excited gamma waves, some slip
On El Capitan, recovery

At the end of a rope, don’t be afraid,
Cling to the wall itself, cling
To molecules, clinging to night
Or wind or to an echoing,

The Brooks River roars in Katmai Park,
The sunlight soaks closed eyelids,
The passage through wind-softened rocks
Contains the murmur of katydids.

— Yaacov David Shulman

NOT EVERYONE HAS LAWS

Not everyone has laws. They come
From life, the crisp autumn comes
With the wind, it comes down from
The mountains, it shakes the geraniums.

The feral cats don’t notice the fading
Stars, the blur of orange-pink,
And the quiet in the hollow of
The day that speaks, their eyes blink,

They do not see the fantasy,
The shocking wealth, the sap in the tree,
They think it has always been here, the supple
Wind, the cars and their ennui.

— Yaacov David Shulman

HE-WITH-THE-SUN-IN-HIS-MOUTH*

The ravens have gone.
The sky they once flew has been emptied.
When I walk out the door, clearances—a pure change.
No more the deep calls
from on high like a bell sharply struck.
No more the fanfare and bluster. The day is listless,
the sun untroubled by wings.

The ravens have gone.
No more the graceful loops and glides,
the beauty they make of the sky and wind—
my mind become beautiful by the sight
of them. Kloo-kok, kloo-kok, I sing, hoping
to lure them back...How all things flash,
how all things flare! Kloo-kok.

— Constance Rowell Mastores

*One of the names used by the Native Americans of the Northwest for a raven. The raven often flies so high that it appears to blot out the sun; or to hold it in its "mouth".
PANORAMA: A FOUND POEM*

Just three words
The pale clouds
Created in China
Just three words
Far from home
Local people know
Believe in miracles
Certain cult status

Beautiful underwater world
Current art zone
Layer of silt
River between hills

Medium haul fleet
Each measured brick
Experiences bond together
Quirky moving platforms

Most market vendors
Follow this advice
Long bike ride
Drink for free

My childhood adults
Stars, designers, stylists
Actively support this
Only in Madagascar
Continuing the story

Availability of beer
Time and possibility
Funny things happen
Follow our advice
Confusing scientific principles

Advantage for transit
Small brick houses
Some healthy walking
Modern high tides
Residents fenced up
Creaking floors, ceilings

Most impressive tickets
Tribute to traditions
American jazz legends
Current special offers

An average person
Of another sort
Catch a breath
Full smile design
You can appreciate

from LADDERS

4.
I listen for a music
Not played in concert halls
Nor sung by human voices.

Its instruments are lives
That resonate through time
And modulate each day.

I hear a cosmic rhythm
Guiding the stars in heaven
And the pulsing of my blood.

9.
Unless the bike is moving
You cannot sit on it;
Momentum holds you straight.

Unless your mind is rolling
You must fall behind
The world’s revolving wheels.

A vital spring keeps flowing
Down the mountainside;
You’ll run with it or die.

15.
To anticipate the green
Whose light impels us forward
When we are stuck in lines;

To celebrate green leaves
Bringing welcome comfort
After a freezing season,

Something green within us
Wakes the dormant soul:
It’s time to move again.

19.
All material things
Vibrate with soft voices
That murmur in our dreams.

Listen, trees are singing,
And rivers recite a prayer
That only you can hear.

Ocean waves are chanting
Odes to their Creator,
And cloudy skies grow clear.

—Mindy Aber Barad

* with special thanks to Ukraine International Airlines magazine

—David Weiser

(More poems in this series may be found on our homepage' www.derondareview.org)
universe

lying side by side
my six-year-old daughter
and I
where the wavelets
of the sea ebb and flow
in the wonderful light
of that early morning hour
before anyone else arrives

the many billions
of stars born
billions of years before
burn without life
unseen
and billions of planets
swirl around them
also unseen

it matters not
my daughter’s footprints
and mine
in the wet sand
are sufficient
to make our place
in the universe

— Larry Lefkowitz

IV. Seeing In

SIGHT, VISION, INSIGHT

Insight, seeing in—into
the centre, to
the heavenly houses
built in the soul,
or in the heavens,
or both?

The gates open
as evening darkens,
angels carry flowers,
prayers inward,
upward.

The heavens open
in the Temple’s heart.
The prophet looks up,
and the angels descend
the ladder of the spheres.

We descend the rungs
into ourselves, into
our heart’s chambers
that pump life’s blood.

— Michael E. Stone
24 June 2009 London

THE HEIGHT OF THE EBB

Even at the height of the ebb I live.
The moon is what draws the waves of my soul
back and forth
from ebb to flow.
Trash is revealed on the shore
when the water draws back.
Things I left on the bottom of the sea,
thinking their power
was gone,
their time over and done,
are suddenly revealed.
This is the moment to gather them up,
before the tide of pride returns.

— Imri Perel
translated by Esther Cameron and Sarita Perel

BETWEEN POEMS

You write a poem
when the poem lets you know it is ripe
ready to break off the branch
ready to separate from you

Between poems you wait

You write a poem in response to distant pressure
that starts in your veins
then translates itself into rhythm

Between poems you wait

You write a poem when a sudden light
streaks meteor against a dark mass of sky
and you wonder breathless if you saw it at all
if it will return
it returns a constellation
a choreography of light

Between poems you wait

You write a poem when you feel an arc
when you feel its upward tilt
when you feel an arc
from its half image you divine the whole

Between poems you wait

When you wait
not knowing if you are barren
or between births
set deep in stone gradients of silence
or merely between refrains
you are a poet waiting for the poem

— Judy Belsky
YOU ARE NOT ALONE

When writing, you are not alone, but face yourself. Like looking in a magic mirror with X-ray power, then a magic glass both telescopic – an explorer’s wand that reaches distant times as well as places – and microscopic – like a scientist’s which can reveal the smallest hidden spaces. Remote things are transformed to something nearer; thoughts that confused you last night now seem clearer, as objects freed by dissipated mists.

The You in this case was a college class at SUNY-Delhi. I was not responding to a question, but providing patter between the recitations from my book – which they had, mostly. Those without could look up at the screen or share their neighbor’s.

I looked up, there, half-hidden by their hands, my name, on spines and jackets, blazoned through the drab fluorescence, as if it might matter.

This morning, as I dote on dreamscape lands and feelings’ fardels as daft poets do, I’m dazzled by that deliquescent light, wrapped in the image of them rapt before me, and am not alone, for as I write I hold them as they held me, each made more, the oneness of us, mattering once again.

—James B. Nicola

WINGS

If only the winged spirit would rest on me, if only The one with wings three times folded inward Whose wings are spotted with faded sparks For every fold a name is written On the fold line of the wings.

And the heretic spirit will come to me, if only, Pulverised and pressed in the spirit – mill whose wings are clipped And say to me: I am Zoharia And look how I survive And how I spread my wings On which the marks of folding can be seen And drink a whole barrelful of wine To life, if only.

And the names that mark the folds fly off One: Was Two: Unknown Three: If only

—Tirtsa Posklinsky Shehory
translated by Esther Cameron

BALLAD OF THE BURNT-OUT PROF

... something ... eternally gained for the universe ...
—William James

Old Duracell, old Mazda-man you’ve got to keep the light— it’s growing dim inside you but that’s no time to hide you— there’s just a chance you might say something shedding light.

