

# Take This Poem And Copy It

Selected poems and stories  
in Hebrew and in English translation

Almog Behar

2017

# Take This Poem And Copy It

Selected poems and stories in Hebrew and in English translation

**A Translation draft**

**Bilingual edition**

**Hebrew and english**

**2017**

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# Poems

## My Arabic is mute / Almog Behar

Translated by Dimi Reider

My Arabic is mute  
strangled at the throat  
Cursing itself  
Without uttering a word  
Sleeps in the airless shelters of my soul  
Hiding  
From relatives  
Behind the Hebrew blinds

And my Hebrew is raging  
Running between rooms and neighbours' balconies  
Making its voice heard in public  
Prophesying the coming of God  
and of bulldozers  
And then it holes up in the living room  
Thinking itself so open in the language of its skin  
So hidden between the pages of its flesh  
A moment naked, a moment later dressed  
It curls up into the armchair  
And begs itself for forgiveness

My Arabic is petrified  
It quietly pretends to be Hebrew  
And whispers to friends  
Whenever somebody knocks at her gate  
"Ahlan Ahlan, welcome"  
And whenever a policeman passes it in the street  
It produces an ID card  
And points out the protective clause  
"Ana min al-yahud, ana min al-yahud" – "I am a Jew, I am a Jew".



**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

And My Hebrew is deaf  
Sometimes very deaf.

## **My Arabic is mute / Almog Behar**

**translated by Alexandra Berger-Polsky**

My Arabic is mute  
strangled from the throat  
cursing herself  
without saying a word  
sleeping in the stifling air of my soul's shelters  
hiding  
from her relatives  
behind Hebrew shutters.

And my Hebrew is growling  
running wild between rooms and neighbors' porches  
making her voice heard in public  
prophesying the coming of the Lord  
and bulldozers  
and then converging in the living room  
thinking of herself  
revelations revelations on the surface of her skin  
covered covered between the pages of her flesh  
one moment naked one moment dressed  
she contracts herself in an armchair  
begging forgiveness of her heart.

My Arabic is afraid  
quietly impersonating Hebrew  
and whispering to friends  
with every knock at her gates:  
“Ahalan, ahalan”.  
And in front of every passing guard  
she takes out her identity card

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

and points to the protective clause:

“Ana min al yahud, ana min al yahud”.

And my Hebrew is deaf

sometimes deaf indeed.

## הערבית שלי אילמת

הערבית שלי אילמת  
חנוקה מן הגרון  
מקללת את עצמה  
בלי להוציא מילה  
ישנה באוויר המחניק של מקלטי נפשי  
מסתרת  
מבני-המשפחה  
מאחורי תריסי העברית.

והעברית שלי גועשת  
מתרועעת בין החדרים ומרפסות השכנים  
משמיעה קולה ברבים  
מנבאת בואם של אלוהים  
ודחפורים  
ואז מתכנסת בסלון  
חושבת את עצמה  
גלויות גלויות על שפת עורה  
כסויות כסויות בין דפי בשרה  
רגע עירומה ורגע לבושה  
היא מצטמצמת בכורסא  
מבקשת את סליחת לבה.

הערבית שלי פוחדת  
מתחזה בשקט לעברית  
ולוחשת לחברים  
עם כל דפיקה בשעריה:  
"אהלן אהלן".  
ומול כל שוטר עובר ברחוב  
שולפת תעודת זהות  
מצביעה על הסעיף המגונן:  
"אנא מן אל-יהוד, אנא מן אל-יהוד".

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

והעברית שלי חירשת  
לפעמים חירשת מאוד.

**Grandfathers / Almog Behar**

**Translated by Dimi Reider**

1. Yitzhak Behar (1917-2002)

When I was a child  
My grandfather's body  
was the breakwater  
on the beach of Tel Aviv.

And all of his body was memories of leaping  
over a bridge in Berlin  
into the frozen river  
and the broken leg anticipating  
the broken heart and broken family.

And my eyes when I was a child would look  
walking along the shoreline  
from the stones of Jaffa to the smoke of Reading and the Yarkon mouth  
Many houses  
Not yet thinking  
Of all the other cities  
in my childhood  
Not breaking over the waves.

2. Ezra Gahtan (1904-1986)

When I was a child  
My grandfather's hands  
were held back.

And on the picture with my mother  
Now in her bed room

The suit of his life  
Sews his body  
into the longings of a refugee  
Two and eighty years long  
was his life's journey  
From the palms on the banks of the Tigris  
And to the old fountain  
since demolished  
at the end of the promenade leading  
To the Netanya beach.

A memory is a tear in the flesh of the present  
And in the picture his daughter is smiling  
Her hand on his shoulder  
and he keeps his face severe  
the old fountain is behind them  
and the horizon is the Mediterranean tub  
that has no respect for rivers.

In the backdrop, some ornamental palms  
planted by the municipality  
and in his flesh the saplings of a white mustachio  
and a black tie  
marking him to be of a different world.  
And in a moment he'll open his mouth  
Say "abroad"  
And mean Eretz Yisrael.

3.  
And I for years have been practicing them  
Walking with my hands enjoined  
behind a forever-upright back.  
For years, I've been practicing  
to be a wave-breaker

קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

for my grandsons.  
For years I've been practicing  
Peeling apples with a pocketknife  
While sitting on benches in public parks  
And eating them slice by slice.  
For years I've been practicing drawing flowers  
With Hebrew words  
Fearing I'll lose  
The colours of all the other languages.

For years I recall  
All the other cities  
I didn't recall as a child  
Composing prayers  
and growing upon myself  
the sinews and skin  
of memories  
breaking over the waves.



**סב וסב**

**א. יצחק פֶּהר (1917-2002)**

בילדותי

גוף סבי

בחוף-ימה של תל-אביב

היה שובר-גלים.

וכל גופו זיכרונות-קפיצה

מעל גשר בברלין

אל מי נהר קפוא

ושֶׁבֶר-רגל שצפה

את שֶׁבֶר הלב והמשפחה.

ועיניי בילדותי היו מביטות

הולכות עם קו החוף

מאבני יפו ועד עשן רידינג ושפך הירקון

הרבה בתים

לא חושבות עדיין

על כל הערים האחרות

בילדותי.

לא נשברות בגלים.

**ב. עֶזְרָא גֶהֶטֶן (1904-1986)**

בילדותי

כפות-ידי סבי

אוחזות אחור.

ובתמונה עם אמי

עתה בחדר שנתה

חליפת חייו

תופרת את גופו

געגועי פליט.

קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

שמונים ושנים שנים  
ארך מסע חייו  
מן הדקלים שלחוף החדקל  
ועד למזרקה הישנה  
שבינתיים נהרסה  
בקצה הטיילת המובילה  
אל חוף-ימה של נתניה.

זיכרון הוא קרע בבשר ההווה  
ובתמונה בתו מחייכת וידה על כתפו  
והוא מרצין פנים  
מאחוריהם המזרקה הישנה.  
והאופק הוא גיגית הים-התיכון  
אשר אינה רוחשת כבוד לנהרות.

ברקע כמה דקלים של נוף  
אותם שתלה העירייה  
ובבשרו שתל זרעי שפם לבן  
ועניבה שחורה  
מסמנים אותו עולם אחר.  
ועוד רגע הוא פותח את פיו  
אומר חוסה-לאָרס  
ומתכוון לארץ-ישראל.

ג.

ואני שנים מתאמן אחריהם  
בהליכה עם ידיים אסופות  
מאחורי גב  
זקוף תמיד.  
שנים אני כבר מתאמן  
להיות שובר-גלים  
לנכדיי.  
שנים אני מתאמן  
בקילוף תפוחים באולר

קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

בישיבה על ספסלי גינות-ציבוריות  
ואכילתם פלחים פלחים.  
שנים אני מתאמן בציור פרחים  
במילים עבריות  
מפחד לאבד  
את כל צבעי השפות האחרות.

שנים אני נזכר  
בכל הערים האחרות  
אותן לא זכרתי בילדותי  
מחבר תפילות  
וקורם על גופי עור וגידים  
של זיכרונות  
הנשברים בגלים.

**Dead poets / Almog Behar**

**Translated by Dimi Reider**

Dead poets  
write better  
than me  
better than the living poets  
better than the unborn.  
When I will be a poet  
a dead poet  
maybe I will write better  
Than me  
Better than the living  
Better than the poets yet unborn.

**Dead poets / Almog Behar**

translated by Alexandra Berger-Polsky

Dead poets  
write better  
better than me  
better than the living poets  
better than those still unborn.  
When I will be a poet  
a dead poet  
perhaps I will write better  
better than me  
better than the living  
better than the unborn.

**משוררים מתים**

משוררים מתים

כותבים טוב

ממני

טוב מן המשוררים החיים

טוב מאלו שעוד לא נולדו.

כשאהיה משורר

משורר מת

אולי אכתוב טוב

ממני

טוב מן החיים

טוב מן המשוררים אשר עדיין לא נולדו.

**Take this poem and copy it / Almog Behar**

**Translated by dimi reider**

Take this poem and copy it with your own hand onto another page. And put words coming out of your heart between the words copied by your hands. And put your eyes into the links between the words made by your hands and the gaps made by the punctuation, the gaps and the lines breaking in your life. Take this poem and copy it a thousand times and give it out to people in the main street of the city. And tell them I wrote this poem this poem I wrote this is the poem I wrote it's me who wrote it wrote it. Take this poem and put it in an envelope and send it to the woman you love and attach a short letter. And before you send it, change its title, and set forth at the end of its lines some rhymes from among your own. and sweeten the bitter and wealth the destitute and bridge the crack opening up and lighten the clumsy and enliven the dead and rhyme the truth. Many are the poems a man can take and make into his own. Of all the poems take this poem and make this poem of all poem your own, because although it has nothing to draw you into making it your own it also doesn't have the possessiveness of man saying his poem is his property and only his own and you have no right to intervene in it and to search around in it but this poem of all poems ask you to intervene in it erase and add up, it is given to you freely and for free ready to change under your hands. Take this poem and make it your poetry and sign your name under it and erase the name of your predecessor but remember him and remember that every word is poetry is born poetry and the poetry is the poetry of many, not of one. And your poem will be taken by another one, after you, and made into his own, and he will bequeath it after him to the children of poets and command them take this poem and copy it onto another page and make it in your own hand.

**Take this poem and copy it / Almog Behar**

translated by Alexandra Berger-Polsky

Take this poem and copy it in your handwriting on a piece of paper and insert words from your soul between the words your hands copied. And notice the additions made by the words from your hands and the subtractions made by punctuation, the spaces and the lines which are broken within your life. Take this poem and copy it a thousand times and distribute it to people on the city's main street. And say to them I wrote this poem this is a poem I wrote this is a poem I wrote this I wrote this poem I wrote this I wrote this I wrote. Take this poem and put it in an envelope and send it to your heart's desire and include a short letter with it. And before you send it change its title and at the end add rhymes of your own. Sweeten the bitter and enrich the spare and bridge the cracked and simplify the clumsy and enliven the dead and square the truth. A person could take many poems and make them his. Take this very poem and make only this one yours for even though it has nothing special which ignites your desire to make it yours it also has no possessiveness of the kind which says a man's poems are his property and his only and you have no right to meddle or ask anything of them but this is a poem which asks you to meddle with it to erase and to add and it is given to you freely for free ready to be changed by your hands. Take this poem and make it yours and sign your name on it and erase the previous name but remember it and remember that every word is poetry is the offspring of poetry and poetry is the poetry of many not one. And someone after you will take your poem and make it his and command those after him the children of poets take this poem and copy it on a piece of paper and make it yours in your handwriting.



קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו

קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו בכתב ידך על דף אחר. ושים מילים היוצאות מלבך בין המילים שהעתיקו ידך. ושים עיניך בחיבורים שעושות המילים שהוציאו ידך ובחיסורים שעושים סימני הפיסוק, הרווחים והשורות הנשברות בתוך חיך. קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו אלף פעמים וחלק לאנשים ברחובה הראשי של העיר. ואמור להם אני כתבתי את השיר הזה את השיר הזה אני כתבתי זה השיר אני כתבתי זה כתבתי זה. קח את השיר הזה והכנס במעטפה ושלה לבחירת לבך וצרף לה מכתב קצר. ולפני שתשלח שנה את כותרתו וקבע בסוף טוריו חרוזים מחרוזת. והמתק המר והעשך הדל וגשר הסדק שנפער והקל המסורבל והחנה את המת וחרוז את האמת. שירים רבים יכול אדם לקחת ולעשותם שלו. קח דווקא את השיר הזה ועשה דווקא אותו שלך כי אף-על-פי שאין בו דבר-מה המושך את הלב לעשותו שלך גם אין בו רכושנות זאת שאומר אדם שירו הוא רכושו הוא רק שלו ולך אין זכות להתערב בו ולבקש בו אלא דווקא זה השיר מבקש ממך להתערב בתוכו למחוק ולהוסיף והוא נמסר לך חינם וחופשי מוכן להשתנות תחת ידך. קח את השיר הזה ועשה אותו שירה שלך וחתום עליו שמך ומחק שם קודמך אך זכור אותו וזכור כי כל מילה היא שירה היא נולדת שירה והשירה שירת רבים ולא יחיד. וגם את שירך ייקח אחר אחרריך ויעשהו שלו ויצווה אחריו לבני-המשוררים קחו את השיר הזה והעתיקוהו על דף אחר ועשוהו שלכם בכתב ידכם.

## A poem for the prisoners / Almog Behar

Translated by Matan Kaminer

I wrote a poem for the prisoners and showed it to my father.  
Said he: What good will poems do the prisoners, and who are we  
To doubt the justice of the jailor, judge and lawmaker?  
Said I: The prisoners of whom I write are we.  
Daily I go back to my cell, await a distant jailor's beckon;  
At his command I'll place my hands in manacles, and if he asks  
I'll strike the window-bars and beg for freedom.  
Said he: This is all dreamy poet's talk, but you, my son,  
Stand this day well clear of jailhouse doors. I did not beget sons for prison, son,  
I'll send you to the Faculty of Law, perhaps, if you desire  
You might become a judge, instead of poems you'll write sentences  
To ease the world's pain. I answered: Father, as I am your son,  
I did not beget progenitors to cower afraid. The jail, you see, is bigger than us both,  
It closes now upon us, and the jailor recommends  
That you refuse to notice your incarceration, that you ask  
To never leave the confines of your cell. Said he: Well then, we all  
Are prisoners of God, my son, all bondsmen of His word,  
His laws, pronouncements, righteous all, and not a one among us  
Has not sinned, do you forget? Said I: This prison, father,  
Was thrown up by men, and daily we assist them  
In their work, we build new wards, we set up cameras,  
And soon enough they'll have no need of guards, they'll all be fired  
And then we shall all guard ourselves. I shall not go  
to any Faculty of Law, but then I've already decided  
To give up poetry. Said he: Decided what? This as I go  
Announcing up and down our section in the ward  
That my own son writes songs for liberation day; our neighbors, son  
Are learning now to sing your songs. Said I: I hear you, father,  
But those are not my songs they sing, those songs were written by the guards,  
From now on I'll write sentences to rival theirs,

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

Verdicts to rival theirs. From my cell I'll write letters too, to you and mother, in  
which I'll reveal

That liberation will not come until your grandchildren have gone, long is the struggle

Longer than a poem can say, all poems fail.

