

## God Has Pity on Kindergarten Children

God has pity on kindergarten children.  
He has less pity on school children.  
And on grownups he has no pity at all,  
he leaves them alone,  
and sometimes they must crawl on all fours  
in the burning sand  
to reach the first-aid station  
covered with blood.

But perhaps he will watch over true lovers  
and have mercy on them and shelter them  
like a tree over the old man  
sleeping on a public bench.

Perhaps we too will give them  
the last rare coins of compassion  
that Mother handed down to us,  
so that their happiness will protect us  
now and in other days.

## The U.N. Headquarters in the High Commissioner's House in Jerusalem

The mediators, the peacemakers, the compromise-shapers, the comforters  
live in the white house  
and get their nourishment from far away,  
through winding pipes, through dark veins, like a fetus.

And their secretaries are lipsticked and laughing,  
and their sturdy chauffeurs wait below, like horses in a stable,  
and the trees that shade them have their roots in no-man's-land  
and the illusions are children who went out to find cyclamen in the field  
and do not come back.  
And the thoughts pass overhead, restless, like reconnaissance planes,  
and take photos and return and develop them  
in dark sad rooms.

And I know they have very heavy chandeliers  
and the boy-I-was sits on them and swings  
out and back, out and back, out till there's no coming back.

And later on, night will arrive to draw  
rusty and bent conclusions from our old lives,  
and over all the houses a melody will gather the scattered words  
like a hand gathering crumbs upon a table  
after the meal, while the talk continues  
and the children are already asleep.

And hopes come to me like bold seafarers,  
like the discoverers of continents coming to an island,  
and stay for a day or two  
and rest . . .  
And then they set sail.

## Autobiography, 1952

My father built over me a worry big as a shipyard  
and I left it once, before I was finished,  
and he remained there with his big, empty worry.  
And my mother was like a tree on the shore  
between her arms that stretched out toward me.

And in '31 my hands were joyous and small  
and in '41 they learned to use a gun  
and when I first fell in love  
my thoughts were like a bunch of colored balloons  
and the girl's white hand held them all  
by a thin string—then let them fly away.

And in '51 the motion of my life  
was like the motion of many slaves chained to a ship,  
and my father's face like the headlight on the front of a train  
growing smaller and smaller in the distance,  
and my mother closed all the many clouds inside her brown closet,  
and as I walked up my street  
the twentieth century was the blood in my veins,

blood that wanted to get out in many wars  
and through many openings,  
that's why it knocks against my head from the inside  
and reaches my heart in angry waves.

But now, in the spring of '52, I see  
that more birds have returned than left last winter.  
And I walk back down the hill to my house.  
And in my room: the woman, whose body is heavy  
and filled with time.

### The Smell of Gasoline Ascends in My Nose

The smell of gasoline ascends in my nose.  
Love, I'll protect you and hold you close  
like an *etrog* in soft wool, so carefully—  
my dead father used to do it that way.

Look, the olive-tree no longer grieves—  
it knows there are seasons and a man must leave,  
stand by my side and dry your face now  
and smile as if in a family photo.

I've packed my wrinkled shirts and my trouble.  
I will never forget you, girl of my final  
window in front of the deserts that are  
empty of windows, filled with war.

You used to laugh but now you keep quiet,  
the beloved country never cries out,  
the wind will rustle in the dry leaves soon—  
when will I sleep beside you again?

In the earth there are raw materials that, unlike us,  
have not been taken out of the darkness,  
the army jet makes peace in the heavens  
upon us and upon all lovers in autumn.

## Six Poems for Tamar

1

The rain is speaking quietly,  
you can sleep now.

Near my bed, the rustle of newspaper wings.  
There are no other angels.

I'll wake up early and bribe the coming day  
to be kind to us.

2

You had a laughter of grapes:  
many round green laughs.

Your body is full of lizards.  
All of them love the sun.

Flowers grew in the field, grass grew on my cheeks,  
everything was possible.

3

You're always lying on  
my eyes.

Every day of our life together  
Ecclesiastes cancels a line of his book.

We are the saving evidence in the terrible trial.  
We'll acquit them all!

4

Like the taste of blood in the mouth,  
spring was upon us—suddenly.

The world is awake tonight.  
It is lying on its back, with its eyes open.

The crescent moon fits the line of your cheek,  
your breast fits the line of my cheek.

5

Your heart plays blood-catch  
inside your veins.

Your eyes are still warm, like beds  
time has slept in.

Your thighs are two sweet yesterdays,  
I'm coming to you.

All hundred and fifty psalms  
roar halleluyah.

6

My eyes want to flow into each other  
like two neighboring lakes.

To tell each other  
everything they've seen.

My blood has many relatives.  
They never visit.

But when they die,  
my blood will inherit.

### **Yehuda Ha-Levi**

The soft hairs on the back of his neck  
are the roots of his eyes.

His curly hair is  
the sequel to his dreams.

His forehead: a sail; his arms: oars  
to carry the soul inside his body to Jerusalem.

5

But in the white fist of his brain  
he holds the black seeds of his happy childhood.

When he reaches the beloved, bone-dry land—  
he will sow.

## **Ibn Gabirol**

Sometimes pus,  
sometimes poetry—

always something is excreted,  
always pain.

My father was a tree in a grove of fathers,  
covered with green moss.

Oh widows of the flesh, orphans of the blood,  
I've got to escape.

Eyes sharp as can-openers  
prried open heavy secrets.

But through the wound in my chest  
God peers into the universe.

I am the door  
to his apartment.

## **When I Was a Child**

When I was a child  
grasses and masts stood at the seashore,  
and as I lay there  
I thought they were all the same  
because all of them rose into the sky above me.