Old Candle-wick, old Burnt-out Prof, (who calls himself the Bop) old hairy ears and snout, Tochisafittish! you gouty worn-out lout— oh, call yourself a name, old cuss— because you weren’t the best, and yet you know it doesn’t matter, no, not in the least.

Old geeze, don’t lose your grip, don’t fall and break your hip— you’ve got to keep the light, baldspot, you’ve got to keep the light, because there’s just a chance if you keep the light, old souse, if you keep the light, there’s still a chance, though mad, that there’s something left to add.

You’ve got to keep the light, old piles, you’ve got to keep the light. You know you’ve been a dog, oh, you’ve acted like a trayf old hog, but somehow in your life you’ve had a loving wife, so there must be something good about you, you lousy lucky lout you— all I ask of you, old candle, is just to keep the Godblessed light, and show a flash of pluck, old duck, and with a bit of luck you might come up with something worthy of the world that you’ve surveyed.

You’ve been around so long now you’ve got to hold some light, whether hell or heaven is waiting with its leaven to galvanize you new again for better or for worse, old man of steel, who once pumped iron, don’t listen to that deathly siren, you’ve got to keep the light a while,
you’ve got to keep that gap-toothed smile,
you’ve got to keep the light alive
inside your horrible old hide,
because you still might do a thing
that’s worthy of its doing,
you’ve got to keep the light, old pipe,
you’ve got to keep the light.

You’ve written many a poem, old bard,
and published many too,
but I’ve got news for you, old prof,
I’ve got news for you —
you haven’t any right, old cough,
not to keep the light.
You don’t get off like that, old shakes
fall off the roof like that —
there’s plenty time to die, old guy,
plenty time to die,
so keep on pumping light, old Bop,
pumping students light!

−E.M. Schorb

KAFKA

Are we on trial, Mister K.? It’s late —
Too late, you claim — to go out looking for
A lawyer to defend us beggars, poor
And trembling in the dusk as we all wait
In pouring rain outside the castle gate
And hope in vain to see it open or
To hear the porter’s steps. It seems no door
Will soon unlatch to save us from our fate.

What is the metamorphosis we’ll find
Upon our death? You’ve warned us, Mister K.,
We’ll be a cockroach, for neither wraith
Nor ghost survive the twilight of the mind.
Yet in that night, the worm of Jacob may
Become the monarch butterfly of faith.

−YakovAzriel

THE MONARCH BUTTERFLY OF FAITH

The monarch butterfly of faith once reigned
As queen when all our fields were fragrant-green;
When purple orchids bloomed and streams flowed clean,
Her sovereignty appeared to be ordained.
And we, her subjects, gazed in awe, unfeigned
In homage and devotion to our queen
Whose wings of topaz-ruby-aquamarine
Proclaimed her reign a paradise regained.

Now exiled from that realm like fugitives,
We and our dethroned queen reside in gutters,
Where the stench of fetid sewage never dies.

Yet look — the butterfly of faith still lives;
Despite defeat, despite despair — she flutters;
Despite all doubts, despite all fears — she flies.

−YakovAzriel

THE WINGS OF A FALCON

With a glance I devoured a piece of sky,
Liberated from between the clouds,

Impaling feathers in my flesh
Which I had been gathering with great pain,
Towards the time when the wind will rise
And I will take off
And crash.

And again the beating
Of wings
Dwells between my shoulder blades.
Not the wings of a raven,
Not the wings of a dove,
The wings of a falcon
Whose claws grasp the last serpent —
The wings of an angel of God.

And even those shall be shed
On the day I will fly
With the force of life alone.

−Imri Perel

translated by Esther Cameron and Sarita Perel

REACHING TO THE HEAVENS

I throw my ring up high
attached to a golden chain,
to heaven I want to fly
to reach a higher plane.

Bound to earth, grounded,
I reach above, beyond the bar
to where love is boundless
to where the meanings are.

I throw my golden chain
above the clouds and dreams,
to reach the realm of the soul
to where things are what they seem.

Bound to horizons limited,
I yearn to stretch afar,
to reach the world of the spirits,
to catch my guiding star.

−Yocheved Miriam Zemel
TWO DAYS BEFORE

"O Lord, open my lips
And my mouth shall declare Your praise."
Psalms 2:17

Two days before
the new moon
of the month
of miracles
I hear
you
breathe
close to
the music
beyond the
open
window

—Felice Miryam Kahn Zisken

THE SONG OF SHMONEH ESREH*
  dedicated to the Melech b’Sadeh**

Sometime the song wells up
through a chamber of my heart,
sometimes through a vibrato
in your soul,
sometimes it tickles through
the toes of my grandson
while he is scaling a wall
of Jerusalem stone.

Last night I heard it
without words,
all eighteen daily blessings
seeking a mouth
to sound them,
not like an ancient aire
floating by on winds of night,
rather akin to a clump
of winged earth
eager to take root
in our so human flesh.

 Beneath that canopy of loam
I glimpsed you, owner
of all fields, less of a lord
than a true friend
in feckless times.

—Vera Schwarcz

** "The King in the field": according, to Kabbalah, during the month of Elul before Rosh HaShanah, we find Hashem closer to us than at other times of the year, not the mighty Ruler ensconced in the Castle of Judgment, but wandering among us in the field, eager and ready to hear our needs, complaints & repentance.

THE WORLD WILL BE FILLED WITH LIGHT

"A society must ask, seek and demand that each individual give something of him/herself...If all of us light the candle of our souls, the world will be filled with light."
R. Adin Even Israel Steinsaltz

Lighting a candle
in the passage to the house
in the seam between day and night.

Lighting candles on the windowsill
for the miracles, for the Sabbath.

A place in the heart always prays.

*When the soul shines
  even skies wrapped in fog
  shed a beautiful light.

Olive trees, cypress, young and old
reach for threads of gold
and our eyes see in one phial of oil
what cannot be seen.

—Felice Miryam Kahn Zisken

** "Eighteen" (Hebrew), one of the terms for the standing prayer (Amidah) which some Jews say 3 times a day, others of us once or twice each day — it contains 18 (actually now 19) blessings
WORD SONNET*

Human
spark
ignites
divine
flame
in
Jewish
hearts
to
scatter
light
in
His
world.

— Esther Halpern

*first written as a prose sentence, turned into a word sonnet at the suggestion of Ruth Fogelman

V. As Part of Something More

[untitled]

As in a peaceful orchard
Alone
In infinite silence
To touch the crown of the blue
To tread the transparent path

— Ruth Gilead
translated by Esther Cameron

quick glance

Crimson and gold leaves
cling to branches
and autumn arrives
with color. How could
ever exist in such a
beautiful setting?
Did Eden’s garden
glow? While the
Almighty suppresses
tears for man’s free
choice to continue to
harm fellow humans,
we are given streaks
of setting sun, snowflakes,
spring buds to show us
a glimpse of Utopia
so we may better bear
much darkness in daily
life.

— Lois Greene Stone

UTOPIAS

Salty sea
intimate space,
darkness wrapping
in warm embrace,
heartbeats rocking me
cradled, safe:
that was my first
Utopia—of place.

Summer vacation
sunrise, sea,
childhood elation—
at long last free!
Time to wander
along the shore,
time to ponder,
time to explore
rock-pools, reaching
for shells through brine:
that was my second
Utopia—of time.

And now—in a wood, say,
sunslant through leaves,
blackbirds trilling
filling the breeze,
time standing still
the world suddenly whole,
I glimpse for an instant
a Utopia of soul.