## A Poem for the Jailhouse Prisoners / Almog Behar

Translated by Itamar Haritan

I wrote a poem for the jailhouse prisoners and showed it to my father.  
He said: How would poems help prisoners, and how dare we  
Cast doubt on the fairness of the jailers and the judges and the legislators?  
I said: upon our own imprisonment I write, father,  
Day after day I go back to my cell, waiting for a sign from a distant jailer,  
If he wishes it, I would shackle my arms in handcuffs, if he wishes it  
I would beg him for freedom by striking the bars on the windows.  
He said: You speak only the poem's flights of fancy, and you yourself stand  
Outside the jailhouse walls, I did not bring sons into this world to be imprisoned, son,  
If you wish it, I will send you to the Faculty of Law and maybe  
You will be a judge, instead of writing poems you shall write verdicts  
To ease the suffering of the world. I said: Father, that I am your son,  
I did not bring parents into this world to be afraid, and the jailhouse is bigger than both of us,  
Closing in on both of us, here the jailer is gesturing to you now  
So that you will refuse to acknowledge your imprisonment, so that you will ask not to go  
beyond  
The boundaries of the cell. He said: If so than we are all prisoners  
In the jailhouse of the Lord, son, all of us are his servants, but  
The laws and verdicts, they are all fair, and there is not one person  
Who is without sin, did you forget? I said: This jail  
Was built by human beings, father, and every day we help them  
Continue to build it, to add wings, to install cameras,  
Soon they will not need jailers, they will fire them all,  
And we will go on watching ourselves, I will not go  
To the Faculty of Law, but I already decided to stop  
Writing poems. He said: How did you decide? I already announced  
Up and down the hallway of our wing in the jailhouse  
That my son is writing poems for the day of liberation, our neighbors,  
They are already learning the poems and singing them. I said: I hear, father,  
But those are not my poems that they sing, those are the poems of the jailers,  
From this day forth I will write rulings to compete with their decrees,  
I will write verdicts to compete with their edicts, I will write you  
And mother letters from my jail cell in which I will inform you that liberation

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

Will not come even in your grandchildren's lifetimes, the struggle is longer  
Than poems could ever describe, all poems have failed.

שיר לאסירי בתי-הסוהר

כתבתי שיר על אסירי בתי-הסוהר והראיתי אותו לאבי.  
אמר: מה יעזרו השירים לאסירים, ומה לנו  
פי גזלול בצדקת הסוהרים והשופטים והמחוקקים?  
אמרתי: על המאסר שלנו אני כותב, אבא,  
יום-יום אני חוזר לתא, ממתינן לרמיזתו של סוהר מרחק,  
אם ירצה אכבל ידי באזקים, אם יבקש  
אתחנן לפניו להפיש במכות על סורגי החלון.  
אמר: תלומות השיר מפיה מדברים, ואתה עצמך עומד  
מחוץ לחומת הפלא, אני לא הולדתי בנים למאסר, בן,  
אם תרצה אשלח אותך לפקולטה למשפטים ואולי  
תהיה שופט, במקום שירים תכתב גזרי-דין  
להקל על פאבי העולם. אמרתי: אבי, שאני בנה,  
לא הולדתי לי הורים לפחד, והפלא גדול משנינו,  
סוגר על שנינו, הנה מסמן לה עכשו הסוהר  
שתסרב להכיר במאסרה, שתבקש לא לצאת  
את גבולות התא. אמר: אם כן אסירים בלנו  
בבית-פלאו של אלהים, בני, בלנו עבדיו, אה מה  
החקים והמשפטים, בלם צודקים, ואין אחד  
שלא יחטא, האם שכחת? אמרתי: את הפלא הזה  
בני אדם בנו, אבא, ויום-יום אנחנו עוזרים להם  
להמשיך בבנייתו, להוסיף אנפים, להציב מצלמות,  
עוד מעט כבר אינם זקוקים לסוהרים, יפטרו את בלם  
ואנחנו נמשיך לשמר על עצמנו, אני לא אלה  
לפקולטה למשפטים, אה כבר התלפתי להפסיק  
לכתב שירים. אמר: פיצד התלפתי? הנה כבר הודעת  
לארף כל המסדרון באגף שלנו בבית-הסוהר  
פי הין שלי כותב שירים ליום השחרור, כבר לומדים  
שכנינו את השירים ומזמרים. אמרתי: אני שומע, אבא,  
אבל לא את שירי הם מזמרים, אלה הם שירי הסוהרים,  
מהיום אני אכתב גזרי-דין להתחרות בגזריהם,  
אכתב פסקי-דין להתחרות בפסוקיהם, אכתב לה  
ולאמא מכתבים מתאי בהם אבשר פי השחרור

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

לא יבוא גם לא בימי נְכַדִּיכֶם, המֵאַבְקֵן אֶרֶץ  
מִמָּה שְׂיֻכְלוּ לְתֹאֵר הַשִּׁירִים, כְּשֶׁלוּ כָּל הַשִּׁירִים.

**Lines to Primo Levi / Almog Behar**

translated by Vivian Eden

In the place where no prayer can save  
all words are prayers, and drinking  
soup from a dish also becomes a melody of prayer.  
And the blows, and the cold, and the hunger and the number tattooed on your arm  
are taken from the prayer book too.  
When the heavy gates of Auschwitz opened and the shadows of the people emerged  
God sat near the opening and wept and begged forgiveness  
and prayed to his people to absolve him. It is inevitable  
that men forgive one another,  
  
there is nothing worse than forgiving God



שורות לפרימו לוי

במקום ממנו אף תפילה לא תציל  
כל המילים הן תפילות, וגם שתיית  
מרק מפינכה נעשית ניגון של תפילה.  
והמכות, והקור, והרעב, והמספר המוטבע ביד,  
לקוחים גם הם ממחזור התפילות.  
כשנפתחו שעריי אושוויץ הכבדים ויצאו צללי האנשים  
ישב אלוהים סמוך לפתח ובכה וביקש מחילה  
והתפלל לעמו שיסלח לו. סליחות אדם  
לאדם אין מהן מנוס,

אין נורא מסליחה לאלוהים

## Midrash<sup>1</sup> for the new Temple / Almog Behar

The prayers have replaced the sacrifices  
When God destroyed the Temple  
And spread Israel between the nations.  
And than the Germans gathered  
The distant children of Israel  
And abolished the prayers  
And returned the sacrifices  
To the new temples they built in Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> Midrash is a Jewish Literary-religious genre the old sages (rabies) used in order to tell a biblical story or verse anew, with it's meaning changed according to time.

**Midrash for the new Temple / Almog Behar**

**Translated by Saul Noam Zaritt**

Prayers replaced sacrifices  
when God destroyed the Temple  
and scattered Israel among the nations,  
and the Germans gathered the remnants of Israel  
and nullified the prayers  
restored the sacrifices  
to the new temples they built in Europe.

**Midrash for the new Temple / Almog Behar**

translated by Alexandra Berger-Polsky

Prayers replaced sacrifices

when God destroyed the Temple and scattered Jews amongst the nations

then the Germans rounded up their remnants

did away with the prayers and reinstated the sacrifices

in Temples which they built anew on the soil of Europe

**מדרש לבית המקדש החדש**

התפילות החליפו את עבודת הקורבנות  
כשאלוהים החריב את בית המקדש ופיזר את ישראל בעמים  
ואז קיבצו הגרמנים את נדחי ישראל  
וביטלו את התפילות והשיבו את עבודת הקורבנות לבתי המקדש  
החדשים שהם בנו על אדמת אירופה

## A Jerusalem courtyard / Almog Behar

The night-sweetness of her love pinches  
In my flesh, in a Jerusalem courtyard,  
Between stones and vine, between  
The sounds of 'Ud and Ladino,  
Between the walls of my body.  
at the edge of the courtyard an old metal fence,  
Standing beside her an old woman,  
Her hair covered, drawn from the alley  
On her way home from the prayer house,  
Tasting the sounds, imagining herself  
Again a king's daughter, passing  
Between the courtyards. And the 'Ud,  
That was a forbidden language for my ears,  
Is freed in the courtyard from his chains,  
And I, who taught myself to suck honey from a rock,  
Now learn to drink honeydew from a girl's mouth.  
The eyes of the old woman are laughing behind the backs  
Of the music players and the beautiful fat woman-singer,  
And to my eyes she looks now like my grandmother,  
Who before her death returned to speak only Arabic,  
Without Hebrew.

## A Jerusalem Courtyard/ Almog Behar

Translated by Saul Noam Zaritt

The night sweetness of her love bites  
in my flesh, in a Jerusalem courtyard between vine and stone  
between the notes of the ud and Ladino, between the walls of my body.  
At the edge of the courtyard fixed against an old metal fence  
is an old woman with her head covered, drawn out from the alleyway  
on her way home from the prayer house, tasting the notes,  
imagining for a moment that she is again the daughter of a king,  
passing through courtyards. And the ud, a forbidden language  
to my ears, was let loose in the courtyard from its bounds, and I  
who taught myself to suckle honey from a stone,  
learn now to drink nectar from a girl's mouth. The old woman's eyes laugh  
behind the musicians' backs and the pudgy beautiful singer,  
and I imagine she looks just like my grandmother who before she died  
went back to speaking only Arabic, not a word of Hebrew.

חצר ירושלמית

מתיקותן הלילית של צביטות אהבתה  
בבשרי, בחצר ירושלמית, בין אבנים וגפן,  
בין צלילי עוד וְלאֲדִינוּ, בין קירות גופי.  
בקצה החצר גדר מתכת ישנה, אצלה נדבקה  
זקנה כשביסה, נשאבת מן הסימטה  
בדרכה הביתה מבית-התפילה, טועמת מן הצלילים,  
מדמה לעצמה שְׁלֶרְגַע היא שוב בת-מלך,  
עוברת בין החצרות. והעוד שהנה שפה אסורה  
לאוזניי, הותר בחצר מכבלי איסוריו, ואני  
שלימדתי עצמי להיות יונק דבש מסלע,  
לומד לשתות צוף מפי נערה. עיניי הזקנה צוחקות  
מאחורי גבם של הנגנים והזמרת השמנה היפה,  
והיא מידמה בעיניי לסבתי, שלפני מותה  
חזרה לדבר רק ערבית, בלי עברית.



**Not to be afraid to say the word nostalgia / Almog Behar**

Translated by dimi reider

Not to be afraid to say  
The word nostalgia  
Not to be afraid  
To feel longing  
Not to be afraid to say  
I have a past  
Placed in a box  
Of locked-up memory

Not to be afraid  
To buy myself some keys  
To press my eyes to keyholes  
Until it all opens  
Until I can steal a glance  
Into me

Not to be afraid to say  
I'm a forgetful man  
But I have a memory  
That wouldn't forget me.

קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

לא לפחד לומר את המילה נוסטלגיה

לא לפחד לומר  
את המילה נוסטלגיה  
לא לפחד  
ללחוש געגועים  
לא לפחד לומר  
יש לי עבר  
מונה בתוך קופסא  
של זיכרון נעול

לא לפחד  
לקנות לי מפתחות  
להצמיד עיניים לחורי המנעולים  
עד שהכל יפתח  
עד שאוכל להגניב מבט  
אל פנימי

לא לפחד לומר  
אני אדם שוכח  
אבל יש לי זיכרון  
שלא מוכן לשכוח אותי

**Joyously My Son Says All / Almog Behar**

Translated by Vivian Eden

Joyously my son says all  
And means all the puzzle pieces  
Or all the Legos  
Or all the fresh roll.  
And sometimes, for emphasis,  
He repeats the word three times  
All, all, all.  
I don't want him to learn  
That those are just pieces.

**בני אומר בשמחה הכל**

בְּנֵי אוֹמֵר בְּשִׂמְחָה הַכֹּל  
וּמִתְפַּנֵּן לְכֹל חֲלָקֵי הַפְּזֹל  
אוֹ לְכֹל קַבִּיּוֹת הַלְּגוֹ  
אוֹ לְכֹל הַלְחָמֵנִיָּה.  
וְלַפְעָמִים, לְצַרְרֵי הַדְּגָשָׁה  
הוּא חוֹזֵר עַל הַמְלָה שֶׁלֹּשׁ פְּעָמִים:  
הַכֹּל הַכֹּל הַכֹּל.  
אֵינִי רוֹצֵה שְׂיִלְמַד  
שְׂאֵלוֹ רַק חֲלָקִים.

\* / **Almog Behar**

Translated by Dimi Reider

At nights, my beloved grows babies in her belly  
In the factory of the womb.  
And through the days, she mends organs  
Separates fingers from fish-film  
Discards prehistoric tails  
Pries open eyes behind stubborn eyelids  
Teaches hearts the secret rhythm of beating  
Trims primal fingernails  
Combs primal hair-locks  
And separates male from female.

And the babies sleep through the day  
And at night they awake within her belly  
Watch themselves growing longer and wider  
And he who was once a seed and an egg  
has grown as big as a grain of rice  
And she who was as a white fava bean  
has grown as big as a green bean.

And the babies try to awake my beloved  
they whisper words in languages she's forgotten  
caress the inside of her belly  
pull on umbilical cords  
beat on the walls of the placenta  
and on the tunnels of the womb.  
And she does not yet awake  
a grain of rice is swelling in her belly  
and she prolongs her sleep,  
telling her heart  
for many a year now I will awaken after them

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

in many, many nights  
now is the time to sleep, to sleep.

And I, sometimes, wake up after them  
in the middle of the night  
to put an ear to the underside of her belly  
to recognize my heart also growing  
in a pregnancy of its own.

בלילות אהובתי מגדלת תינוקות בבטנה  
בבית-החורשת של הרקם.  
ובימים היא מתקנת איברים  
מפרידה אצבעות מקרום הדג שדבק בהן  
משילה זנבות קדמוניים  
פוקחת עינים מאחורי עפעפים עקשניים  
מלמדת ללקבות סודות על קצב פעימות  
קוצצת צפרנים ראשונות  
סוקת שערות ראשונות  
ומבחינה זכרים מנקבות.

והתינוקות ישנים בימים  
ובלילות הם ערים בבטנה  
צופים בעצמם מתארכים ומתרחבים  
ונה שקה נרע אחד וביצית אחת  
גדלו כבר בגרגר הארז  
וזאת שהיתה פשועית הלבנה  
גדלה בקלפת האפונה הנרקה.

והתינוקות מנסים להעיר אהובתי בלילות  
לוהטים לה מלים בשפות ששכחה  
מלטפים לה דפנות של בטן  
מושכים חבלי טבור  
מכים על קירות שליה  
על מחלות רקם.

והיא עוד אינה מתעוררת  
גרגר ארז תופח בבטנה והיא  
מאריכה שנתה  
אומרת ללכה  
עוד שנים רבות אני מתעוררת אחריהם בלילות  
עתה לישן לישן.

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

ואני לפעמים מתעורר אחריהם באמצע הלילה  
להצמיד אָזן לתחתיות בטנה  
לזהות לב ועוד לב  
לזהות פיצד גם לפי מתרחב  
בהריון משלו.



**Tisha B'Av, 2003, Jerusalem / Almog Behar**

Translated by Moran Benit and Yael Kenan

On the eve of the Ninth of Av in Jerusalem, within the walls of her home,  
If we make love maybe the city will rise from its ashes.

In the morning, engulfed in sleep, we will breathe in  
The smells of fasting ascending from the neighbors' kitchens,  
And slowly we will rise.

Clothed and perfumed we will go looking for an apartment

For me in the nearby, sweaty, streets,

Examine the state of the sinks

And study the payment schedule.