Only my mother's words went with me  
like a sandwich wrapped in rustling waxpaper,  
and I didn't know when my father would come back  
because there was another forest beyond the clearing.

Everything stretched out a hand,  
a bull gored the sun with its horns,  
and in the nights the light of the streets caressed  
my cheeks along with the walls,  
and the moon, like a large pitcher, leaned over  
and watered my thirsty sleep.

### **Look: Thoughts and Dreams**

Look: thoughts and dreams are weaving over us  
their warp and woof, their wide camouflage-net,  
and the reconnaissance planes and God  
will never know  
what we really want  
and where we are going.

Only the voice that rises at the end of a question  
still rises above the world and hangs there,  
even if it was made by  
mortar shells, like a ripped flag,  
like a mutilated cloud.

Look, we too are going  
in the reverse-flower-way:  
to begin with a calyx exulting toward the light,  
to descend with the stem growing more and more solemn,  
to arrive at the closed earth and to wait there for a while,  
and to end as a root, in the darkness, in the deep womb.

## *From We Loved Here*

1

My father spent four years inside their war,  
and did not hate his enemies, or love.  
And yet I know that somehow, even there,  
he was already forming me, out of

his calms, so few and scattered, which he gleaned  
among the bombs exploding and the smoke,  
and put them in his knapsack, in between  
the remnants of his mother's hardening cake.

And in his eyes he took the nameless dead,  
he stored them, so that someday I might know  
and love them in his glance—so that I would

not die in horror, as they all had done. . . .  
He filled his eyes with them, and yet in vain:  
to all my wars, unwilling, I must go.

3

The lips of dead men whisper where they lie  
deep down, their innocent voices hushed in earth,  
and now the trees and flowers grow terribly  
exaggerated, as they blossom forth.

Bandages are again torn off in haste,  
the earth does not want healing, it wants pain.  
And spring is not serenity, not rest,  
ever, and spring is enemy terrain.

With the other lovers, we were sent to learn  
about the strange land where the rainbow ends,  
to see if it was possible to advance.

And we already knew: the dead return,  
and we already knew: the fiercest wind  
comes forth now from inside a young girl's hand.



6

In the long nights our room was closed off and  
sealed, like a grave inside a pyramid.

Above us: foreign silence, heaped like sand  
for aeons at the entrance to our bed.

And when our bodies lie stretched out in sleep,  
upon the walls, again, is sketched the last  
appointment that our patient souls must keep.  
Do you see them now? A narrow boat drifts past;

two figures stand inside it; others row.  
And stars peer out, the stars of different lives;  
are carried by the Nile of time, below.

And like two mummies, we have been wrapped tight  
in love. And after centuries, dawn arrives;  
a cheerful archaeologist—with the light.

18

A preface first: the two of them, the brittle  
calm, necessity, and sun, and shade,  
an anxious father, cities braced for battle,  
and from afar, unrecognizable dead.

The story's climax now—the war. First leave,  
and smoke instead of streets, and he and she  
together, and a mother from her grave  
comforting: It'll be all right, don't worry.

And the last laugh is this: the way she put  
his army cap on, walking to the mirror.  
And was so lovely, and the cap just fit.

And then, behind the houses, in the yard,  
a separation like cold-blooded murder,  
and night arriving, like an afterword.

9

## God's Hand in the World

1

God's hand is in the world  
like my mother's hand in the guts of the slaughtered chicken  
on Sabbath eve.  
What does God see through the window  
while his hands reach into the world?  
What does my mother see?

2

My pain is already a grandfather:  
it has begotten two generations  
of pains that look like it.  
My hopes have erected white housing projects  
far away from the crowds inside me.  
My girlfriend forgot her love on the sidewalk  
like a bicycle. All night outside, in the dew.

Children mark the eras of my life  
and the eras of Jerusalem  
with moon chalk on the street.  
God's hand in the world.

## Sort of an Apocalypse

The man under his fig tree telephoned the man under his vine:  
"Tonight they definitely might come. Assign  
positions, armor-plate the leaves, secure the tree,  
tell the dead to report home immediately."

The white lamb leaned over, said to the wolf:  
"Humans are bleating and my heart aches with grief.  
I'm afraid they'll get to gunpoint, to bayonets in the dust.  
At our next meeting this matter will be discussed."

All the nations (united) will flow to Jerusalem  
to see if the Torah has gone out. And then,

inasmuch as it's spring, they'll come down  
and pick flowers from all around.

And they'll beat swords into plowshares and plowshares into swords,  
and so on and so on, and back and forth.

Perhaps from being beaten thinner and thinner,  
the iron of hatred will vanish, forever.

## **And That Is Your Glory**

*(Phrase from the liturgy of the Days of Awe)*

I've yoked together my large silence and my small outcry  
like an ox and an ass. I've been through low and through high.  
I've been in Jerusalem, in Rome. And perhaps in Mecca anon.  
But now God is hiding, and man cries Where have you gone.  
And that is your glory.

Underneath the world, God lies stretched on his back,  
always repairing, always things get out of whack.  
I wanted to see him all, but I see no more  
than the soles of his shoes and I'm sadder than I was before.  
And that is his glory.

Even the trees went out once to choose a king.  
A thousand times I've given my life one more fling.  
At the end of the street somebody stands and picks:  
this one and this one and this one and this one and this.  
And that is your glory.

Perhaps like an ancient statue that has no arms  
our life, without deeds and heroes, has greater charms.  
Ungird my T-shirt, love; this was my final bout.  
I fought all the knights, until the electricity gave out.  
And that is my glory.

Rest your mind, it ran with me all the way,  
it's exhausted now and needs to knock off for the day.