— Judy Koren
Suddenly it’s Genesis
and I appoint myself

- care-taker

of a piece of earth's crust

Plowing  Planting  Watering  Pruning
Picking  Kindling  Burning  Building
Feeding

Getting rid of poisonous insects

All those occupations

that

If you give them

an instant

Grab your

Whole Life

— Sabina Messeg
translated by the author

THERE IS NO HOUSE OPPOSITE MY HOUSE

There is no house opposite my house, no window
opposite my window,
no door opposite my door, no strife opposite my song

— I am neighbor
to a body of mountains
that stands erect
above the supine bodies of the valley

Their love
is more pleasant to me than the love of humans

Their love exempts me from duties
of the heart, it lets my soul go
free

I no longer need loves—
just one more day, and another... and another,
just days that rush forth shorter and shorter
just time, just
the light tremor
of the pen

ballpoint or fountain

into whose nostrils has risen
from under
the scorched crust of earth

— the scent of water
— Sabina Messeg
translated by Esther Cameron and the author

SUBWAY CITY

It was a social painting
society moving
a tradition of going
and places achieved
the divide of space
sacrificed for destination
remarkable for determination
embroidered hearts
safe from strangers
each a star
without a shine
a name hidden within
rivers of shoulders
a universe of faces
each with a history
like waves under a ship.

— Roger Singer

SUBWAY FLOOR WITH PAINTED PATTERN

Someone made this subway floor
of variegated flecks,
each a part of something more
against a base of black.

Look down—the variegated flecks
come in hues of human skin
against a base of nightsky black:
off-white, off-red, yellow, brown, tan... 

So many hues like human skin,
sized, shaped, placed like confetti,
off-white, red, yellow, brown, taupe, tan,
as if every fleck were ready,
The Deronda Review vol. VIII no. 1

festive-flung like fun confetti,
to go as Someone’s subway floor
of mixed society – ready
to ride as part of something more.

—James B. Nicola

SONG OF THE PEACEFUL HEART

What lasted was the Lord’s, his fingers
Busy with creation, sunny weather
And the sound of roosters laughing.
Later, the music of bulls
Dancing around a campfire
Waiting for the females to arrive.

Sitting on a mossy log
with a banjo plinking

Oh Susanna
A raccoon hums & smiles.

Children touched
By the finger of God

Skip like monkeys, pure happiness,
No witnesses required.

— Alan Basting

FAMILY COLORS

In my family
now
are many colors,
and backgrounds:
European, Hispanic,
African, Asian, and
Native American too.
One family:
children, spouses
and grandchildren.
Ours is just one
of many thousands
across the globe
building
a new future,
and new vision,
of inclusion
for us all.

— Duane L Herrmann

"LE LIVING"

The living.
Compromise of the living.

We are not like the heroic dead.
Graceless, scrofulous

with scrupulosity,
I saw our desire to mirror ourselves....

Lo! We are proud performers in a little
rock and shrub enclosed circle.

We have the dignity of the rays of the sun,
the step of the expectation of the onlooker—

What if our dance is a prance?
Join us.

— Reuven Goldfarb

*The “Le” refers to The Living Theatre, a radical theatre
formed in New York in the ’60’s by Judith Malina and Julian
Beck, whose premise was that the audience was as much a
part of the play as the actors, and that the play (and your part
in the play) began as soon as you entered the building or the
space where the performance was to be held. Extend this
aesthetic further out, and we are all actors in the play of life.

THE FOREST PATH

I want to go to you
where the kudzu darkens a space like a secret door
to a grand foreign place
so I can slip into where I belong, where I began
merge with dirt, earth, and leaf all belief before me
and hold in my hand cool mystery like water from the stream

This dull day I can only catch a chance glance
at the deer on the roadside eating sweet grass
the hawk on a long branch at rest
as I sit uneasy, a stranger in a crowd that forgets
the meaning of many words

The past means little to me, cast out a fair price for the
delight
of falling and rising up
for a choice that means so much
I don’t like prim talks, neat walks, teacup lawns and
arduous laws
yet I cast myself out
somewhere a long time ago I got very lost
I’m heading now to find my way back
to the pine shadowed forest path.

— Susan Oleferuk
WHERE TO?

How cunningly the hours are spent roaming the boxwood grove alongside the river.

Thoughts come astride of each footfall, fleeting but recaptured within moments, thereafter to be counted if, in fact, fleeting occurrences count in the daily climbing of each precipice.

It is altogether useless to complain. Just look to the sky for comfort, as if stars could be seen in daylight before sun begins to meddle.

Where should she start, knowing that starting points are arbitrary and inconsiderate of any urge to get immediately into motion. However, thoughts will do no lasting damage.

She is prepared to comport with whatever is required in the field and to claim innocence if anyone objects. She will commence with a general scurrying in friendly territory and will plan to reach the outpost in due course.

— Irene Mitchell

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

By the consent of the Omnipresent, weary of supplications,
And by the consent of the audience held captive in auditoriums
By the assembly on the top floors of high rises
And by the assembly of the ground floor, the dwellers in streets

We permit you everything

And the court repeats the formula three times: All things are permitted to you All things are forgiven you All things help you And the light is sweet and good to the eyes and it is permitted to love

Go forth

— Amichai Chasson

SWOLLEN AND SWELLING

Now all the earth is swollen and swelling, the fields and the furrows are swollen and swelling, swelling and swollen, the ditches and rivers, the fatbergs and graves, are swollen and swelling, swelling and swollen, the longings of children buried in prisons are flowing and swelling, foaming and swollen, the hands of the migrants, imprisoned for being, are lifeless and broken, hallowed and aching, we have suffered from generals riding stone horses we have suffered from flags waved in our faces we have suffered our congress of mansplaining con men, we rise with the women we rise over churches, we rise over armies, battered unbroken, believing and seeing, buoyed by the zeitgeist, the flux and the flooding. Shall I say goodbye to the ruined land where will I go clutching my iPhone, wearing a watch that counts all my footsteps, where will the GPS lead? What will I find that restores the lost forests, turns loose the walled rivers. My virtual reality is chock full of diversion, friends laughing on Facebook, family on Facetime. Yet I long for an animal to caress, for the cry of the fox, song of the loon over calm evening water, the splash of a frog that is not threatened, the glimpse of a wolf that is not tagged and tracked, the scent of mossy stones where a sweet sea laps the shore.

Up from our humblebrag leaders, up from the binge—watching flock, up from the talk shows and scorn of the foreign we rise with the women, we gather together in gardens and farm fields, growing and plowing, in the season of seeding, when all the earth is swollen and swelling, when a torrent of blackbirds will come down and remake us, skirling and screeching, wailing and whirling over the wetlands, the cattails and rushes, our home and beginning.