And when we find an apartment we will make sure that it isn't an eternal structure,  
that it can be altered,

Make sure to keep it ordinary, with crowded, cracked, tiles

And a window overlooking the neighboring windows.

And if, when lamentations echo through the city walls once again,

Maybe in a year, our love is still vibrant,

We will wake up early and go looking for one apartment

With one bed

To overflow with love

In the city of many peoples.

ט' באב התשס"ג, ירושלים

בערב תשעה באב בירושלים, בין כותלי ביתה,  
אם נעשה אהבה אולי תעורר העיר מחורבנה.

בבוקר מסוממי שינה נשאף  
את ריחות הצום המטפסים ממטבחי השכנים  
ונקום לאט לאט.  
מלובשים ומבושמים נצא לחפש לי דירה  
ברחובות הסמוכים, המיוזעים,  
ונחקור על ניקיון כיורים,  
ונשנן את סדרי גביית התשלומים.  
וכשנמצא דירה נוודא שאינה בנויה בניין-עולם, שניתן לשנותה,  
ונקפיד על רגילותה, שתהא צפופת מרצפות סדוקות  
ושיהיה בה חלון צופה אל יתר חלונות השכונה.

ואם כששוב תעלינה קינות מקירות העיר,  
אולי בעוד שנה, תהא אהבתנו עדיין מרובת חיים,  
נשכים לקום בבוקר ונחפש דירה אחת  
ובה מיטה אחת  
להרבות בה אהבה בעיר רַפְתִּי עִם.

**Sheikh Jarrah, 2010 / Almog Behar**

Translated by Chana Morgenstern

“There is no sanctity in an occupied city!”

Protest slogan. Sheikh Jarrah.

1.

With drums we ascended Nablus road. Yet all the way  
I worried that the noise was disturbing the neighbors' rest,  
I was reminded that I'm not happy when drums pass on my own street.  
And I worried that the beat was too cheerful to express the sadness  
of those who were thrown to the streets, the anger of those coming from the streets.

2.

I am a Jew of beard, of glasses of tea, of a messiah  
who will no longer come, of many commandments that for generations I have been  
promising  
my heart I'll fulfill but I don't succeed, of the remembrance of the sanctity of Arabic  
words  
in the Hebrew tongue. And for a moment, from opposite sides of the barbed-wired  
fence  
that has sprung from the doorstep of the Ghawi family who were thrown to the streets,  
we met,  
members of two faiths—different, but sisters.  
He has a beard too and memories and his face is cut by the fence into scores of  
pieces, and he hurls heavy accusations at me like a brother,  
that I have become exilic, he rages, riddled with self-hatred, a lover  
of Arabs, a traitor, an informer on his own people in poems, more dangerous  
than the anti-Semites, a Capo, and he reminds me with fierce descriptions  
of the incinerators of Auschwitz and of the outstretched hand of God who promises  
to return his people to his land or his land to his people.  
For a moment I thought we might return to being members of the same faith,  
two Jews tired of accusations. And I took his hand  
and suggested that we go to the grave of Shimon

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

the Righteous One, and cry greatly over the righteous man and the wounds we have inflicted  
on his old heart, until perhaps the righteous man will cry over us and the depth of the fracture  
that is threatening to break us and the land of Israel, between Germany and Palestine.

3.

I just got to Sheikh Jarrah and already I'm looking for Jews. As if  
I arrived in a faraway country and am looking for nine friends for a quorum,  
or a corner with kosher food and Sabbath and holiday meals. I'm the distance of  
a ten-minute walk from my home, my synagogue, the time of Sabbath's entrance  
nears and I whisper to my God that it should be right in his eyes, the cry  
of our slogans, as if I am fixing the Sabbath before him  
repairing her in all her aspects, and as if I am praying the evening prayers  
of Shabbat before him with all of the right intentions.

4.

And I sought to pass the police barricade,  
to go down and pray at the grave of the righteous man with the rest of the worshippers  
who arrived bathed and festive. We will sing before the righteous man  
with great joy and greet the Sabbath queen. And I'll ask him to permit me  
to pray among the criminals, and to justify the actions of the protesters  
who desecrate the Sabbath in order to sanctify the name of the heavens in Jerusalem.

5.

And one night I dreamt: We'll come to Sheikh Jarrah for a protest,  
regiment by regiment of the expelled, and with us will march the Yemenites expelled  
from the Kineret village, the Jewish Hebron refugees of 1929,  
the Arabs of Ba'ka, Talbieh, Katamon, Meah Sha'arim, Lifta  
and Ein Karem expelled during the Naqba, the Jewish quarter refugees  
expelled in '48 by Jordan, and in '67 their homes nationalized  
by the government of Israel to be sold for great profit leaving them refugees,  
the Palestinians expelled from the villages surrounding Latrun in '67,  
the Mizrahim expelled from the Yemin Moshe neighborhood after years in

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

the eye of the target, to make room for painters and artists, the residents of unknown Bedouin villages in the Negev, the mortgage defaulters expelled from their homes by eviction crews, the Jaffa and Musrara residents forced to vacate their homes to make way for the rich, and the people of Silwan, a demolition order threatening their homes.

6.

And one night the Jerusalem mayor dreamt: Sheikh Jarrah will be concrete, a giant parking lot, and whoever saw a date here, and whoever saw an olive, and whoever saw a grove will see a massive lot of cars, till the ends of the horizon, like a shopping center in a peaceful American town. All the parking problems of Jerusalem will be solved in Sheikh Jarrah, maybe the world's parking problems will be solved in Israel, all of Palestine covered in concrete, because the solution is in concrete that will finally subdue the fight over the holiness of the land, which will disappear.

7.

And we stand, hundreds of protestors, facing the barricades at the neighborhood's entrance.

We are advancing and retreating, dodging the police, returning to their arms, moving in circles, nearly reaching the officers and turning to run. They strike us like angry fathers yearning to discipline, like school children craving revenge.

We don't know whether to ask them to spare the old, the pregnant women, and the children, or to stand and receive their blows with love, whether to turn and run again, in order to return.

8.

And we stand, hundreds of protestors, facing the barricades at the neighborhood's entrance.

The policemen, who have just returned from a course, watch us with eyes weary of the extra shift we've forced on them, of their meager salaries, of the cries of protestors and commanders. They worry the protest will run into the Sabbath again this week.

**Take This Poem And Copy It – קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו**

And their commander orders them to clear us off the road, if they don't clear the road  
he'll cancel their day off, and with every blow we hate them  
and forget their commander, the mayor, the courthouse.

In my heart I wanted to cross to their side, take their commander's  
megaphone and achingly ask the protesters to disperse, to cry out:

This week we won't declare the protest illegal, no,

We're just asking that you disband in exchange for our salaries

this-or-that amount of shekels for every hour of protest, because we promised our  
wives

we would be at Shabbat dinner, this week go protest at the mayor's house, the prime  
minister's house, the house of the millionaire who buys them houses, protest  
in your parents', your neighbors' living rooms, just leave us be, this week, please.

9.

On the way to the protest the muezzin sings from the mosque tower in Maqam Saba.

And I sing quietly to my God in the same note: *May our eyes behold  
your return to Zion, mercifully, mercifully.*

10.

Shimon the Righteous was one of the last survivors of the Great Assembly,  
student of Ezra the Scribe, teacher of Antigonus of Socho,

and he used to say: On three things the world stands,

on the Torah, on divine service, and on acts of loving-kindness.

And we are not his students nor his student's students,

And the fear of the heavens is no longer upon us as it was upon them,

And we do not seek to act with loving-kindness save

toward ourselves, and the world does not stand.

We forget that we were strangers in the land of Egypt, forget

that there is but one law for us and for the stranger

who lives with us, forget that the Hanoun family are not strangers

to this land, that the Al-Kurd family are not strangers

to this land, that the Ghawi family are not strangers

to this land, and we continue to forget.

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

11.

By the courtyard of the expelled Hanoun and Al-Kurd families a border patrol soldier calls my name. What are you doing here? He asks me the same question I would ask him. Only a year ago we were reading Aristotle, Maimonides, Al-Ghazali and Zhuangzi together, and now he's guarding the houses of the evicted from the protestors. This guy was my teacher, he says, embarrassed, to a soldier who joins the conversation, and complains: they all hate us, they're angrier at us than at pilots who drop bombs, they curse us out, and in the end we have to separate between fighting children here like babysitters, what do you have to say about that? And I said nothing, in my mind I was still trying to connect Maimonides and Al-Ghazali to the Sheikh Jarrah expulsion.

שיח' ג'ראח, ה'תש"ע

"אין קדושה בעיר כבושה", מסמאות ההפגנות

א.

באנו בתופים במעלה דרך שכם. ואני כל הדרך  
הייתי חושש האם אין הרעש מפריע מנוחת השכנים,  
שזכרתי שאני איני שמח כשעוברים בתופים ברחובי.  
והייתי חושש האם אין המקצב שמח מדי לבטא את עצב  
המושלכים אלי רחוב, את זעם הבאים מן הרחוב.

ב.

אני יהודי של זקן, של כוסות תה, של משיח  
שכבר לא יבוא, של מצוות רבות שמזה דורות אני מבטיח  
ללבי לקיימן ואיני מצליח, של זכרון קדושת מילים ערביות  
באות עברי. ולרגע, משני עברי גדר הסורגים  
שצמחה על מפתן בית משפחת ע'אוני המושלכת לרחוב,  
נפגשנו בני שתי דתות שונות, אבל אחיות.  
גם לו זקן וזיכרונות ופניו נחתכים בגדר לעשרות  
חתיכות, והוא מטיח בי האשמות כבדות פאח,  
שנעשיתי גלותי, הוא רועם, אכול שנאה עצמית, אוהב  
ערבים, בוגד, מלשין על בני-עמי בשירים, מסוכן יותר  
מן האנטישמים, קאפו, והוא מזכיר לי בתיאורים עזים  
את המשרפות של אושוויץ ואת ידו הנטויה של אלוהים המבטיח  
להשיב את ארצו לעמו, או את עמו לארצו.  
לרגע חשבתי על האפשרות שנשוב להיות בני דת אחת,  
שני יהודים עייפים מהאשמות. נטלתי את ידו  
והצעתי לו שנלך שניים אל קברו של שמעון  
הצדיק, ונרבה בכיות על הצדיק ועל הפצעים שפצענו  
בלבו הזקן, עד שאולי יבכה הצדיק עלינו ועל עומק השבר  
המאיים לשבור אותנו ואת ארץ-ישראל, בין גרמניה לפלסטין.

ג.

רק הגעתי לשיח' ג'ראח וכבר אני מחפש יהודים. כמו



## קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

הגעתי לארץ רחוקה ואני מחפש חברים תשעה למניין,  
או פינה עם אוכל כשר וסעודות שבת וחג. ואני מרחק  
עשרים רגעים של רגל מביתי, מבית-הכנסת שלי. זמן כניסת  
השבת דוחק, ואני לוחש לאלוהי שתהיה נכונה צעקת  
הסמאות בעיניו כאילו תיקנתי קבלת השבת לפניו  
מתקנת בכל דרכיה, וכאילו התפללתי תפילת ערבית  
של שבת לפניו בכל הכוונות הנכונות.

ד.

וביקשתי לעבור את מחסום המשטרה  
ולרדת להתפלל בקברו של הצדיק עם המתפללים  
הבאים כולם רחוצים וחגיגיים. נשיר לפני הצדיק  
בשמחה גדולה ונקבל את פני המלכה, ואבקשו שיתיר לי  
להתפלל עם העבריינין, ואבקשו שיצדיק גם את המפגינים  
המחללים את השבת כדי לקדש שם שמים בירושלים.

ה.

והייתי חולם באחד הלילות: נבוא לשיח' ג'ראח להפגנה  
גדודים גדודים של מגורשים, ובתוכנו יצעדו התימנים שגורשו  
מן המושבה כנרת, ופליטי חברון היהודים מתרפ"ט,  
וערביי בקעה, טלביה, קטמון, מאה שערים, ליפתא  
ועין כרם שגורשו בנכבה, ופליטי הרובע היהודי  
שב-48 גורשו על-ידי הירדנים וב-67 הולאמו בתייהם על-ידי  
ממשלת ישראל להימכר בכסף רב ולהשאירם בפליטותם,  
והפלסטינים שגורשו מן הכפרים שסביב לטרון ב-67,  
והמזרחים שגורשו משכונת ימין משה, אחרי שנים  
בעין הצלפים, כדי לפנות מקום לאַמנים ולציריים, ותושבי  
הכפרים הבודווים הלא-מוכרים בנגב, ונפגעי המשכנתאות  
המושלכים מבתייהם בצווי ההוצאה לפועל, ויושבי יפו ומוסררה  
הנדחקים לפנות את בתייהם לטובת עשיר מהם, ואנשי סִילוֹאן  
שצו הריסה מאיים על ביתם.

ו.

והיה ראש העיר ירושלים חולם באחד הלילות: שיח' ג'ראח

## קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

תהיה לאספלט, מגרש חניה גדול, ומי שראה בה פעם תאנה,  
ומי שראה בה זית, מי שראה בה כרם, יראה מכוניות במגרש ענק,  
עד קצה האופק, כמו מרכז קניות בעיירה אמריקאית שלווה.  
בשיח' ג'ראח יפתרו כל בעיות החניה של ירושלים, אולי  
בארץ ישראל יפתרו כל בעיות החניה של העולם, פלסטין כולה  
תכוסה אספלט, כי הפתרון הוא באספלט שירגיע סוף סוף  
את המריבה על קדושת האדמה, שתיעלם.

ז.

ועמדנו מאות מפגינים מול מחסום המשטרה בכניסה לשכונה.  
ואנחנו קרבים ונסוגים, מתחמקים מן המשטרה ושבים  
אל זרועותיה, נעים במעגלים, כמעט מגיעים עדי השוטרים  
ומסתובבים לברוח. והם מכים בנו קאבות כועסים  
המשתוקקים לחנך, כילדי בית-ספר המבקשים להחזיר.  
ואנחנו לא יודעים אם לבקש מהם לחמול על הזקנים,  
הנשים ההרות והטף, אם לעמוד ולקבל המכות באהבה,  
אם לפנות ולברוח שוב, כדי לשוב.

ח.

ועמדנו מאות מפגינים מול מחסום המשטרה בכניסה לשכונה.  
ומבטי השוטרים, שרק הגיעו מקורס, עייפים מן המשמרת הנוספת  
שכפינו עליהם, משכר דל, מצעקות המפקדים והמפגינים,  
חוששים כי גם השבוע תימשך ההפגנה אל תוך השבת.  
ומפקדם פוקד עליהם להדוף אותנו מן הכביש, אם לא יהדפו  
יבטל להם את חופשת השבת, ואנחנו עם כל מכה שונאים אותם  
ושוכחים את מפקדם, את ראש-העיר, את בית-המשפט.  
ורציתי בלבי לעבור לצד השוטרים, לקחת את המגאפון  
של מפקדם, ולבקש בכאב מן המפגינים להתפזר, לקרוא:  
השבוע אנחנו לא מכריזים על ההפגנה שאינה חוקית, לא,  
אנחנו רק מבקשים מכם להתפנות בשכר זה שכל אחד מאתנו מקבל  
כך וכך שקלים על כל שעת הפגנה, בעבור זה שהבטחנו לנשותינו  
שנבוא לסעודת השבת, בבקשה, השבוע לכו להפגין בביתו  
של ראש העיר, של ראש הממשלה, של המליונר שקונה להם בתים,  
בסלון של הוריהם, של שכניכם, תניחו לנו רק השבוע, בבקשה.