— Douglas Macdonald
AXIS MUNDI

When that's done you will again be a Messiah
I will again be a dove
Together we'll be the leading sheep ringing in the
fields of the bodies
Whatever she knows is most correct
We'll hover between the heavenly and earthly
Jerusalem
In this gentle motion this path straight as an arrow
Skewered like Cozbi and Zimri
(Yes, I know
Despite and despite)
On the axis mundi
Precisely above the foundation stone

— Tirtsa Posklinsky Shehory
translated by Esther Cameron

UTOPIA AMONG PEOPLE

Whirlpools of clouds in a dream cradle
White clusters, black-grey clusters
Riding on the wind, with human sighs
Rising to the embroidered skies
Memorializing like a flash in the eye's lens
Blazing Vancouver at burning sundown
And frozen Baker Mountain in its
Snow white gown.
Its neighbors are silent at its feet at the lake shore
The soul longs
To shelter under other souls' humble wings.
Words from the soul's lake tear the net
The strands of thought
Like the quacking of mallards
Spreading the depths of the soul in a net of words
Shortening the distance
To touch, to feel, to breathe, to see
To look down on the valley from the summit
To look into the valley of others' dreams
To dance with them like elves in fairytales
Spirit with spirit
Word with word
Mesh in gentle accord
To prolong the generous moment
Like a sustained chord
And the secret of the body and its outburst
Like a corset
Will be removed

― Rachelly Abraham-Eitan

PUTTING ON TEFILLIN

"And you shall put these, My words, on your
heart and on your soul, and you shall bind them as
a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets
between your eyes. ” (Deuteronomy 11:18)

Every morning the prophet Ezekiel put on
Tefillin of a chariot,
And when he wound the straps around his arm,
He would see the tracks of wheels
And a storm wind; and a cloud; and a fire ablaze.

Every morning King David put on
Tefillin of a harp,
And when he wound the straps around his arm,
He would see musical notes
Quavering on a seven—lined stave.

Every morning Joseph put on
Tefillin of dreams,
And when he wound the straps around his arm,
He would see stars binding sheaves
As the sun and the moon whispered: 'Amen'.

— Ed Meek

WHAT I'LL MISS

1.
Swimming with you in a glacial pond in Wellfleet
— water warmer than air in September —
so clear you can see twenty feet down,
perch flitting in between — miniature
submarines. It takes us all summer
to get to where we can swim
across and back Dyer Pond.

We need to relearn to relax and breathe,
turning heads to capture air,
returning to a fluid world
our bodies seem to remember
somewhere beyond thought — our arms extend
to pull and push the water behind
where legs scissor and feet paddle.
We slice through — — smooth as seals.

2.
Maybe this is the world we'll return to —
the one we were baptized in,
the one where we spent most of our first year,
hooked up, enveloped, floating
in viscous warmth
until we grew too big to carry
and had to emerge
into the light of this world.

Could it be like that? Not heaven
but the murky dusk of our subconscious
where now we nightly float
and where we will return to remember
how to breathe and swim and see.

— Tirtsa Posklinsky Shehory
translated by Esther Cameron
Every morning Jacob put on
Tefillin of a ladder,
And when he wound the straps around his arm,
He would see angels ascending
Rung by rung.

But I — every morning I put on
Tefillin of sand,
And when I wind the straps around my arm,
They break apart, disintegrate and disperse
Like grains in the desert of routine.

When will I put on
Not the tefillin of Rashi,
Nor the tefillin of Rabbeinu Tam,
But rather
The tefillin of Rabbi Nachman,
Tefillin of Shabbat?

— Yakov Azriel

REVELATORY VISTAS

Religion having lost its cutting edge
in western realms, we need a new conceit
that realistically can put a wedge
between man’s arrogance and the elite
presumptions most religious realms afford.
We need to open up the roof that hides
galactic mysteries which checkerboard
the universe with cosmic regicides.
Perhaps their subjects need to be less smug
and with the ever after less secure.
We’d better probe past gilt-edged books that plug
up holes in reason’s rusty armature
and give up sailing from a spirit realm.
But then we need to stand fast at the helm.

— Frank De Canio

EX NIHILO

I
In Cordova
Pure and refined
They created
And re-created
Worlds of knowledges
Of fathers and mothers
Creating together

Hearts in love with G-d
Knowledges of worlds
Beyond good and evil
In need of darkness
In order to discern the light
Neither inside nor outside

Joined together
Empty and full in the study hall
The doing of the Universe
Through their extended vision

II
Born in the balance
mothers and fathers
higher and higher intelligences
mold themselves
By stages
From nothing —
A crown

Desire to create
Inside out
In order to receive

I sink deep inside
To that place of twinkling growth
And pull, gasp, push.
We Parents
Participate in the
Crowning

III
into the emptiness
He poured the rules
created safe borders
to find peace
for the rumbling and tumbling
in the Hidden Place
yet to be revealed

I close my eyes
count the months
lean against the wall
that separates me from
annihilation
in perfect belief
that all will remain as it was
when I awaken

IV
I perceive
a world that exists
in a balance of pure light
reality fractured by distinctions

In the paradox…
Paradise
And Supernal reality
Both too much with too little light
Blind,
Blur the differences
Between day and night
To co-exist in contradiction

— Mindy Aber Barad
WHEN RABBI AKIVA DIED A MARTYR’S DEATH

"Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

"‘with all your soul’ — Rabbi Akiva taught, even when your soul is being taken away” (The Talmud)

When Rabbi Akiva died a martyr’s death,
Tortured with iron combs as he was slain,
His soul untainted, his body raked by pain —
What did he see as he gasped his final breath?
Chimneys with human smoke from the twentieth Century? Fires from autos-da-fe in Spain?
How decades after Abel’s murder, Cain
Still schemed to slaughter all the sons of Seth?

Or as he said the Shma and died, did he
Behold the Temple rise above the sand
And dust of death, enveloped by an aura?
For there, inside the Temple’s court, Rashi
And the Rambam, the Gra, the Besht, all stand,
Nodding as the Messiah teaches Torah.

—Yakov Azriel

HUNGER

They left me in the forest.
My sister who is me and me
Got lost and lost.
I doubled myself because loneliness is
The real beast.
And in the thick of the forest no one speaks my
language
(Out of the meagre mouth pours darkness.
From the clenched lap to the uttering lips).

Memory shrinks to a sentence:
The hunger was very severe (description)
I ate and ate and was not satisfied (cause)
They left me in the forest (effect)
They left me in the forest (repetition)
They left me in the forest (compulsive repetition).

I dream of a burning gingerbread house
Deep in the forest
And inside the house a broad woman
Whose eyes are tender.

—Netalie Braun
translated by Esther Cameron with the author

TO THE SHEKHINAH IN TEVET

Upon this day of darkness, Mother, may
Your image rise and shine in many minds
As the one metaphor of all our caring,
Sign of the being in which we must live.

Your image rises, shines in many minds.
Your light shines forth from one face to another.
Sign of the being in which we must live,
In your presence things fall into place.

Your light shines forth from one face to another.
Under your glance the ways of help appear.
In your presence things fall into place.
You organize our issues and concerns.

Under your glance the ways of help appear.
In your hands the things we do add up.
You organize our issues and concerns.
You are the map, the blueprint of our temple.

In your hands the things we do add up.
You are memory, storehouse of our good.
You are the map, the blueprint of our temple.
You are the meeting-place, the standing-ground.

You are mind’s integrity and purpose.
You show us how to sift the laws and customs.
Talisman of the freedom of the upright.

You are mind’s integrity and purpose.
You show us how to sift the laws and customs.
Talisman of the freedom of the upright,
Through you we know what we must hold inviolate.

You show us how to sift the laws and customs.
As the one metaphor of all our caring,
Soul of creation, our inviolate House,
Upon this day of darkness, Mother, rise.

—Esther Cameron

I’LL TELL YOU HOW HAPPY THEY WERE

We were sitting in Sheshet’s bar near the streets of the river
Mixing cocktails of being and nothingness in tall
Colorful glasses that almost shattered in our hands,
drinking and swimming
From the mouth of the river to the end of the last sea,
swimming and drinking
Not listening to the heavenly voice whispering: water, water.