ט.

בדרך להפגנה המואזין שר ממגדל המסגד במקאם צפא  
ואני הייתי שר בשקט לאלוהי באותה מנגינה: ותחזינה עינינו  
בשובך לציון פרחמים. פרחמים.

י.

שמעון הצדיק משיירי הכנסת הגדולה היה,  
תלמידו של עזרא הסופר, רבו של אנטונינוס איש סוכו,  
והוא היה אומר: על שלושה דברים העולם עומד  
על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים.  
ואנחנו לא תלמידיו ולא תלמידי תלמידיו,  
וכבר אין מורא שמים עלינו כעל תלמידיו,  
ואין אנו מבקשים על גמילות החסדים  
אלא על עצמנו, והעולם שוב אינו עומד.  
שכחנו כי גרים היינו בארץ מצרים, שכחנו  
כי תורה אחת ומשפט אחד יהיה לנו ולגר  
הגר אתנו, שכחנו כי בני משפחת תאנן אינם גרים  
לארץ הזאת, כי בני משפחת אֶל-פֹרֵד אינם גרים  
לארץ הזאת, כי בני משפחת ע'אוֹי אינם גרים  
לארץ הזאת, ועוד אנחנו מוסיפים לשכוח.

יא.

ליד חצר משפחות אֶל-פֹרֵד ותאנן המגורשות, חייל מג"ב  
קורא בשמי. מה אתה עושה כאן? הוא שואל אותי מה שאני  
ביקשתי לשאול אותו. רק לפני שנה קראנו יחד אריסטו, רמב"ם,  
אֶלְגִּזְאֵלִי וג'אֶנְג דְּזָה, ועתה הוא ממונה על הרחקת המוחים  
מבתי-המגורשים. זה היה מורה שלי, הוא אומר במבוכה  
למג"בניק אחר שמצטרף לשיחה ומתלונן: כולם שונאים  
אותנו, כועסים עלינו יותר מעל טייס שמפיל פצצות של טון,  
מקללים אותנו, ובסוף אנחנו צריכים להפריד כאן  
בין ילדים שרבים כאילו היינו גננות, מה אתה אומר על זה?  
ואני לא אמרתי דבר, עוד הייתי מנסה בראשי לחבר  
בין הרמב"ם ואלגזאלי לגירוש משיח' ג'ראח.

## The grocery list / Almog Behar

Translated by dimi reider

At night I sometimes wake up to write to you  
As you sleep, and in the stone-blind darkness I search  
For a pen and paper. Sometimes I find a scrap  
Only among the grocery lists you place  
by your head. There, there are penciled  
the vegetables you sought to buy in the market last week  
or in the week to come, and many different detergents  
and bourghul, fine and coarse. I'm not used anymore to write  
on pages far from the computer, to write in a pen  
far away from the keyboard. 'A computer (machshev) is a male  
thought (machshava)', I rehearse the beginnings of poems  
and then erase: 'in hebrew even a computer has a gender'.  
I've gotten used to writing to you  
In your sleep, and now the list is mingling in my mind your smile  
as you fell asleep, the smell of the tomatoes, whose green stem you  
plucked and held up to my nose, and the pressing need to clean  
the house week after week, or at least once a fortnight.  
I go loving after your wakefulness and I am certain you court  
me in your sleep. I've borrowed from you many words for my poems,  
will you borrow words from me to spice the salad that we will cut  
from the vegetables that you bought? to pay with them  
for the olive oil and its rising prices? To silence  
your roving dreams? I come back to bed and you are sleeping  
your warm feet nestled within mine, which are cold. You place  
a hand over me. If I look tomorrow at the words I wrote overnight  
over your list, will I be able to read my thoughts  
within them? Will you be able to buy  
the right vegetables with them?

שיר על רשימת קניות

בלילות אני לפעמים מתעורר לכתוב לך  
כשאת ישנה, ובעיוורון החשכה מחפש  
דף ועט. לעיתים אני מוצא לי פיסת נייר  
רק בין רשימות הקניות שאת מניחה  
סמוך לראשך. כתובים בהן בעיפרון ירקות  
שביקשת לקנות בשוק בשבוע שחלף  
או בזה שיבוא, והרבה חומרי ניקוי  
ובורגול עדין וגס. אני כבר לא רגיל לכתוב  
על דפים הרחק מן המחשב, לכתוב בעט  
הרחק מן המקלדת. מחשב הוא מחשבה  
ממין זכר, אני משנן פתיחה לשיר, אדמה  
היא אדם ממין נקבה. התרגלתי לכתוב לך  
בשנתך, ועתה הרשימה מערבת במחשבתי  
את החיוך על פניך טרם הירדמותך, את ריח  
העגבניות שתלשת מהן את גבעולן הירוק  
והחזקת מול אפי, ואת ההכרח הדוחק לנקות  
את הבית שבוע שבוע, או לפחות פעם בשבועיים.  
אני מאהב אחר ערוךך, ובטוח שאת מחזרת  
אחרי בשנתך. כבר שאלתי ממך מילים רבות לשירי,  
האם תשאלני את משיירי מילים לתבל בהן  
את הסלט שנחתוך מהירקות שקנית? לשלם בהן  
על שמן הזית ומחירו המאמיר? להשקיט חלומותיך  
המתרוצצים? אני חוזר אל המיטה ואת ישנה,  
רגלייך חמות ברגליי הקרות. את מניחה  
עלי יד. אם אסתכל מחר במילים שכתבתי לעת ליל  
על רשימתך האם אצליח לקרוא בהן  
את מחשבותיי? האם תצליחי לקנות על פיהן  
את הירקות הנכונים?

**A poem in five meanings**

**/ Almog Behar**

Translated by dimi reider

a.

I buy paper mercies with ink verses  
And beg the forgiveness of sunset beating on my parched neck  
I join sounds that have meaning only in Hebrew  
And try to spell your way to me, to this piece of paper.

b.

My heart's ache is a part of my heart  
Just like my heart's joy is part of my heart  
Just like my missing tears are part of my cry:  
In Hebrew, a dry riverbed is still called a river.

c.

A dark Greek philosopher has found: Men, when awake  
Are all in the same world, together  
And as they go abed, each goes into a world  
Of his own. And I, in my dreams, was with you  
And woke up alone.

d.

A Chinese sage has taught: What  
You must throw away is greater than  
What should be gathered, because he who forgets  
Gathers, and he who remembers discards.  
And I didn't learn from him a thing.

e.

Ecclisiastes said: There is no memory  
And ever since I read him  
his sentence never departed from my life.

שיר בחמישה מובנים

1. אני קונה לי רחמיי נייר בפסוקי דיו ומבקש את סליחת השקיעה על עורפי המלוהט. אני מחבר בין צלילים שיש להם מובן רק בעברית ומבקש לקסום את דרכי אלי, אל הדף הזה.
2. כאב לבי הוא חלק מלבי כמו ששמחת לבי היא חלק מלבי כמו שדמעותיי החסרות הן חלק מבכיי: בעברית גם נחל אכזב הוא נחל.
3. פילוסוף יוניי אפל גילה: בערות נמצאים כל בני האדם יחד באותו העולם, ובלכתם לישון פונה כל איש לעולמו שלו. ואני בחלומי הייתי איתך והתעוררתי לבד.
4. חכם סיני לימד: רב מה שיש להשליך ממה שיש להוסיף. כי השוכח מוסיף, ואילו הזוכר גורע. ואני לא למדתי ממנו דבר.
5. קוהלת אמר: אין זיכרון. ומאז למדתיו משפטו מלווה את חיי.

**The Hand Holds A Sword / Almog Behar**

The gap between the hand and the gun is  
like the distance between the cheek and the kiss,  
like the borderline between my life and the present,  
like the parting of the shout from my lips.  
A man gathers autumns and winters,  
silence also has a voice;  
A gap that was bigger then  
was cut by the squeeze of a shining trigger.  
The skill of a bullet in the evening wind  
penetrates to the soul;  
In my memory the hand holds a sword  
the journey of man to the earth begins.  
Blood never screams  
even if spilled when it is still warm,  
and many people have learned  
not to give it any thought.  
The gap between the finger and the trigger is  
like the distance of the dead from the shot,  
like the separating of the wall from the crack  
like the birth of a corpse.



ליד יש חרב

רווח היד מן הרובה  
פמרחק הלחי מן הנשיקה  
כגבול חיי מן ההווה  
וכהיפרד שפתיי מן הצעקה.  
סתוים וְחורפים אדם גובה  
וְיש קול גם בשתיקה,  
רווח שאז היָה שווה  
נקטע בלתיצת הדק מבהיקה.  
מיומנות כדור ברוח ערב  
חודרת עד אֵל הנשמה  
בזיכרוני ליד יש חרב  
ומתחיל מסע אדם לאדמה.  
דָם לא צועק אפילו  
אם שופכים אותו כשהוא עוד חם,  
וְאנשים רבים השכילו  
לא לתת על כף אֵת דעתם.  
רווח האצבע מן ההדק  
פמרחק המת מן היריָה  
פהיפרד הקיר מן הסדק  
פהיוולד גוויָה.

**Does grace / Almog Behar**

The prayers of the fathers  
In the buildings of stone  
And in the public gardens of graves:  
The soil was caressed until mourning  
And the skies until tears.  
Now the cantor will call  
Now it is turn for the skies  
To crack naked in open wonder:  
If nature does not have a partner in the ceremony  
It remains lost in confusion.  
Only onto God no one bestows grace  
And no one listens to his prayers:  
People shout in the public squares  
How lonesome they are  
But how lonely is God no one can tell.  
Again the prayer goes back to the page  
Like the dove before becoming a metaphor:  
Routine is yet to be invented  
The dove still has a chance.

עושה חסד

תפילות האבות בבתי האבן  
ובגינות הקברים הציבוריות:  
האדמה לוטפה כבר עד אבל  
והשמיים עד דמעות.  
עכשיו החזן יקרא  
עכשיו תור השמיים להיחצות:  
אם אין לטבע שותף בטקס  
הוא נותר אוֹבד עצות.  
רק עם אלוהים איש לא עושה חסד  
ולו אין אל מי להתפלל:  
בני-אדם צועקים בציבור על בדידותם  
אבל כמה בודד הוא האל?  
שוב התפילה חוזרת לדף  
כמו היונה לפני שהייתה לדימוי:  
עוד לא הומצאה השגרה  
עוד יש לה סיכוי.

**A poem for Rachel / Almog Behar**

Rachel in the evening of Ya'acov's wedding to Lea  
Was crying shepherds' songs  
And in the morning she lingered on sleeping  
So she would not think  
And at once a few days  
Were in her eyes like long years in her love for him.

קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

**A Poem for Rachel / Almog Behar**

Translated by Saul Noam Zaritt

Rachel, on the evening of Yaakov and Leah's marriage,  
cried and wept shepherds' songs  
and in the morning she slept in so that she wouldn't have to think  
and all at once a few days  
were to her like long years of her love for him.

שיר לרחל

רחל בערב חתונתו של יעקב ללא  
הייתה בוכה שיירי רועים  
ובבוקר היא האריכה לישון כדי שלא לחשוב  
ולפתע ימים אחדים  
היו בעיניה כשנים ארוכות באהבתה אותו

\* / **Almog Behar**

In the light of a morning  
That shutters protected us from its brightness,  
We talked about children,  
And meant only love.  
When you left I wrote  
In one of my notebooks:  
“Someday we will talk about love  
And mean only children”.

קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – **Take This Poem And Copy It**

\* **/ Almog Behar**

**Translated by Saul Noam Zaritt**

In the morning light with the blinds shading us from the intense gleam  
we spoke about children and really meant love.

And after you left I wrote in one of my notebooks:

"Someday we'll speak about love  
and really mean children."



קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

\*

לְאוֹרוֹ שֶׁל בּוֹקֵר שְׁתַּרְיָסִים סוֹכְכוֹ עֲלֵינוּ מְעוֹצֵם אוֹרוֹ  
דִּיבְרָנוּ עַל יְלָדִים וְהִתְכוּוֹנוּ בְּסֶךְ-הַפֶּל לְאֵהָבָה.  
כְּשֶׁהֲלַכְתָּ כְּתַבְתִּי בְּאֶחָת מִמַּחְבְּרוֹתַי:  
"מִתִּישָׁהוּ נִדְבַר עַל אֵהָבָה  
וְנִתְפוּוֹן בְּסֶךְ-הַפֶּל לְיְלָדִים".

**A woman awaits a bombing / Almog Behar**

**Translated by Chana Morgenstern**

*for the Gazan poet Manal Miqdad*

From her nightly resting place, during the long journey to sleep  
she considers the library of books she's collected  
the travel and nature books should really go  
to her good friend from class, whose been dreaming to travel next summer,  
through rivers and deserts, the children's books that remain on the shelf  
should go to the orphanage born of the war, the diaries  
her father should burn, if they aren't destroyed in the bombing  
and she should ask the neighbors too, the English books  
she bought but hasn't read she wills to her cousin, who confided in her his dream  
to leave, the borrowed books can stay with her friends  
if they promise not to fold the pages or write in the margins, and choose someone  
to leave them to in case of another explosion.  
behold her bed; it is not surrounded by heroic men, only fear in the night.  
the books remain silent, they don't announce to whom they wish to be willed  
and she prays that tonight she will fall into a dreamless sleep.  
undisturbed by explosions, undisturbed by the games of the neighbor's kids  
whose whole bellies are fright

**אישה מצפה להפצה**

למנאל מיקדאד

על משכבה בלילות, בְּניסיון הארוך להירדם,  
היא חושבת על הספרים שאספה לְספריתה.  
את ספרי הטיולים והטבע כדאי שתקבל  
חברתה הטובה מן הכיתה, שחולמת לראות בקיץ הבא  
נחלים ומדבריות, את ספרי הילדים שנותרו על המדפים  
כדאי שיקחו לְבית היתומים שתוליד המלחמה, את היומנים  
כדאי שתבקש מאביה שישרפו, אם הפיצוץ לא ישמיד אותם,  
כדאי אולי לבקש גם מהשכנים, את הספרים באנגלית שקנתה  
ועוד לא קראה כדאי שיתנו לבן דודה, שסיפר לה על חלומותיו  
לעזוב, את הספרים שלוו חברים אפשר שישאירו אצלם  
אם יבטיחו לא לקמט ולא לכתוב בתוכם, ויבחרו הם  
למי להוריש אותם במקרה של הפצה נוספת.  
הנה מְטתה, אין גיבורים סביב לה, רק פחד בלילות.  
הספרים שותקים, אינם מודיעים למי הם רוצים להימסר אחריה.  
והיא מקווה להצליח הפעם להירדם לשינה ללא חלומות  
שלא תופרע ברעש ההפצצות, שלא תופרע ברעש משחקי ילדי השכנים  
שכל בטנם בהלות.

## Four Comments on the Nakedness of the Poem-Source / Almog Behar

translated by Alexandra Berger-Polsky

### 1.

Two years ago—during a one-off lecture in Jerusalem by Jacques Derrida, who is Jacob Deris, native of Algeria, who spoke in Francified and Germanized English about the inability of crossing the boundaries of language, and on the opposition of the poem to its being translated while simultaneously the reader is beckoned to try his strength and strain his lips and his tongue at an impossibility as great as an attempt at genesis—I read a collection of translations from Arabic to Hebrew by Naim Araid, native of the village Ma'ar in the Galilee, who translated the poems of Adonis, the Lebanese poet, born in Damascus as Ali Ahmad Said Asbar.