—Amichai Chasson
translated by Esther Cameron
YOU HOPE TO BE

You hope to be a discoverer
Of the spark of life which links
Person to person—
Soul to soul.

You hope to illuminate
This world of darkness,
Seeing past the warpedness
The woundedness
Weaving together
Neshama, neshama,
Until all neshamas are one.

Do not undertake this lightly
Lest you are the sole light
Left out of the great gathering,
Exiled from the utopia
You hope to create.

—Sara DeBeer

VI. New Places

THE ARCHEOLOGIST, STILL AN INTERN, PAUSES

Beneath stacked societies and the slow creep of evolution, she finds a knife hacked from stone, honed by flint and use. Shards of bowls next to it, chips in the ashes.

This was the kitchen of a home. Most likely the knife once cut flesh from the hide of antelope, and maybe something like bread. She sees no spears,

no feathered crowns, no trace of shattered skulls. Her colleagues test its ancient stains:
no smudge of human blood found at the edge.
There might have been a peaceful time.

—Florence Weinberger

ON UTOPIA

Oh! Another quixotic utopia
with the wonders of a perfect place!
But why not Arcadia beyond the corner,
the one society where one’s actions can help?

On the extremes, there are no faults
without reproach in body and in soul.
Let Shangri-La give its concert,
played by the beautiful immortal lady.

Come across time to the golden age
when, without effort, you did much.
You are invited to a gilded lifestyle
of philosophers with servants on hand.

Then go over the Sambatyon River
to meet the warriors of the ten tribes.
Behold their age-old customs
and work in harmony with the land.

Come and watch Hollywood,
with unmatched creativity
of otherworldly adventures,
inhabited by incomparable heroes.

Visit Israel as the land
of flowing milk and honey.
Over five thousand books written
about her by starry-eyed travelers!

Utopia means a way of life
where back-breaking work becomes easy.
Leaders in every age, for every age, proclaim it
And they come and go, like the air we breathe.

—Hayim Abramson

From TWO BIRDS IN FLAME: POEMS INSPIRED BY SHAKER THEMES

238. Thirteen Bottles


We are seldom ill. We receive long lives and splendid health. Perhaps it is our clear country air or our sturdy diet, home grown fruits and vegetables, canned in our own kitchen by our busy strong hands. More it seems than we can preserve. It becomes an ever-bounteous table round the year, but our produce is best eaten in season.
Six pies a day. Each! We work with great energy in our fields and at our daily tasks. Haying, threshing, churning, even laundry is heavy labor, hefting baskets, full sixty pounds each, and each must be carried to the top floors of the dwelling. Thus we stay strong.
And our tables blessed also by little strife. Yet we know the ills of the world, the pang of the mother in labor, the twisting spasm of gall bladder and kidney stone, shock of angina, and the wheezing hunger for air, so we make our little gifts to the men and women outside, without insisting they join us, our remedies offered to all.

—Kelley Jean White MD
AN INNOCENT STROLL

From this point on there is only silence. From my house to the beach I’ve cleared away everything. Hired workmen worked from night to morning clearing away what was left of the city. From here to the sea there is only a long junkyard lying motionless and voiceless.

So at dawn I put on my coat and walked out the door At such an hour. Not to rebel. Not to repair. And not as a prophet wrapped In a mantle. I went to inspect my kingdom, an innocent stroll
And to see it suddenly in a different light.

— Admiel Kosman
Translated by Esther Cameron

THIS NEW PLACE

I waited for the heat to break
to walk out into this mauve evening.
Convex rows of lights distantly gleam
as the hills layer broadly down to the sea.
Lupines grow here amidst the thistles and just beyond, thickening stands of trees appear. I move into a sudden scent of pine carried eastward by the breeze. Here and there cypress stand erect against the deepening sky. In this new place my eyes don’t leave the path although they want to watch the stars emerge and add their glitter from afar.
The silence of this high open space sings, pristine, peaceful, full of promise.

— Erika Zeisel

THE CENTRAL GOD

This is the central God who is now passing through our neighborhood.
He heals and fixes everything, and he has time in abundance, no one
Pushes any more. Yesterday, today, tomorrow, he smiles.
Now he is the central God who comes as a glazier.

A glazier. A new glazier for repairs. From every balcony, all Members of the family and the neighbors, they all see him now,
Lean and thin as he is, almost transparent, passing by, With complete tranquillity repairing and setting in order, oh

You have nothing to worry about, ma’am, everything shines
Now, the windows and the lights, everything New and polished, thus the business Of life is turning out well,
For my central God is passing
As a glazier through our neighborhood.

This is the central, the supreme, the exalted God, and he is now passing
Through our neighborhood as a gardener. With a rake and a spade and one broken pail. He Weeds and cultivates, on the garden of the neighbor on the left he scatters An eternal dust of radiance, on the burn-scar of the future, of the past, what Is there to be afraid of here he smiles

To the old man and the old woman, nothing is Too late, you see I have Counsel, I have insight, I have Forgiveness, I have understanding, and again God smiles, this is the central God, Of glory, of mists, of angels and the Shekhinah, For my people in my neighborhood, who are so tired, Yesterday, today, tomorrow.

This is the central God, the highest, the supreme, the exalted God,
Now passing through our neighborhood with a wheelbarrow, this is the professional God, the plasterer, the molder of grace, the painter Of abundance, on the wheelbarrow between the paper-rolls and the tiles He’s also carrying the plasterboard of knowing And choice, while this God, thin as he is, the central God, the God who fixes, who many Years ago poured the foundations of this universe, pure and clear, seated Upon the cherubim, mighty and dazzling, Lord, Creator, Maker, and his voice Speaks equity, wrapping himself in light as a cloak, this God is now passing through my home in complete tranquillity, Fixing up and setting in good order Whatever came by way of transgression.

— Admiel Kosman
Translated by Esther Cameron
RESPONSIBLE ADULT

Everybody’s looking for that Responsible Adult; and when that Responsible Adult walks into the room, everyone will know it—even the nervous dogs that shy when you make a move.

They slink, so you have to sit quietly, minding your own business, concentrating very gently on your time-consuming nemesis. Then they’ll come up to you and check your scent. They’re like the subdued men in laundromats, standing quietly by themselves, with their own personal habits and grimaces, when a sudden thought or disappointment will inflame them; they start up in impotent fury, impotent because defused. Their anger flares up and dies away.

Everyone is looking for that Responsible Adult, and when that One comes, even the dogs and old men will know it— they most of all—and they’ll laugh and say, ”Now we’re all really going to get fed!”

— Reuven Goldfarb

MISSILES AND MOLOTOV COCKTAILS

Missiles and Molotov cocktails fly across our Gaza border. Fire crosses our Syrian border while within our borders, terrorists set our land afame and maim and kill our daughters and sons.

And yet, doves fly at the Western Wall and pigeons coo on our window ledge as we mourn and celebrate as if we have two hearts.

We love, have babies as if we have no battles, build families as if we have no wars and with the hope that charges our vision we live each day to the full.

— Ruth Fogelman

"HOW GOODLY ARE THY TENTS, O JACOB” from Bat Ayin

By October, before the biting winter wind, starlings weave twigs and leaves in the crook of a tree, while the people of Bat Ayin are nesting in the distant hills.

From my perch I look through the morning mist to the speck of a man adding another white slat to his sloping roof, leaving an opening for the pipe of the stove that will warm them against the cold.

From here I can see the wings of his son’s white shirt, his daughter’s pink dress and can hear their laughter in harmony with the birdsong not far above my head.

Suddenly, a bird flies by me with a red thread in his beak, so pleased to pleasure his mate for something bright to feather her nest. I imagine the man has put aside his hammer and nails, his struggle to make the roof secure and tight, to surprise his wife with a bouquet of wildflowers from their newly cleared front yard. In the midst of sawdust and splinters she will improvise a vase in that lovely sunlit space and smile.

[untitled]

How many miracles happened to us in this house: That the slippers were always at hand to be put on At the threshold, the entrance to the living room. That the heap of dirty laundry Would whiten, get worn, and return to its heap, That the dishes piled themselves in the sink by themselves, The work of goblins reveling at night. The bears still sleep in the beds Whenever the children are absent, The toothbrushes gossip together, The creaking of doors murmurs a heavy song, And in all this there is man and there is wife There are clothes and there is blessing There is overflow and there is sipping There is blood and there is a tear And a tongue of crimson cloth that whitens every evening After midnight.

— Efrat Bigman translated by Esther Cameron
Meanwhile, high on a mountain in a green tent tucked between the cypress, acacia and pine, a young soldier, struggling to keep awake, was up all night, listening to the jackals howl and guarding us, and this rain-sweetened earth.

Weeks ago we lived in makeshift huts. Open to the stars, reminding us of what is transient and what endures. If, heaven forbid, forces stronger than winter winds prevail we may be knocked down, but never erased.

Knowing we have enemies beyond these hills Who wait for us to assume we are safe, to knock these houses down from their stilts, we have named this place* to remind our God, “guard us like the precious pupil of an eye and shelter us in the shadow of your wings."

. . .

I am only looking in and soon I will be gone, while you read these lines not knowing why I have come, what I have tried, and why I am moving on before the work is done.

— Roberta Chester

*The name ”Bat Ayin” means “pupil of the eye.”

HOUSE MEETING

In two high-rise buildings, meetings of residents were scheduled
At the same hour.
In Building A:
Do not walk on the grass.
Do not place bags of garbage beside the dumpsters.
Do not make noise.
Do not scratch the elevator with your bicycle.
Please pay your fees to the house committee.
In Building B:
Thank you for the welcome cake delivered to the new resident.
Thank you for the hot meals cooked for the neighbor who gave birth.
Thanks to the neighbor who brings a glass of water to the person cleaning the hall.
Thanks for agreeing to the Shabbat elevator.
Thanks to all who care.

— Nitsa Dori

TO DATE

I crossed seven rivers of fire
Seven Sabbaths and another Sabbath of weeping
And in my mouth is a taste of rest that was taken away at twilight
And the holy day prayer and the hubbub of children in the courtyards
And there is no breach nor outburst nor wailing in our streets.

— Amichai Chasson translated by Esther Cameron

from THE LAND ISEBUTE: Excerpts Concerning the Origin, Location, and Customs of the Land and Its Inhabitants

How To Reach The Land Isebute

In the midst of tangled, wintry roads, there is a country. Who built the country and when that country was built is now forgotten, but one thing has been remembered forever: it appeared owing to one’s imagination and since then it has never ceased to develop. The country was generated from a matter that has constantly produced new forms, and if you look at it from above you would get an impression of a living kaleidoscope . . .

. . . If you place yourself closer to the windowpane in which wintry ornaments gleam on nightly canvas you’ll distinguish numerous winding paths leading to the Land Isebute. But please, be patient! Don’t ask which path will bring you faster to Isebute: the way itself matters, and in each case this way must be unique.

Isebute is a country that cannot be found on the regular map. So, if in a wintry night you examine your windowpane you may find on its surface a glossy road map that shows you the way to this country. Only you know how many days and nights you’ve spent, searching for this map and blaming everybody for its disappearance . . .

The Geography . . . And Requirements For Citizenship

Another very strange thing about Isebute is that its visitors cannot agree on how it looks, and they give very conflicting descriptions of its landscape, architecture, and even climate. Thus, some of them state that Isebute is a mountainous area with harsh climate and gothic architecture—a perfect place for philosophers and poets. Others insist that this is a land of lakes with a landscape of plains and a nice, mild weather suitable for dreamers of all kinds. I, personally, heard that Isebute was located under a special sphere that was created to maintain an artificial climate and, thus, increase engineering creativity of its citizens.
However, if you really want to know about this country you must refer to poetry. Only in poetry can one find some traces of Isebute, but who takes poetry for a serious source of knowledge? Indeed, if you seek a detailed information about this country, you’d better find another source because poetry may only deliver you a message and the ability to accept it depends exclusively on you. If you only knew how many readers turned those pages—but nothing happened! They thoroughly read rhymes and words. But in vain! They didn’t get the message and they wondered if there was any . . .

. . . To become an Isebuter one must be born with certain qualities, not on a certain territory. One becomes an Isebuter only on condition that he possesses the Isebuter’s mentality. Only then he will learn successfully how to speak Isebutish and will be finally considered a native speaker. Otherwise, his heavy accent will give him away. No matter how far from this country you are, if you are born to be an Isebuter you will sooner or later become its citizen: your inner compass is pointed at this country and there is no chance that you’d miss it.

The Book Of Isebute

Have you ever read a book that was written exclusively for you and has been waiting for you for ages? Haven’t you? Oh, I see—you doubt that such a book exists. I know. Nevertheless, it does. Ask any Isebuter and he will point at the Bibute—the Book of Isebute, an ancient collection of thoughts written especially for you. Everybody knows this book, but nobody knows what’s in there for you because this is what only you should know. And if you don’t read it then the lives of generations are wasted . . .

. . . In its preface it states: “This book has been waiting for you for a long, long time. Generations have touched these pages before leaving for their eternal journey, but there has always been an anticipation of You. And now You have come, the Reader of the Bibute. Talk to me.”

From The Bibute

If you think that it is only your place that is capable of generating life, you are wrong. Life is life, and no one could tell you what life is not, because even a divine creature that is supposed to live forever cannot permeate the forbidden zone of non-existence. Otherwise, it wouldn’t be the non-existence. Thus, life is everywhere, and it is only a matter of one’s definition whether to call it life or something else. Everything starts with definitions. If they claim to be universal, they may one day fail, for one can always elaborate conditions in which general rules don’t work.

—Vera Zubarev

THE FALL

I had been too long in the garden
an eternity of days stretched before me
I was ready to be tempted
to taste the sweetness before the first bite
I’d often imagined it, seen the fruit
as if already fallen on the lush grass
so that the eating itself seemed a lesser evil
inevitable, almost preordained
Otherwise, I reasoned, why had the tree
been placed just so, in the middle of the garden
if not to delight the eye and mind?
It was only later, after the storm
had felled the proud trees
that I saw the serpent coiled in my heart.

—Dina Yehuda

CONVERSATION IN A NEGLECTED GARDEN;
OR SOCIALISM FROM THE TORAH

The homeowner went down into the garden and sat by the pool.
The garden—it was quite spacious, and the pool could be called a lake or even an ocean —— was not visible from the street; you would not guess its presence behind the modest, slightly neglected house that resembled the other houses in the row. The homeowner was not noticed either when he left the house and walked about the city. No one knew him and no one thought about the fact that they did not know him. They just did not focus on him.