### 2.

The translated Adonis writes of nakedness, which for him is always preceded by three points, the nakedness of the poem-source, the digger of borders in the sand of the wizened universe, and the revealer of bodies of discarded words amongst the mountains of dying poems. The fire of the poems, of Adonis, is lost in the expanses of existent and non-existent time, and his language is replaced with other language, reduced, and his footsteps in the world beyond the mountains of Lebanon were no longer his.

### 3.

Derrida, the spokesperson of Post, disappeared suddenly from the great hall in my head, and when he returned he had in his throat harsh words to hurl against my torn ears, and as he sharpened his pain with his lack of willingness to negotiate with the end, he said that any death is the death of the whole world, not the death of one world among many, but of the whole world itself. And the survivor of that death, he explained, is condemned to living out the death of those close to him and far from him, condemned to carry the dead world alone on his back. And then he read a poem written

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by Paul C lan, who is Paul Antschel, native of Czernowitz which is in Bukovina, former province of the Hapsburg Empire. He read the poem in German, the language of C lan's death, and afterwards read its English translation. And I began to write down these words, this half-poem.

**4.**

The translated C lan writes of the humming of black stars' flux, sliding far from him and the sky, distancing themselves yet still heard. He writes of the dissected forehead of a sacrifice, the ram which was the atonement of Isaac, and how between its dry time-worn horns, that once again have no anger or desire for battle, the sorrow-image is engraved. No-body, C lan knew, no-body in the world is innocent, not the world-self or the poem-self or the ram which prevented Abraham's crime. The world-self is dead, C lan understood, or Derrida understood, or I understood its manner, and now it falls on me to carry its entirety on my back until my own death.

ארבע הערות על העירום של ראשית-השיר

1.

לפני שנתיים – בהרצאה ירושלמית חד-פעמית של נ'אק דרידה, הוא יעקב דרעי יליד אלז'יר, שדיבר באנגלית מצורפת ומגורמנת על חוסר היכולת לחצות את גבולות השפה, ועל התנגדות השיר לתרגומו אשר בו-זמנית גם קוראת לקורא לבוא ולנסות את כוחו ולאמץ שפתיו ולשונו באי-האפשרות כבניסיון בראשית – קראתי בקובץ תרגומים מערבית לעברית שהתקין נעים ערידי, יליד הכפר מע'אר שבגליל, לשירי אדוניס, הוא המשורר הלבנוני יליד דמשק עלי אקמד סעיד אספר.

2.

אדוניס המתורגם שר על העירום, אשר תמיד קודמות לו שלוש נקודות, העירום של ראשית-השיר החופר גבולות בתוך חולות היקום הנובל וחושף גופות מילים זרוקות בין הרי השירים הגוועים. האש של השירים, של אדוניס, אבדה במרחבי הזמן הקיים והלא-קיים, ושפתו התחלפה באחרת, מצומצמת, וצעדיו בעולם שמעבר להרי-הלבנון שוב לא היו צעדיו.

3.

דרידה, דובר הפוסט, נעלם פתע מן האולם הגדול שבראשי, וכשחזר היו בגרונו מילים קשות להטיח על אוזניי הקרועות, ומתוך שחידד את כאבו בחוסר רצונו לשאת-ולתת עם הקץ אמר כי כל מוות הוא מותו של העולם, לא של עולם אחד מרבים, אלא של העולם האחד כולו. והניצול מאותו מוות, הסביר, נידון לחיות לבדו את מות קרובו או רחוקו, נידון לשאת לבדו את העולם המת על גבו. ואז הוא קרא שיר שכתב פאול צלאן, יליד טשקנוביץ' שבבוקובינה, פרובינציה-לשעבר של הממלכה ההאבסבורגית. הוא קרא את השיר בגרמנית, שפת מותו של צלאן, ואחר קרא את תרגומו לאנגלית. ואני התחלתי לכתוב את המילים הללו, הספק-שיר הזה.

4.

צלאן המתורגם שר על זמזומו של שטף כוכבים שחורים, אשר מחליקים הרחק ממנו ומן השמיים, מתרחקים ועדיין נשמעים. הוא שר על מצחו המבותר של הקורבן, האייל שהיה כפרתו של יצחק, ובין קרניו היבשות ואכולות-הזמן, ששוב אין בהן זעם או תשוקה לקרב, חקק את דמות-הצער. שום-איש, ידע

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צלאן, שום-איש בעולם אינו חף-מפשע, אף לא העולם-עצמו או השיר-עצמו או האיל שמנע את פשעו של אברהם. העולם-עצמו מת, הבין צלאן, או שהבין דרידה, או שהבנתי אני דרכו, ועתה עלי לשאת אותו כולו על גבי עד מותי שלי.

## Jerusalem Shuts Her Heart / Almog Behar

translated by Alexandra Berger-Polsky

Jerusalem shuts her heart to herself  
wraps herself in tall watchtowers  
she makes a wall  
between herself and the eyes of the people.

Night after night  
after sunset  
she goes out in a heavy robe  
and checks that all her gates are closed  
since all her inhabitants are imprisoned  
and she places locks on the trees.

And one woman  
comes up from the desert screaming  
banging on the wall's stones  
calling out crying of that which is in her heart:  
“Come my beloved let us go out from the city  
let us sleep in the villages and awake in the vineyards”  
and Jerusalem slept and her heart did not wake.

And that one woman  
lifts heavy iron keys  
to the openings of the locks  
and her screams wake the guards  
who patrol the city dressed in uniforms  
who strike her flesh and bruise her skin  
tear her garment  
night after night.

Night after night before the setting of the moon  
the Divine goes out to the Mount of Dispute



**Take This Poem And Copy It – קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו**

leaping over the wall and running away with it  
to the slopes of the desert  
to the coastal plain  
far from the shuttered city  
and the guards.

ירושלים סוגרת את לבה

ירושלים סוגרת את לבה מעצמה  
מתעטפת במגדלי שמירה גבוהים  
מקימה חומה  
בינה ובין עיניי האנשים.

לילה לילה  
אחרי שקיעת החמה  
היא יוצאת בשלמה כבדה  
ומוודאת כי כל שעריה סגורים  
כי כל יושביה אסורים  
ומניחה על העצים מנעולים.

ואישה אחת  
עולה מן המדבר בצעקות  
מִדְּפַקַת על אבני החומה  
קוראת בוכה את שעל לבה:  
"לכה דודי נצא הָעִיר  
נלינה בְּכַפְרִים נשכימה לְכַרְמִים"  
וירושלים ישנה ולבה לא מתעורר.

והאישה האחת  
מגישה מפתחות ברזל כבדים  
אל כפות המנעולים  
וצעקותיה מעירות את השומרים  
הסובבים בעיר הלבושים מדים  
המכים בשרה פוצעים עורה  
קורעים שלמתה  
לילה לילה.

לילה לילה לפני שקיעת הלבנה  
יוצא האלוהים את הר המריבה  
מדלג על החומה ובורח עמה

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

אל מורדות המדבר

אל שפלת הים

הרחק מן העיר הסגורה

והשומרים.

**(Poem Without a Name) / Almog Behar**

translated by Alexandra Berger-Polsky

Law: Giving a name to God  
is deemed an act of heresy.  
Which comes to teach: Many names  
has the Divine, in the Torah eleven  
names, in the Gemara thirty-two,  
in Kabbalah seventy. The Sages say:  
infinite are the names of the Name.  
A difficulty: Is giving a name for private use  
an act of heresy? Law:  
Giving a name for private use is not an act  
of heresy, collective naming is. Which comes  
to teach: The Holy One says all  
names in one breath, in our speech  
they came out one by one.  
And Others say: The names in our speech  
separate between Him and His name,  
yet His speech binds our world and His.

(שיר בלי שם)

הלכה: נתינת שם לאל  
הרי זה מעשה כפירה.  
תלמוד לומר: שמות רבים  
למקום, בתורה אחד עשר  
שמות, בגמרא שלושים ושנים,  
בקבלה שבעים. חכמים אומרים:  
אין סוף לשמות השם.  
קשיא: וקריאתו בשם לעצמו  
מעשה כפירה היא? הלכה:  
קריאתו בשם אינה מעשה  
כפירה, קריאתנו כן. תלמוד  
לומר: הקב"ה אומר כל  
השמות בדיבור אחד, בדיבורנו  
הם יוצאים אחד אחד.  
ואחרים אומרים: השמות בדיבורנו  
מפרידים בין שמו ובינו,  
בדיבורו מחברים עולמנו ועולמו.

**Ecclesiastes the Elder / Almog Behar**

translated by Alexandra Berger-Polsky

And when Ecclesiastes concluded  
the writing of his book  
at the waning of his kingdom he was visited by  
the sabbatical of the soul  
which brought a silencing of words to his body  
which preserved the long sorrow of his face  
against the great fear in his stomach  
and he didn't produce any more books  
and he didn't collect any more fables  
and he was no longer called Ecclesiastes the Wise  
and he didn't instruct the people  
and his pain was relieved by the silence of God in the heavens  
and by the violence of the words upon the earth.

קהלת-הזקן

וככלות קהלת  
לכתוב את מגילתו  
באה לו באחרית ימי מלכותו  
השבת של הנפש  
והביאה לגוף את שתיקת המילים  
וגוננה על העצב הארוך של פניו  
מפני הפחד הנורא של ביטנו  
ולא עשה עוד ספרים  
ולא אסף עוד משלים  
ולא נקרא שמו עוד קהלת חכם  
ולא לימד העם  
והוקל מכאובו משתיקת האלוהים בשמיים  
ומאלימות המילים עלי אדמות.

**A Man in Darkness / Almog Behar**

translated by Alexandra Berger-Polsky

Your presence in darkness: in your mother's belly, at night  
as you sleep beneath the blanket, in a military guard  
post, in a prison hole, in the belly of the earth.

In the shadows your body's movements are hidden, but so are  
the movements of your enemy (you might  
rub your nose, he might pull out a gun).

The darkness births monsters. You search for a friend,  
and in the murk only the outlines of God's face are clear.

So clear that you release your touch on the warm trigger  
and reach out your hand to touch the whiskers of his beard.



**אדם בחושך**

הימצאותך בחושך: כבטן אמה, בלילה  
בשנתך תחת שמיכה, כעמדת שמירה  
צבאית, כבור כלא, כבטן האדמה.  
כאפילה כל תנועות גופך חבויים, אבל גם  
תנועות גופו של אויבך (אתה יכול  
לחטט באפך, הוא יכול לשלוף אקדח).  
החושך מוליד מפלצות. אתה מחפש ידך,  
ובעלטה רק תווי פניו של האלוהים ברוכים.  
כל כך ברוכים עד שאתה מוותר על מגע ההדק  
החם ושולח ידך ללטף את זיפי זקנו.

**Hunger / Almog Behar**

translated by Alexandra Berger-Polsky

The onion is the shoulders,  
folding into an embrace.  
And the smile is the apple,  
nibbled in a busy mouth.  
The egg is the eye,  
keeping the sights to itself.  
And the lemons are the fingers.

הבצל הוא הכתפיים,  
מתקלפות לתוך חיבוק.  
והחיוך הוא התפוח,  
נגס בפה עסוק.  
הביצה היא העין,  
שומרת בלבה על המראות.  
והלימונים הם אצבעות.

קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – **Take This Poem And Copy It**

**\* / Almog Behar**

**translated by Alexandra Berger-Polsky**

One doesn't need to be taunted in the sky in Jerusalem.

For that there's Tel Aviv

קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – **Take This Poem And Copy It**

\*

לא צריך להתגרות בשמיים בירושלים.  
בשביל זה יש תל-אביב

**a halved poem / Almog Behar**

translated by Alexandra Berger-Polsky

poetry is written when one is hungry  
when a thing doesn't hold the sky.  
when sentences are disassembled  
and all the words are transported in trucks  
to new apartments.  
when the night is silent  
and people and seasons are just a yearning.  
when tears dry up  
inside the eye.  
poetry is written when one is full.  
poetry is written.  
poetry.

שיר חצוי

שירה נכתבת כשרעבים.  
כשדבר לא מחזיק את השמיים.  
כשמשפטים מפורקים  
וכל המילים מועברות במשאיות  
לדירות חדשות.  
כשהליקה שותק  
ובני אדם ועונות הם רק געגוע.  
כשדמעות מתייבשות  
בפנים העין.  
שירה נכתבת כששבעים.  
שירה נכתבת.  
שירה.

## O How Has Baghdad Become / Almog Behar

translated by Alexandra Berger-Polsky

Baghdad, pulsing universe, most beautiful of cities, slowing the waters' flow in Eden's third river. Young women and men cross bridges overlooking explosions and wrap themselves in hazy scarves of desert dust made of fear of Mongolian fire and smart cruise missiles programmed in English (and covered up by names from another world, like 'Tomahawk'). In the new Babylonia they destroyed the towers whose tips touched sky, the firmament sown with stealth bombers which confuse radar devices, and in the markets medicines for children have sold out. At the rivers of Aram-Naharaim the mourners gather, and foreign presidents live out ancient prophecies of rage, not for them, and shatter infants against the boulders. Another revolution of Allah comes down from the planes' skies, a reminder of the grief of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the fire-dust obliterates sunsets and amplifies sunsets. Drunk from the power of his control over people, he wishes to be ruler of stars and signs as well. Ur of the Chaldees already saw all the battles and all the wars, and the new Iraqi prophets of consolation walk barefoot in the streets of Earth's young valley, burning, and know to preach: "In eternity there are no victories". Victories allow all who are transient, all for whom their time in history is short, to be as the haughtiest of kingdoms. On the dust of the earth sits Babylonia's maiden daughter, who starts to sing in the Arabic of the Quran, to the sounds of the oud and kanun, trained in the tunes of life's joys by the fingers of blind musicians: "O how has Baghdad once so populous become like a widow, she that was great among the nations".

*Jerusalem, at the falling of American bombs  
on Baghdad, 17 Adar II 5763,  
the night between 20.3.2003 and 21.3.2003*



**איכה ישבה בגדאד**

בגדאד, משובש תבל, היפה שבקריית העולם, מאטה את קצב זרימת המים בשלישי בנהרות גן-העדן. נערות ונערים עוברים על הגשרים המצפים להפצצה ומתעטפים בצעיפי אובך אבק מדבר מיוחד האש המוגולית וטילי השיוט החכמים המתוכננים אנגלית (ומתכסים בשמות עתיקים בני עולמות אחרים, פטומהוק). בכך החדשה חרבו המגדלים שראשם בשמים, הרקיע זרוע מטוסים חמקנים המבלבלים את מכשירי המכ"ם, ובשווקים אלו זה מכבר התרופות לילדים. על נהרות ארם-נהרים מתקבצים הבוכים, ונשיאים זרים מגשימים נבואות זעם עתיקות, לא להם, ומנפצים עוללים אל-הסלעים. שוב מהפכת אללה יורדת משמי המטוסים, תזפורת לעצב סדום ועמורה, ואבק-שריפה מוחק שקיעות ומעצים שקיעות. שיפור מפותח שליטתו על בני-האדם הוא מבקש להיות ריבון גם לפוככים ולמזלות. אור-פשוטים כבר ראתה את כל הקרבות וכל המלחמות הקרבות, ונביאי נחמה עירקיים חדשים הולכים יחפים ברחובות בקעת ארץ שנוער הבוערים ויודעים לשנן: "בנצח אין ניצחונות". הניצחונות ניתנו לכל מי שחולף, לכל מי שזמנו בהיסטוריה קצר כגורל כל הממלכות היהירות. על עפר הארץ יושבת בתולת בת-בכל, ומתחילה לזמר בערבית של קראן, לצלילי עוד וקאנון המנוסים בניגונים של שמחות החיים באצבעות נגנים סומים: "איכה ישבה בגדאד העיר רבתי עם היתה פאלמנה רבתי בגוים".