The homeowner sat on the bench and looked around. The place was beautiful. All the plants and bushes and trees were flourishing; and on the lawn and among the trees and in the air the beasts and insects and the birds crept and crawled and flew, for they did not devour each other. There was no trace of the ugliness out there, in the city built on the cursed earth — it looked worse every time he left the house. But here something was missing. Everything was beautiful, just a bit disorganized. There was no one to work the land, plant flowerbeds and orchards. He had no one to talk to. That was why he’d created them; it is not good to be alone.

Deep in thought, he felt a hand on his shoulder and did not have to turn his head to know who the hand belonged to. The one he had created at the beginning of his way, the one who used to play before him. She had left the house long ago, probably wandering around town; he preferred not to think about her doings. But now he did not have the heart to scold her.

“You have to write something,” she said without preamble.
Without turning his head, he said, “I already tried that. I gave them what I wrote with my own finger, I gave myself to them, but they preferred their own work.”

He heard a slight sigh. “Yes, the old conflict. Even at the start they did not listen to you. They wanted to know for themselves, you gave them free will....”

“Yes, I gave in to them and let them build the world they wanted... although it’s hard for me to think they really wanted that world...”

“They lost control,” she said. “Their competitiveness...”

“... starting with Cain and Abel...” he growled.

“... Their will became divided... And I think they took some seeds from the tree of knowledge when they left here, they have gone on eating of its fruits... One invention leads to another, and they have to adapt, and whoever controls the inventions controls the people...”

“Strange,” he mused. “When I told man he would have to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, I meant it as a curse, but when man is replaced by his machines, the ability to earn his bread becomes a blessing hard to come by.”

“You must intervene!”

“But I tried to intervene! I gave them the Sabbath, so that they could recover once a week from the rat-race... I asked them for sacrifices, I told them over and over that the earth is mine... I gave them the Sabbatical year to restore a bit of equality. It was supposed to be a mechanism for correcting the tendency toward increasing inequality that’s inherent in the economic process. But the mechanism never worked well, and now it is not functioning at all.”

“That mechanism was intended to function in an agricultural society...”

“Yes, to a technological society it no longer seems that relevant. The problem is that they can’t take a hint, they don’t know how to apply the principles to the new situation, their brains are hostage to that cursed process. They distort the human character by advertising and entertainment, until I no longer recognize My image in them.”

There was a long silence. Finally she said, “You know what? You need to write a novel.”

“A novel?! ”

“Yes, a novel. You have already given them laws, but at present the laws are not being obeyed, or are being distorted. Now you have to tell them a story in which they behave the right way and repair the world. You’ll write it so brilliantly, and make the happy end so appealing, that they’ll imitate your characters of their own free will.”

“You mean a Utopian novel. How many Utopian novels have been written, do you think? They’ve helped even less than my Torah. And since when have I been a novelist?”

“First of all: shall the Creator be less persistent than the inventors He created?! They persist until they do the impossible. For hundreds of years they dreamed of a flying machine, until someone managed to invent it. The novel that will show the right way to repair the world has not yet been written. And, of course, you won’t write under Your own name. You’ll dictate it to me, and I’ll give it to some person who will think it’s his idea.”

“Yes,” he said bitterly, “and everyone will be jealous of him.”

“If they catch the vision, they will not be jealous.”

After another silence, he sighed and said, “Well, let’s give it a try. At this point there isn’t much to lose.”

After a few minutes he began to speak in a firm voice, and she took out a notepad and began to write.

“I will take for my hero a genius who has made a fortune in computers. He came from a pious Jewish background, of course he no longer keeps the mitzvot, but before he got off the straight path he learned something. I’ll have him do teshuvah.”

“How will you get him to do teshuvah?”

“Somehow or other. Maybe his son will commit suicide because he sees no meaning in existence. Maybe he will be diagnosed with a terminal illness and think he does not have much time left to live... And maybe he will just see the possibility of an amazing work that will be possible if he can correct the distortion, and that will bring him back of his own free will. One fine morning he will wake up with the thought that if mankind has reached a state where almost everything defined as work can be done by a machine, then there is no need for man to work at all, but only to play and take care of his soul. Everything ought to be play!”

“Armed with this insight, he starts picking up the hints that I have dropped throughout the tradition. For instance, he is reminded of the eight levels of charity that Maimonides recognized, the higher one is to help a person find work so that he can make a decent living. It turns out that in the present situation, an even higher level is needed: the invention of an economic system that will enable every honest person to make a decent living without needing gifts or exploiting others. He remembers that the whole earth belongs to Me, I created the laws of nature which they are exploiting, and which give the economic process its momentum, and no one has the right to take all the fruits of this process for himself. He thinks about all those games where there are winners and losers, but there are also rules that prevent them from really harming each other, and he thinks: now we need to set rules that will allow people to play the economic game without mutual damage.”

“A kind of socialism, is not it?”

“Yes, the socialists have grasped part of my intention... But the socialism of my hero — I shall call him Yosef, of course — will be improved, sophisticated. The first socialists had a saying: to each
And don't forget to find readers for the book ...”
“Actually it will be enough if just one person reads it. But you know, you will have to help them a lot. They’ll need many miracles.”
“Revealed miracles?”
“The hidden ones will be enough, I think.”
He gazed around him for a moment and then rose to accompany her. “Who knows, maybe someday I'll have some company here again. And then you'll come back too?”
“Of course.”
—Esther Cameron


Also see the epic poem The Consciousness of Earth (available on Amazon).

WHO WILL BUILD ME A HOUSE IN JERUSALEM?

Who will build the house in Jerusalem?
We, the architects, in whose desk drawers
Are blueprints for column, gate and crown of glory.
We will draft courtyards from the Tractate of Measurements
A palace the eye will never be sated with seeing.

Who will build the house in Jerusalem?
We, the sages, the teachers of teachings,
Who sit in study halls toiling in Torah,
We shall meditate on the laws of the sanctuary
To gain for the people the treasure of purity.

Who will build the house in Jerusalem?
We, who come up to rejoice on the holy mountain,
Barefoot as beggars on three pilgrim feasts,
And with the groans and hot tears of our prayers
(Disguised, out of fear, as friendly conversation)
We're digging foundations in earth unforgotten

Who will build the house in Jerusalem?
We who live in two-thousand-year exile
Mourning the loss of the house on stone pavements
Praying to see Your return in compassion
We will gather the memory of those years
And build it into the dwelling of delight

Who will build the house in Jerusalem?
We, the youth who give gladness
To your special children, encourage them
And comfort their pain. From the stocks of suffering
We'll make the scaffolding for the construction.

Who will build the house in Jerusalem?
We, who embroider the curtains with threads,
Who grind flour for offerings and spices for incense,
Who act as guides on the path to the mount,
From the beauty and might of our faith and trust
We'll pour the foundations for the building.

according to his ability, from each according to his need. But for some reason they didn't try to gather information, to find out what the abilities and needs of all the individuals really were. Yosef understands that this is the main task, and it is precisely computers that can help with it — that can store information and match resources and needs.

"He also understands that he can't invent such a system alone. Many minds have to be connected, somewhat the way computers are connected on the Internet, so he decides to fund a huge research institute and recruit people with knowledge and good middot — people who will recognize one other, because that's indispensable to the formation of connections."

"Don't forget to give him a wife," she remarked.

"A little extra understanding will come in handy, and every novel needs a love interest."

"And what will she do, his ‘woman of valor’?"

"For one thing she will recruit other women — "bnot binah" — to help with the task. And don't forget the poets, they have a holistic sense that could be very useful. Also an eye for the significant detail. *

"And what about my Torah?"