ירושלים, בנפול הפצצות האמריקאיות

על בגדאד, י"ז באדר ב' ה'תשס"ג,

הלילה שבין ה-20.3.2003 ל-21.3.2003.

**Nizar Qabbani writes Pablo Neruda's Mujar from the Exile / Almog**

**Behar**

Translated by Alexandra Berger-Polsky

I will visit you in your dreams. For this purpose you will need to travel far from me, to cover yourself in the blanket of eyelids and in your mind's eye live through the meeting and the parting. It will be enough if you concentrate on one kiss, one glance, one word, these will suffice as reasons for longing. Remember: Longing is sweet like the pain of hands grasping one another at the end of a night of talking and sleeplessness, yearning reminds us of our existence as do wounds, craving calms the wandering thoughts. There is no need to check messages on handheld devices, to try to give answers when there is no one to pose questions to us. You said: I want to say something but I don't know what. You sat at the end of the table, in our heads we translated words between us, from the liver to the tongue, from the lungs to the throat, from the butterflies of the stomach to the dryness of the lips. I said to you: Poets have already written entire books to women they met for a day, sometimes to women they saw for a moment, much more than I have managed to write over the course of years to women who have not left. The city sleeps and we are awake, the tea from the cup burns exactly at the tip of the tongue, afterwards softening the throat. Do you like snow? At which section of the sky do you like to stare? What do you prefer, night or day? I will come to you in your dreams. You must sail to an island, imagine that the Mediterranean Sea freezes one winter and we walk on it, from Haifa to Kyrenia, from Istanbul to Thessaloniki. If you don't recognize me in the dream, I won't remind you who I was, I will only tell you that footprints

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in snow are fleeting, that footprints in the sand are fleeting, only the footprints  
that we walked on the asphalt sidewalks will never be erased,  
because they were never marked. Do you remember  
that we planned dynasties, daughters that you birth and sons that I sire and they will  
meet  
in another city? The longing is not distance, it is the finger  
that you put up to your lips until it filled with the moisture of your breathing.  
I will come in a dream. You can send me an electronic  
message when you are falling asleep, and I will also close  
my eyes. I will be reminded of the taste of the wine, and the poet who wrote:  
When the wine glass empties the world is more beautiful, when  
I look through it at your eyes, your eyebrows, your dreams. Did  
you always know that thus we would meet and thus we would part? Did  
you see the signs already in your childhood, when you answered the neighbors'  
son when he asked where you're from: I haven't yet arrived  
here, I am still there speaking to you  
in a language that I have forgotten, have you forgotten? The touch of the cold on the  
fingers is pleasant  
when the shoulders meet accidentally while walking, or while  
sitting in the last coffee house that the city has allowed its residents  
to stay open after midnight. Soon the waiter will come  
and send us back out to the cold streets. We will invite  
him to come with us, and we will point for him at the moon  
so that he will see it in its fullness for the first time as it  
leans on our palms which insist on not  
yet holding one another. So much stubbornness  
we could teach one another, years  
that your father taught you of the taste of wine when it was  
bitter on your tongue, years that your grandmother prayed that you would marry  
the neighbors' son and you would live with him in the next village, years  
that I measured pains in my extremities with the help of poems.  
I will visit your dream. Even though you didn't promise you will visit in my dream.  
A visit of yours would be too dangerous, as I would ask that the  
yearning materialize in the shedding of tears, in the grasp of the fingers, in the

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abyss of the pit of the stomach. You didn't ask for a picture, so there would not remain a witness to the time that was trapped between airplanes.  
Have I told you that I already offered to one of the lovers that visited my shores at high tide to meet again when we are widowed, so we must delay our next meeting to our second widowhood? Do you sometimes sit to count the waves? Do you rest your palm inside the foam like a beggar? Do you lean on the walls of the houses of those who were your lovers as they sail to other islands? Have you memorized all the words I tried to say to you? Where are you from? Why didn't you ask where I am from? Certainly you knew I would not answer you anything other than the regular things: The name of the hospital in which I was born, the department, the room, the doctor's name. How do you know that now when you're dreaming and in the dream, a cloud passes by, this is not me? How do you know that yesterday when you dreamt and in the dream there was a distant melody, that you thought you heard from an old radio as you sat to eat lentil soup with a lot of bread in the Galatasaray Quarter, this was not me? Our dreams are not ours, just as our children are not ours. A woman I loved once promised to lend me the keys to the library of her dreams, and she forgot. When I asked what happened she answered that she has not since remembered her dreams. Do you remember your dreams? You know that I forgot to examine your fingernails, I forgot to check if your hands sweat while you dance, I forgot to measure the length of your eyelashes, I forgot to ask if your belly shakes slightly when you rest an open palm on it? Have you already seen me in your streets? I pass through there often, crossing the bridges that lead from Baghdad to London, from Jerusalem to Oslo, from Izmir to Crete. Have you ever picked up a stranger in the street and offered him water and bread and wine? Have you always remembered your religion,

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or do you sometimes wake up from sleep confused between Moses,  
Jesus, Mohammed, Zarathustra, the Buddha and Laozi? Did you  
know that I was once more beautiful, without the grey  
hairs in my beard and without the hairs missing from my head? But  
then I didn't believe in my beauty, and I frequently smiled abashedly  
in the hope that the girls' glances would not fall on my nose.  
You know that we met at the best time for our love,  
but only on the condition that it be quick as the light  
of the streetlights under which we walked? Do you remember if  
my lips were cold or warm in a kiss, whole  
or cracked, dry or moist? Do you  
remember how they will be like at our next meeting, in a dream?  
I will come visit you, in dreams. Tomorrow or  
in another year. Do you believe that people really  
get married and live their whole lives together in one place,  
or was it because you knew that we calm  
our parents and our children, and ourselves with these words, that you smiled  
when you said them? Many times I forget to trim  
my nails in time, to cut my hairs at the barber,  
to write all my thoughts. Beauty is sad. It  
reminds us of all that we will lose, all  
that was never ours. Already  
at the moment of our meeting we already began to long for the moment of our  
meeting and for the  
longing that this would come to arouse in my chest and in your navel. What  
color is coal when you look at it up close? What  
did you see in my eyes? What were you sacred of? How did you know  
that I was also scared? You knew that in the end I would give up,  
I will not try to convince you that our love is eternal. You went  
and also I went, but I warned you that perhaps  
I would try to make our love eternal in poems. There  
we will not separate after a few days in the entrance of your  
hotel at three-thirty in the morning, there  
we will continue our night talks on the following night.

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

When you first saw me did you immediately know that I would kiss you  
and say that you must come with me to Jerusalem? I  
knew that you would kiss me and go by yourself to a different city.  
There is always a suitcase to pack, clothing to change before  
a long flight, foreign money to hurry and spend  
before it loses its value as we get on the plane.  
That night we divided the world between us, for you  
the coastal cities and for me the cities on mountains, for you  
the capital cities and for me the cities where the  
rebel outposts sit. Your love is in the cup of wine, my love is in the cup of forgetting.  
I smiled at you while you were walking but I knew, no matter how small  
the world becomes it is still vast, and we may never meet again.  
I will come visit. Once I came as a she-mule, a she-goat, a number  
of times I came as a butterfly, as the foam of the waves, as a lost ray of  
light that detached from the moon. And why don't  
you come visit in a dream? Again I will promise  
that after we talk all night we will suffice with just one kiss  
or two, with one hug in which the hands  
and the body are two geologic layers of the Earth pressing  
into one another, and with two or three long letters  
of longing and yearning, after which only short update  
messages will be sent: I have finished losing all my hairs. I have finished  
writing the poems I will dedicate to you. I no longer  
prefer the sweet coffee over the bitter. I have forgotten  
the sound of your voice. I have forgotten the taste of your lips.  
I have forgotten the first letter in your name. I have forgotten if  
you wore glasses on your eyes. I try to forget  
how it was when I saw you for the first time and I can't.  
If we meet a second time I will need to fall in love with you  
again. Tomorrow I will visit in your dreams for the last time, in order to  
tell you what I failed to tell at our meeting when I was looking for  
one last moment of insanity and courage in my honesty: I  
love you. Meaning I loved. Meaning I will love. Meaning  
still I get confused between the tenses, meaning between

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

being awake and asleep, between dream and reality, between this  
life and the other life I could have lived. The longing becomes  
thinner with the years. Mostly at night. Mostly when you  
sit next to windows. Mostly when the moon sheds light. Perhaps  
in another year we will protest together in Taksim Square, we will open  
anew the family carpet repair store  
in the Galatasaray neighborhood, we will get drunk again. Did I tell you  
already that people fly in the sky, walk in the streets  
of cities whose languages they never heard before, cry  
in bodily fluids, sweat, semen, spit, until each one's smell  
becomes similar to the other's? I will come visit. Meanwhile can you  
send me the music that you love?  
Even just a few sounds would be fine.

ניזאר קבאני כותב למוֹתָר של פאבלו נרודה מן הגלות

אבקר אותך בחלומך. לשם כך תִּדְרְשִׁי לנסוע  
הרחק ממני, להתכסות בשמיכת העפעפיים ולהעביר בעיניי  
רוחך את הפגישה ואת הפירוד. מספיק שתתרכזי  
בנשיקה אחת, במבט אחד, במילה אחת, הן  
תספיקנה את הסיבות כולן לגעגועים. תזכירי: הגעגועים  
מתוקים כמו כאב ידיים הנלחצות זאת אל  
זאת בתום ליל שיחה ונדודי שינה, הכמיהה  
מזכירה לנו את קיומנו כמו הפצעים, הערגה  
מרגיעה את המחשבות הנוודות. אין צורך לבדוק  
הודעות במכשירים הניידים, לנסות להשיב תשובות כשאין  
מי שינסח לנו שאלות. אמרת: אני רוצה  
לומר לך דבר מה, ואיני יודעת מהו.  
ישבת בקצה השולחן, ובראשינו תרגמנו בינינו כל  
הזמן מילים, מן הכבד ללשון, מן הריאות  
לגרון, מפרפורי הבטן ליובש השפתיים. אמרתי לך:  
משוררים כבר כתבו ספרים שלמים לנשים שפגשו  
ליום אחד, לעיתים לאישה שראו רק רגע  
אחד, הרבה יותר מכפי שאני הספקתי לכתוב  
לאורך שנים לנשים שלא עזבו. העיר ישנה  
ואנחנו ערים, התה מן הכוס שורף בדיוק  
בקצה הלשון, אחר כך מרכז את הגרון.  
את אוהבת שלג? על איזה חלק מן  
השמיים את אוהבת להתבונן? מה תעדיפי, לילה  
או יום? אני אבוא אליך בחלומך. עליך  
לשוט לאי, לדמיין שהים התיכון יקפא חורף  
אחד ונלך עליו, מחיפה לקִיֶּנְיָה, מאיסטמבול לסלוניקי.  
אם לא תזהי אותי בחלום, לא אזכיר  
לך מי הייתי, רק אספר לך שהצעדים  
בשלג נמחקים, הצעדים בחול נמחקים, רק הצעדים  
שצעדנו על מדרכות האספלט לעולם לא ימחקו,  
כי הם מעולם לא סומנו. את זוכרת  
שתכננו שושלות, בנות שתולידי ובנים שאולידי ויפגשו



## קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

בעיר אחרת? הגעגועים אינם מרחק, הם האצבע  
שהצמדת אל שפתייך עד שהתמלאה בלחות הנשימות.  
אני אבוא בחלום. תוכלי לשלוח לי הודעה  
אלקטרונית כשאת עומדת להירדם, ואעצום גם אני  
את עיני. אזכר בטעם היין, ובמשורר שכתב:  
כשכוס היין מתרוקנת העולם יפה יותר, כאשר  
אני מתבונן דרכה בעיניך, בגבותיך, בחלומותיך. האם  
תמיד ידעת שכך ניפגש וכך ניפרד? האם  
ראית סימנים לכך כבר בילדותך, כשענית לבן  
השכנים ששאל מאיפה את: עדיין לא הגעתי  
לכאן כלל, עדיין אני שם ומדברת אִתך  
בשפה ששכחתי, שכחתי? נעימה פגיעת הקור באצבעות  
כשהכתפיים נפגשות בטעות בזמן ההליכה, או בזמן  
הישיבה בבית הקפה האחרון שהעיר התירה לתושביה  
להותיר פתוח אחר חצות. תכף יבוא המלצר  
וישלח אותנו בחזרה אל הרחובות הקרים. נציע  
לו שיבוא איתנו, שנצביע עבורו על הלבנה  
כדי שיראה אותה בפעם הראשונה במילואה כשהיא  
נשענת על כפות ידינו המתעקשות לא לאחוז  
עדיין זאת בזאת. כל כך הרבה התעקשות  
אנחנו יכולים ללמד זה את זה, שנים  
שלימד אותך אביך את טעם היין כשהיה  
מר בלשונך, שנים שהתפללה סבתך שתתחתני עם  
בן השכנים ותגורי עמו בכפר הסמוך, שנים  
שמדדתי את כאבי בקצות האיברים בעזרת השירים.  
אבקר בחלומך. למרות שלא הבטחת שתבקרי בחלומי.  
ביקור שלך יהיה מסוכן מדי, כשאבקש מן  
הגעגועים להתממש בשפיכת הדמעות, בלפיתת האצבעות, בתהום  
של קרקעית הבטן. לא ביקשת תמונה, שלא  
תישאר עדות לזמן שהיה לכוד בין מטוסים.  
אמרתי לך שכבר הצעתי לאחת האהובות שביקרו  
בחופי בשעת הגאות שניפגש שוב בימי אלמנותנו,  
ונצטרך לדחות את מועד הפגישה הבאה שלנו  
לאלמנות השניה? את יושבת לפעמים לספור את

## קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

הגלים? את מניחה את כף ירך בתוך  
הקצף כקבצנית? את נשענת על קירות בתי  
מי שהיו אהוביך כשהם מפליגים לאיים אחרים?  
שננת את כל המילים שניסיתי לומר לך?  
מאיפה את? למה לא שאלת מאיפה אני?  
ודאי ידעת שלא אענה לך דבר מלבד  
הדברים הרגילים: שם בית-החולים שבו נולדתי,  
המחלקה, החדר, שם הרופא. כיצד את יודעת  
שעכשיו כשאת חולמת ובחלום חולף ענן, אין  
זה אני? כיצד את יודעת שאתמול כשחלמת  
ובחלום נשמע ניגון רחוק, שחשבת ששמעת מרדיו  
ישן כשישבת לאכול מרק עדשים טבול בלחם  
רב ברובע גֶ'טָה-סְרָאי, לא היה זה  
אני? החלומות שלנו אינם שלנו, כפי שהילדים  
שלנו אינם שלנו. אישה שאהבתי הבטיחה פעם  
להשאיל לי את המפתחות לספריית חלומותיה, ושכחה.  
כששאלתי מה קרה ענתה שמאז שהבטיחה שוב  
אינה זוכרת את חלומותיה. האם את זוכרת  
את חלומותיך? את יודעת ששכחתי לבחון את  
ציפורנייך, שכחתי לבדוק האם את מזיעה בידיך  
בזמן ריקוד, שכחתי למדוד את אורך ריסייך,  
שכחתי לשאול האם בטנך רועדת רעד קל  
כשמניחים עליה כף יד פקוחה? האם ראית  
אותי כבר פעם ברחובך? עברתי שם פעמים  
רבות, חוצה את הגשרים המובילים מבגדאד ללונדון,  
מירושלים לאוסלו, מאיזמיר לכרתים. האם אספת פעם  
אדם זר מן הרחוב והצעת לו מים  
ולחם ויין? האם תמיד זכרת את דתך,  
או שלעיתים קמת משינה מבולבלת בין משה,  
ישו, מוחמד, זרתוסטרא, הבודהא ולא-דזה? את  
יודעת שפעם הייתי יפה יותר, ללא השערות  
הלבנות בזקן והשערות שאבדו מן הראש? אבל  
אז לא האמנתי ביופיי, והרבתי לחייך במבוכה  
בתקווה שמבטי הנערות לא יבחנו את אפי.

## קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

את יודעת שנפגשנו בזמן הנכון ביותר לאהבתנו,  
אך רק בתנאי שתהא היא קצרה כאור  
פנסי-הרחוב שתחתייהם הלכנו? את זוכרת אם  
היו שפתיי קרות או חמות בנשיקה, שלמות  
או סדוקות, יבשות או לחות? האם את  
זוכרת כיצד הן תהיינה במפגשנו הבא, בחלום?  
אני אבוא לבקר אותך, בחלומות. מחר או  
בעוד שנה. האם את מאמינה שאנשים באמת  
מתחתנים וחיים כל חייהם יחד במקום אחד,  
או שבגלל שידעת שבמילים הללו אנחנו מרגיעים  
את הורינו ואת ילדינו, ואת עצמנו, חייכת  
כשאמרת אותן? פעמים רבות אני שוכח לקצוץ  
את ציפורני בזמן, לקצר שערוטי אצל הספר,  
לכתוב את כל מחשבותי. היופי עצוב. הוא  
מזכיר לנו את כל מה שנאבד, כל  
מה שאף פעם לא היה שלנו. כבר  
ברגע המפגש התחלנו להתגעגע לרגע המפגש ואל  
הגעגועים שהוא עתיד לעורר בחזי ובטבורך. מה  
צבע הפחם כשמתכוננים בו באמת מקרוב? מה  
ראית בתוך עיני? ממה פחדת? איך ידעת  
שגם אני מפחד? את ידעת שבסוף אוותר,  
לא אנסה לשכנע אותך שאהבתנו נצחית. הלכת  
וגם אני הלכתי, אבל הזהרתי אותך שאולי  
אנסה להפוך את אהבתנו לנצחית בשירים. שם  
לא נפרד אחרי כמה ימים בפתח בית  
המלון שלך בשלוש וחצי לפנות בוקר, שם  
נחדש את שיחת הלילה גם בלילה שיבוא.  
כשראית אותי לראשונה ידעת מיד שאשק לך  
ואומר שצריכה את ללכת עמי לירושלים? אני  
ידעתי שתשקי לי ותלכי לבדך לעיר אחרת.  
תמיד יש מזוודה לארוז, בגדים להחליף לקראת  
טיסה ארוכה, כסף זר שיש למהר ולבזבז  
לפני שיאבד את ערכו כשנעלה על המטוס.  
באותו לילה חילקנו את העולם ביננו, לך

## קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

ערי החוף ולי הערים שעל ההרים, לך  
ערי הבירה ולי הערים ששם יושבות מפקדות  
המורדים. אהבתך בכוס היין, אהבתי בכוס השכחה.  
חייכתי אליך כשהלכת אבל ידעתי, כמה שיקטן  
העולם גדול הוא, ואולי לא ניפגש שוב.  
אבוא לבקר. פעם באתי כפרדה, כעזה, כמה  
פעמים באתי כפרפר, כקצף הגלים, כקרן אור  
אבודה אחת שהתנתקה מן הירח. ולמה לא  
תבואי את לבקר בחלומי? אבטיח לך שוב  
שאחרי שנשוחח כל הלילה נסתפק רק בנשיקה  
אחת או שתיים, בחיבוק אחד שבו הידיים  
והגוף הם שכבות גיאולוגיות של אדמה הנלחצות  
אלו אל אלו, ובשניים שלושה מכתבים ארוכים  
של ערבות וכמיהה, שאחריהם תבואנה רק הודעות  
עדכון קצרות: סיימתי לאבד את שערותי. סיימתי  
את כתיבת השירים שאקדיש לך. כבר איני  
מעדיף את הקפה המתוק על המר. שכחתי  
את צליל קולך. שכחתי את טעם שפתייך.  
שכחתי את האות הראשונה בשמך. שכחתי האם  
הרכבת משקפיים על עינייך. אני מנסה לשכוח  
כיצד ראיתי אותך בפעם הראשונה ואיני מצליח.  
אם ניפגש פעם שניה אצטרך להתאהב בך  
שוב. מחר אבקר בחלומך בפעם האחרונה, כדי  
לומר את שכשלת לומר לך בפגישתנו כשחיפשתי  
רגע אחרון של שגעון ואומץ בכנותי: אני  
אוהב אותך. כלומר אהבתי. כלומר אוהב. כלומר  
עדיין אני מתבלבל בין הזמנים, כלומר בין  
הערות והשינה, בין החלום והמציאות, בין החיים  
האלו והחיים האחרים שיכולתי לחיות. הגעגועים הפכים  
דקים עם השנים. בעיקר בלילות. בעיקר כשאתה  
יושב ליד חלונות. בעיקר כשהירח מאיר. אולי  
בעוד שנה נפגין יחד בכיכר תקסים, נפתח  
מחדש יחד את חנות תיקון השטיחים המשפחתית  
בשכונת גלטה-סראי, נשתכר שוב. סיפרתי לך

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כבר שבני-אדם עפים בשמיים, הולכים ברחובות  
ערים שקודם לא שמעו את לשונן, בוכים  
בנוזלי הגוף, בזיעה, בזרע, ברוק, עד שריחם  
נעשה דומה זה לזה? אבוא לבקר. תוכלי  
בינתיים לשלוח לי את המוזיקה שאת אוהבת?  
אפשר גם רק כמה צלילים.

\* / **Almog Behar**

Translation by Alexandra Berger-Polsky

"We have spoken enough of love in darkened rooms." Salim Nasib, *Oum*

We have spoken enough of love  
in darkened rooms, she said,  
and now the world has also darkened,  
we have said enough, and there is nothing  
to say now.

Now she just holds  
my hand, breathing  
the last breaths of night  
like the harbinger of sleep and  
acts of love, and the expanse  
until morning's awakening in the black east.

Enough we've said, she said,  
now quiet. We'll shut up and close up  
body and body, or we will go out together to watch  
the heavy panting of the Nile,  
the dark movements which sweep up the streets,  
the anonymity of our love in the eyes of the god.

Tomorrow again she will sing my words,  
the horrible pain, and our love-speak  
will inflame the lit concert halls  
and all the lands that were conquered by the Cairo radio.

But now she only holds  
the hand that is perhaps mine, breathing  
the last breaths of night. She already feels  
how her heavenly voice will awaken the crowded cafes,  
and will invite so many saddened souls

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

to hold the edges of her headscarf with a desperate grasp.

All who hear her will breathe  
breaths that are like final ones  
the fractions of her twisting syllables  
like the harbinger of hallucinations and  
acts of love, and the expanse  
until morning's awakening in the black east.

"מספיק דיברנו על האהבה בחדרים קודרים"  
סלים נסיב, "אום"

מספיק דיברנו על אהבה  
בחדרים קודרים, אמרה,  
עתה גם העולם ככה,  
מספיק דיברנו, ואין  
מה לומר עכשיו.  
עכשיו היא רק אוחזת  
בכף-ידי, נושמת  
נשימות אחרונות של לילה  
כמו מצפה בואם של השינה  
ומעשי האהבה, וכל מרחק הציפייה  
להתעוררות השחר במזרח השחור.

די אמרנו, אמרה,  
עתה נשתוק. נשתוק ונסתגר  
גוף וגוף, או נצא החוצה יחד להביט  
על ההתנשפויית הכבדות של הנילוס,  
על התנועה הקודרת הסוחפת את הרחובות,  
על אלמוניות אהבותינו בעיניי האל.

מחר היא שוב תשיר את מלותיי,  
את הכאב הנורא, ודיבורי האהבה שלנו  
יבעירו את אולמות הקונצרטים המוארים  
ואת הארצות שאותן כבש הרדיו של קהיר.  
אבל עכשיו היא עדיין רק אוחזת  
בכף-יד שהיא אולי שלי, ונושמת  
נשימות אחרונות של לילה. כבר מרגישה  
איך בת-קולה תעורר את בת-הקפה הצפופים,  
ותציע להרבה נפשות עצובות  
לאחוז באחיזה נואשות את שולי מטפחתה.

כל אחד משומעיה ינשום



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בנשימות כמו אחרונות

את שברי הברותיה המתפתלות

כמו יצפה בואם של ההזיה

ומעשי האהבה, וכל מרחק הציפייה

להתעוררות השחר במזרח השחור.

**Possessions Remain After the Man / Almog Behar**

translated by Alexandra Berger-Polsky

Possessions remain after the dead. They wait in full drawers,  
in closets, on shelves, in suitcases and in bags.

Letters written in foreign languages, presents collected  
with the years, blessings from birthdays, bibles with or without  
commentators, pictures with dedications. And the diary in which his wife  
wrote in cursive Latin letters as they traveled  
abroad, and the garments, outer and under, and the towels,  
and the toothbrush, and the shaving blades.

Possessions remain after the dead: I saw a shirt  
passing days without its owner, and books left on the table  
half read. In a whole life the man spent  
many shirts, and replaced them with others, and come his end,  
in a last ironic smile, it was a new shirt that clung to his body.  
And who will wear the shirt after his death, who will read  
the end of the stories,

**החפצים נשארים אחר האדם**

החפצים נשארים אחרי המת. ממתנינים במגירות מלאות,  
בארונות, על מדפים, במזוודות ובשקיות.  
מכתבים כתובים שפות זרות, מתנות שנאספו  
עם השנים, ברכות מימי-הולדת, תנ"כים עם או בלי  
פירושים, תמונות עם הקדשות. והיומן שהיתה אישתו  
כותבת באותיות לטיניות מחוברות כשטיילו  
בחול, והבגדים, עליונים ותחתונים, והמגבות,  
ומברשת השיניים, וסכיניי הגילוח.  
החפצים נשארים אחרי המת: ראיתי חולצה  
מאריכה ימים מבעליה, וספרים שנותרו על השולחן  
קרואים למחצה. חיים שלמים בילה אדם  
חולצות רבות והחליפן באחרות, ולעת סופו,  
בחיוך אירוניה אחרון, דבקה לגופו חולצה חדשה.  
ומי ילבש החולצה אחר מותו, מי יקרא  
סופי הסיפורים,

## Those Who Return to Him Empty / Almog Behar

Translated by Alexandra Berger-Polsky

The body is the monument to the living  
the name is the monument to the body. And in death  
the body is exchanged for a marble slab  
on which the name is etched. There are those whose graves  
become old, tend toward death, expire  
with an erased name. Then the blank marble slab  
is the final monument to the name once engraved on it. And when the slab falls  
a monument to it will also rise: the hole held open by the ground.  
Perhaps my father would whisper: I am the monument to my father, with my body.  
And we continue to walk from place to place. Living monuments.

Apparently Pinchas Sadeh was right:  
God loves those who return to him empty.

And the pleasures of the flesh are forbidden to us  
until we complete the seven days, the thirty days, the year,  
the life. This we swore to.  
And suddenly we were happy that life is a fatal disease,  
that our promise will not forever stand.

**החוזרים אליו ריקים**

הגוף הוא המצבה לחי  
השם המצבה לגוף. ובמוות  
מוחלף הגוף בלוח שיש  
עליו חרוט השם. ויש שקברים  
מזדקנים, נוטים למות, גוועים  
עם שם מחוק. ואז לוח השיש הריק  
הוא מצבה אחרונה לשם שהיה חקוק עליו. וכשיפול הלוח  
תקום גם לו מצבה: הבור שיפער באדמה.  
אבי היה אולי לוחש: אני המצבה לאבי, כגופי.  
ואנחנו מוסיפים להלך ממקום למקום. מצבות חיות.

פנחס שדה כנראה צדק:  
אלוהים אוהב את החוזרים אליו ריקים.

ואסורות לנו הנאות הגוף  
עד שנצא מן השבעה, השלושים, השנה,  
החיים. כך קיבלנו עלינו בשבועה.  
ולפתע שמחנו על כך שהחיים הם מחלה סופנית,  
שלא לנצח תעמוד שבועתנו.

\* / **Almog Behar**

translated by Alexandra Berger-Polsky

I write bilingual poetry  
in Hebrew and in silence  
and I read the world map before sleep  
planning for myself escape routes.  
I write poetry outside language  
in luminous symbols imitating letters  
and recite in anguish under the blankets  
he's shadow he's image he's camera  
he's blood he's man he's earth  
he's god he's shadow he's savior.  
I write poetry  
outside myself  
and I whisper to my lover as we make love:  
I will be your man and you be my wife  
thus a new religion will not be born.  
I erase poetry  
in Hebrew and in silence  
line by line  
day by day  
night by night  
and I read the world map  
before sleep  
I search for new old homelands  
and paths to faith  
with a long silence I say to myself:  
Moses taught Torah from the fragments of the tablets  
I have no time free from thoughts.

אני כותב שירה דו-לשונית  
בעברית ובשתיקה  
וקורא במפת העולם טרם השינה  
מתכנן לי מסלולי בריחה.  
אני כותב שירה חוץ לשפה  
בסימנים דמויי אותיות מאירות  
ומשנן במבוכה מתחת לשמיכה  
הוא צל הוא צלם הוא מצלמה  
הוא דם הוא אדם הוא אדמה  
הוא אל הוא צל הוא הצלה.  
אני כותב שירה  
חוץ לעצמי  
ולוחש לאהובתי בעת מעשה האהבה:  
אהיה לך איש ותהיי לי אישה  
כך לא נולדת דת חדשה.  
אני מוחק שירה  
בעברית ובשתיקה  
שורה שורה  
יום יום  
לילה לילה  
וקורא במפת העולם  
טרם השינה  
מחפש לי מולדות חדשות ישנות  
ודרכים לאמונה  
אומר ללבי בשתיקה ארוכה:  
משה לימד תורה מן השברים של הלוחות  
אין לי זמן פנוי ממחשבות.

## The Land of Israel, 5713 / Almog Behar

translated by Alexandra Berger-Polsky

Jerusalem of the heavens, imprisoned in messianic birth pangs  
asked to be poured downward, tabernacles of peace in her hands,  
to the plains of tattered huts. There in the land of transit camps  
in between the teeth of boulders, a finjan hurried to boil  
with no malicious intent, on the tin shack floor,  
and spilled on the skin of my childhood. A cry broke out  
shattering walls, and burns were marked in memory,  
and Jerusalem of the heavens filled with great yearning  
to be poured downward in kindness, cold compresses in her hands.  
But in the room the cries penetrate all breeze and sound,  
under the roof that leaked in winter and burned in summer,  
the wick's light still lit, prophesying in rage  
about our future, and our fall.