"What a question! Of course, the first thing your hero will do will be to go back to his old teacher, and perhaps the teacher will find him a wife, or recommend that he remarry the one he divorced before he became religious, and the teacher will also find scholars who will advise the group so they won't recommend anything that goes against the Torah."

He gave a short laugh: "And what shall I do with the wicked?"

For a moment her face fell. "Listen, sometimes I think you should not leave so much up to free will. If you were, for example, to add — or create some mad scientist who would add to the atmosphere some kind of gas that would moderate the hormones a bit...."

"You know what happened when I allowed the sages to slay the evil inclination?!

"All right, all right, forget I said that." Then, sounding as hopeful as she could: "But even without that, there is strength in the spirit. 'Not by might and not by power but by My spirit.' You had a prophet say that once."

"Yes, I had almost forgotten ... Well, let's say that my Yosef initiates a process, and people understand that it is a great thing that restores meaning to life, and more and more join until the wicked find themselves isolated. Yes, like with the lower waters — if there is enough fresh water the salt water doesn't come in. In the end I made the creative power stronger than the destructive power."

He was silent until she finished writing. "Well," he said, "I think that's it, you can take it."

She took a deep breath. "Now I have to find a writer who can describe all this, in fresh colors and with characters that come to life."

"And don't forget to find readers for the book ...."
Who will build the house in Jerusalem?
We, the little children
Who lend a hand to their fathers and brothers
By singing Psalms in mighty chorus.
The breath of our mouths and the echo of our skipping
Raise walls and hoist banners for the garden of God.

Who will build the house in Jerusalem?
We who spin dreams with innocent mind,
Who write poems with pure intention,
Who depict the city in radiant sunlight,
We will restore the spirit in splendor
To the cynic soul so wrinkled and lightless

Who will build the house in Jerusalem?
We, the pioneers of high-tech,
Who formulate algorithms from the valley of chips
We'll set up virtuality on the mountains
And in vehicles driven by no careless driver
We'll bring to You all who desire to ascend

Who will build the house in Jerusalem?
We, the young leaders
Who believe in “Jerusalem light to the nations,”
Who after exile stand straight and proud
We'll bring the prophets' words to fruition

Who will build the house in Jerusalem?
We, the women who make the homes of beauty.
Who sing cradle songs for temple and holiness,
Who raise sons to fight for the land,
We'll catch in vessels the tears of parenthood
And ignite them as incense in the inmost place.

Who will build the house in Jerusalem?
We, the soldiers crowned with courage and humility,
Who guard Your walls and fight in Your name,
Who swear loyalty to Your people at the Wall,
In Your holiest name we will doff our uniforms
And don the robes of Levite and priest

Who will build the house in Jerusalem?
I'll build the house, My children,
For your thought is most pleasing in My sight,
I will take your words for bricks
And your children for priests.
Behold thus says the Lord, the living God
From the words of my twelve tribes
In the city of the redeemed I will build My palace.

— Ricky Yuval
translated by Esther Cameron

DESSERT SPELL

The magic of it all—
from the goat’s hair and sweet scent,
two cherubs fashioned from one ball,
flapping their wings as we repent
by the desert tabernacle tent.

We’ve come in silent stealth
to catch a glimpse, to be uplifted
by an interior overlaid with wealth,
gathered in Egypt while none resisted
the holiness for which it existed.

The gold rimmed ark
with its blue purple veil,
brass corner horns iridescent in the dark,
so brazen in their appeal
for the Lord of Hosts’ seal.

But we must not lose sight
of the cause of so much wonder—
the six branched menorah light
that illuminates every blunder
so we won’t be led asunder...

‘til the House of All Peoples can emerge,
‘til the pathways of peace converge.

— Leah Gottesman

TOMORROW

It's another country upon a map
I draw upon a page in the future,
take a pencil let the lines reach. There,
carefully draft the outlines, wrap

each place with imaginary scenes,
anything at all that comes to mind,
sometimes. Perhaps a dream to remind
me of what I thought that redeems

the days that got lost. Make up for the past,
for the errors that I made. Recoup
the moments that fell away. Out of the loop
onto surer shores, to be free. At last,

maybe, in a place, reorganize. Regroup
for a while, though I know it's not the first stop.

— Zev Davis
Index of Contributors

Rachelly Abraham-Eitan 25
Hayim Abramson 28
Simcha Angel 36
Yakov Azriel 19, 25, 27
Mindy Aber Barad 8, 16, 26
Anna Banasiak 7
Alan Basting 23
Judy Belsky 6, 17
Elhanan ben Avraham 13
Efrat Bigman 30
Erez Biton 12
Netalie Braun 27
Joseph Brush 14
Katherine H. Burkman 11
Esther Cameron 27
Amichai Chasson 24, 27, 31
Robert Chester 30
Zev Davis 35
Sara DeBeer 28
Frank De Canio 26
Wendy Dickstein 14
Nitsa Dori 31
Adam Fisher 12
Ruth Fogelman 30
Heather Gelb 11
Ruth Gilead 3, 10, 21
Reuven Goldfarb 23, 30
Leah Gottesman 35
Esther Halpern 21
Duane L. Herrmann 9, 23
Dina Yehuda 32
Judy Koren 21
Admiel Kosman 29
John B. Lee 14
Larry Lefkowitz 17
Marianne Lyon 11
Douglas Macdonald 24
Constance Rowell Mastores 3, 4, 5, 8, 15
Ed Meek 9, 25
Sabina Messeg 22
Irene Millman 3, 12
Irene Mitchell 24
Rumi Morkin 7
Cynthia Weber Nankee 6
Ruth Netzer 1
Bryan Nichols 15
James B. Nicola 18, 22
Susan Olefuruk 4, 10, 23
Imri Perel 17, 19
Meira Raanan 1, 36
Tony Reevy 7, 8
Shefi Rosenzweig 10
E.M. Schorb 18
Vera Schwarcz 4, 20

THE DERONDA REVIEW:
Editor: Esther Cameron,
derondareview@gmail.com.
Coeditor: Mindy Aber Barad,
POB 6709, Efrat, Israel;
maber4kids@yahoo.com. Single
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Yudit Shahar 11
Sarah Shapiro 6
Tirtsa Posklinsky Shehory 8, 9, 18, 25
Yaacov David Shulman 15
Roger Singer 22
Ronny Someck 9
Lois Greene Stone 21
Michael E. Stone 8, 17
Wally Swist 4, 5
Christine Tabaka 10
Florence Weinberger 28
David Weiser 16
Kelley Jean White 28
Ricky Yuval 34
Yocheved Zemel 19
Erika Zeisel 29
Felice Miryam Kahn Zisken 12, 15, 19, 20
Vera Zubarev 31

IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

In the Garden of Eden
time stands still.
The realm of the external blends
into the realm of the internal
with ease.
All is calm in the Universe
All is One.

In the Garden of Eden
time stands still.
The domain of the transient merges
into the domain of the permanent
with harmony.
All is tranquil in the Universe
All is one with G-d.

In the Garden of Eden
time stands still.
The world of the material unites
into the world of the spiritual
with peace.
All is serene in the Universe
All is one with G-d Who is One.

—Simcha Angel

Yoram Raanan, Gan Eden Lyrical, 2017, oil on board, 60 x 80 cm
Cool, soothing blues and greens, contrasting with creamy yellows and pink, convey a sense of purity and simplicity, energy and vitality, and hint at a luscious verdant garden with life-giving water, a place of perception and enjoyment of light. —Meira Raanan