Jerusalem of the heavens, light of our longing between the rivers of Babylon,  
has not been poured from her skies, and has not brought in her hands  
the choicest gifts of saving tabernacles of peace  
to the Minister of Housing and the many immigrants. Seasons have passed  
without a transfer, and the pleas of generations  
have turned from perpetual dust to food, sustenance, oblivion.

No exit was found from the blistering summer  
and impossible it was to catch rest in the nights  
under cover of cool roofs, and if the rain wasn't assured  
in a place where working the land was just  
planting in tent pegs in the teeth of boulders.

The children, in a classroom for those of many ages  
and those of many diasporas, learned the language of the place  
before their parents. But upon return to their families  
they were reminded that Hebrew is a jumble of languages,  
as if Arabic, Persian, and Romanian, sister languages,  
are one. And the adults learned, too,  
each one in the poverty of his home, that the Jerusalem of the prayers for next year



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has been rebuilt of rows and rows of tattered huts and tin shacks and narrow concrete  
cubes  
constricting us.

ארץ-ישראל, ה'תשי"ג

ירושלים של מעלה, אסורה בחבלי משיח,  
ביקשה להישפך מטה, ובידיה סוכות שלום,  
אל ערבות הבדונים. שם בארץ המעברות  
בין שיני הסלעים, פינג'אן מיהר להתרתח,  
בלי כוונות זדון, על ריצפת הפחון,  
ונשפך על עור ילדוטי. ואז התעורר בכי  
משבר קירות, והסתמנו כוויות בזיכרון,  
וירושלים של מעלה התמלאה תשוקות גדולות  
להישפך מטה בחסד גדול, ובידיה רטות קרות.  
אבל בחדר בכי פרוץ לכל רוח וקול,  
תחת גג שדלף בחורף והתלהט בחום,  
עדיין דלקה אש פתיליה, והתנבאה בזעם  
על עתידנו, ועל הנפילה.  
ירושלים של מעלה, אור געגועינו בין נהרות בבל,  
לא נשפכה משמיה, ולא הביאה בידיה  
מנחות ביכורים של סופות שלום מצלות  
לשר השיכון ולעולים הרבים. עונות רבות התחלפו  
ולא היה מעבר, ותחינות של דורות  
הפכו מאבק תמידי לאוכל, לפרנסה, לשכחה.  
מן הקיץ הבוזע לא נמצא מוצא  
ואי-אפשר היה לתפוס בלילות תנומה  
בחסות קרירות הגגות, ואילו הגשם לא היה הבטחה  
במקום בו עבודת האדמה הסתכמה  
בנטיעת יתדות אוהלים בין שיני סלעים.  
הילדים, בכיתה משותפת לבני גילאים רבים  
ובני גלויזת שונות, למדו את שפת המקום  
קודם להוריהם. אבל בלכתם הביתה למשפחותיהם  
הזכירו להם הקולות שהעברית היא בליל שפוט  
ואילו הערבית, הפרסית והרומנית, השפות האחיות,  
הן אחת. וגם המבוגרים למדו,  
איש איש בדלות ביתו, שירושלים של התפילות לשנה הבאה  
הפכה בנויה שורות שורות של בדונים ופחונים וקוביות בטון צרות

**Take This Poem And Copy It – קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו**

ומצרות.

\* / **Almog Behar**

A draft for Translation by Tamar Freed

The cessation of the muezzin's voice in my new neighborhood  
Left my ears  
In unrewarded expectation  
... Until I started going to the synagogue every day  
Arvit, Shaharit and Minha. Why do we have  
only three prayers a day, I asked the rabbi,  
why don't we mightily call out from towers.  
He told me about Abraham the son of Maimonides  
That the prayers in his synagogue took place on rugs  
kneeling in the Muslim manner, and I told him  
about Anwar Shaul, who called himself Ibn al-Samaw'al,  
after the Arab-Jewish Jahalia poet, and who eulogized in a mosque  
in Baghdad, the prime minister of Iraq in a magnificent qasida.  
One Sabbath eve, when the cantor came before the arc  
And read the Kaddish in one of the scales of the maqam  
I was finally able to hear the muezzin again  
calling believers to worship God.  
If the Levites did not sing Arabic mawals in the Temple of Jerusalem  
while they were conducting and crooning  
canticles, chants and hymns on the gittit,  
on the a...

"וידוע מה שכתב רבינו הגדול הרמב"ם שהשמחה בעבודת השם יתברך ובאהבתו בעשיית מצותיו עבודה גדולה היא, וכל המונע עצמו משמחת מצוה זאת ראוי ליפרע ממנו... ועל זה סמכו גדולי הדורות של עדות המזרח לחבר שירים ופזמונים בלחן של שירי ערבים לשורר ולזמר להשם יתברך במסיבות של חתן ובר מצוה ובמילה, ובשבתות וימים טובים, בשירים המיוסדים על פי לחן של שירים ערביים. ויש להמליץ על זה: על ערבים בתוכה תלינו כנורותינו"

ר' עובדיה יוסף

שְׁבִיתת קוֹל הַמוֹאֲזִין בְּשִׁכּוֹנְתֵי הַחֲדָשָׁה  
הוֹתִירָה אֶת אוֹזְנֵי  
בְּצִיפֵייה בִּלְתֵי מִשְׁתַּלְמַת  
עַד שֶׁהִתְחַלְתִּי הוֹלֵךְ יוֹם יוֹם לְבֵית-הַכִּנְסָה  
עַרְבֵית, שְׁחֲרִית וּמְנַקָּה. לְמָה לָנוּ  
רַק שְׁלוֹשׁ תְּפִילוֹת בְּיוֹם, שְׁאַלְתִּי אֶת הָרֵב,  
לְמָה אֲנַחְנוּ לֹא קוֹרְאִים בְּעוֹז מִמַּגְדָּלִים.  
הוּא סִיפֵר לִי עַל אֲבֵרָהּם בֶּן הָרַמְבַּ"ם  
שֶׁבְּבֵית-הַכִּנְסָה שָׁלוּ הָיוּ מִתְּפַלְלִים עַל שְׁטִיחִים  
בְּכִרְיָעָה מוֹסְלֵמִית, וְאֵנִי סִיפַרְתִּי לוֹ  
עַל אֲנֹר שְׁאוֹל, שֶׁקָּרָא לְעִצְמוֹ אֶבְרָהָם-סְמֹאֵל,  
בֶּן מִשׁוֹרֵר הַגְּאֹהֲלֵיָה הָעֵרֶבִי-יְהוּדִי, וְהַסְפִיד בְּמִסְגַּד  
בְּבִגְדָאֵד אֶת רֵאשׁ-מִמְשַׁלַּת עִירָאֵק בְּקִצְיָה מִפּוֹאֲרַת.  
עֵרֵב שֶׁבֶת אֶחָד כִּשְׁשִׁלִּיחַ הַצִּיבּוֹר יֵרֵד לְפָנַי הַתִּיבָה  
וְקָרָא אֶת הַקְּדִישׁ בְּאֶחָד מִסּוּלְמוֹת הַמְּקָאם  
הַצִּלְחָתִי סוּף סוּף לְשִׁמוֹעַ שׁוֹב אֶת הַמוֹאֲזִין  
קוֹרָא לְמֵאמִינִים לְעִבּוֹדַת הָאֱלוֹהִים.  
אִם לֹא זִימְרוּ הַלוֹוִיִּים בְּבֵית-הַמִּקְדָּשׁ בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם  
בְּמִוֹאֲלִים עֵרֶבִים בְּעוֹדָם מִנְּצַחִים וּמִרְנָנִים  
בְּנִגְיָנוֹת, בְּמִזְמוּרִים, בְּשִׁירִים עַל הַגְּתִית,  
עַל עֲלָמוֹת שִׁיר, עַל יוֹנֵת אֵלִם רְחֻקִים,  
וּוֹדָאֵי זִימְרוּ בֵּהֶם הַמִּתְּפַלְלִים בְּבֵית-הַכִּנְסָה  
שֶׁל רַבִּי יְהוּדָה הַלּוֹי כִּשְׁהַתְּכוֹנְנוּ  
לְשִׁיר אֶת פִּיּוּטִיו, וּוֹדָאֵי נָטְלוּ אֶת הַפְּסוּק  
עַל-עַרְבִים בְּתוֹכָהּ תְּלִינוּ פְּנֹרֵתִינוּ  
וּפִירְקוּ כָל הַבְּרָה לְהַרְבֵּה צִלִּילִים בְּכוֹוֵנָה גְּדוּלָה.

**Li Bai and the vacant moon / Almog Behar**

A draft for Translation by Shulamit Ran

Li Bai tried to embrace the full moon

and fell into the river. And he died...

...The world spoke to him, intoxicated, he drank to understand

and he knew there's no time for philosophy.

I, too, like him, the full moon I love, but I have no courage

to encircle it. I embrace the vacant moon, and my heart,

So it won't fall, so we won't fall

Li Bai [an 8<sup>th</sup> century Chinese poet] tried to embrace [encircle, surround, hug] the full moon and fell into the river [he was known as a drunk!]. And he died at the age of 61.

לי באי והירח הריק

לי באי ניסה לחבק את הירח המלא  
ונפל לנהר. ומת. הוא פנה אל העולם  
קסימניות סיניות שיכורות אותן אבין  
רק אחרי שאתפכח. ואני רציתי לקום  
ולנסות לחבק את מילותיו, אבל הבנתי  
כמה ריק עכשיו הירח. רק אחרי שאתפכח  
אנסה גם אני לחבק את הירח השחור  
מגג ביתי מגג לבי השיכור מגג חיי המתנדנדים.  
אני, שלא חייתי אף פעם לצד נהר,  
ולא למדתי לחבק עד שלא הרחקתי אלפי מילין מביתי  
ודיברתי שפה זרה, מכיר את עצב רגע מותו:  
ברגע מותו היה לי באי מילה שיכורה  
שחייבה את האוויר הנחצה ושמחה לטבול במים.  
וגופו היה אבן שנפלה לנהר או לב גדול  
שעלה על גדותיו או חלום שהתרוקן אל המים  
במוות קצר. העולם דיבר אליו במילים שיכורות,  
והוא שתה כדי להבין, וידע שאין זמן לפילוסופיה.  
גם אני, כמוהו, אוהב את הירח המלא, אבל לי אין אומץ  
לחבקו. אני מחבק את הירח הריק, ואת לבי  
שלא יפול, שלא ניפול.

(לי באי, משורר סיני בן המאה השמינית, מת בגיל 61 ונודע כשתיין גדול)

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

## **Translations from English into Hebrew**



חלמתי שרקדתי טנגו  
אתה, אחזת אותי כל-כך קרוב  
עד שהיינו כמו השירה הנאנחת מן התפים.  
גרמת לי לכנף את שרירי  
ולשען לאחור על המוזיקה  
של הכדוריות התוססות בדם.  
שמעתי את ירכי שרות.

### Dancing / Sonia Sanchez

I dreamt I was tangoing with  
you, you held me so close  
we were like the singing coming off the drums.  
you made me squeeze muscles  
lean back on the sound  
of corpuscles sliding in blood.  
I heard my thighs singing.

קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – **Take This Poem And Copy It**

**והימים אינם מלאים מספיק / עזרא פאונד**

והימים אינם מלאים מספיק  
והלילות אינם מלאים מספיק  
והחיים חומקים כעכבר שדה  
בלי תנועה בעשב.

### **And the days are not full enough / Ezra Pound**

And the days are not full enough  
And the nights are not full enough  
And life slips by like a field mouse  
Not shaking the grass.

קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

פרידה / וויליאם ס. מרווין

העדרותך עברה בי  
כמו חוט במחט.  
כל מה שאני עושה תפור בצבעה.

### Separation / William S. Merwin

Your absence has gone through me  
Like thread through a needle.  
Everything I do is stitched with its color.

הדקל שבקצה התודעה,  
מעבר למחשבה האחרונה, עולה  
במרחק הברונזה,

ציפור זהובת-נוצות  
שרה בדקל, בלי משמעות אנוש,  
בלי רגש אנושי, שיר נוכרי.

אתה יודע אז שאין זו הסיבה  
ההופכת אותנו שמחים או עצובים.  
הציפור שרה. נוצותיה נוצות.

הדקל עומד בקצה המרחב.  
הרוח נעה לאט בענפים.  
נוצות הציפור העשויות-אש שמוטות מטה.

### Of Mere Being / Wallace Stevens

The palm at the end of the mind,  
Beyond the last thought, rises  
In the bronze decor,

A gold-feathered bird  
Sings in the palm, without human meaning,  
Without human feeling, a foreign song.

You know then that it is not the reason  
That makes us happy or unhappy.  
The bird sings. Its feathers shine.

The palm stands on the edge of space.  
The wind moves slowly in the branches.  
The bird's fire-fangled feathers dangle down.

חזיונות של ג'והנה / בוב דילן

האין זה מתאים ללילה – לתעתע בך כשאתה מנסה לשמר על שקט?  
אנחנו יושבים כאן לכודים, גם אם פלנו ננסה להתנגד  
ולואיז אוקזת חפן גשם בכף ידה, מפתה אותך להתמרד  
אורות באון חולים מהבהבים מעלית-גג סמוכה  
וצנורות החמום לא מפסיקים להשתעל במבוכה  
ותחנת הרדיו היחידה בסקלה מנגנת כל-כך ברכות  
אבל אין דבר, אין בזה דבר, שממש אפשר לקום ולכבות  
ואתה יכול פשוט למות  
רק לואיז ואהובה סבוכים על הספה  
והחזיונות של ג'והנה שמשתלטים על הנשמה

במגיש הריק הגברות משחקות ברמאיות שלמדו מן הגברים בסביבה  
ונצרות משמרת הלילה לוחשות חלומות של בריחה ברפכת הקרוכה  
אנחנו יכולים לשמע את שומר הלילה נוקש בגדר המתכת עם פנס ונושם  
שואל את עצמו מי באמת מטרף: הוא או הם?  
ולואיז, היא בסדר גמור, היא רק קרוכה מדי  
ועדינה ודומה למראה בעיני  
אבל מבט אחד בזה מזכיר לי בזמן  
שג'והנה כבר לא כאן  
רוח הרפאים של החשמל צונחת בעצמות הלחיים  
והחזיונות של ג'והנה תפסו את מקומי בינתיים

עכשו: הילדון האבוד לוקח את עצמו כל-כך ברחיצות  
מנופף באמללותו, מספר שהוא אוהב להיות על סף ההתאבדות  
וכשמיישהו מעלה את שמה  
הוא מזד מזכיר את נשיקת הפרדה שהיא הדביקה לי  
ואיך הוא כה מלא בטחון  
הוא צריך המון אמץ כדי להיות כה חסר תועלת  
כדי לבזבז את כל הזמן שבשעון  
למלמל מלים ריקות בסלון  
כשאני עומד במסדרון  
איך אני יכול להסביר?

## קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

הו, כָּךְ כִּה קִשָּׁה לְהַמְשִׁיךְ בְּשָׁלוֹם  
וְהַתְּזוּנוֹת שֶׁל ג'וֹהַנָּה הַשְּׂאִירוּ אוֹתִי עַד אוֹר יוֹם

בְּתוֹךְ אוֹלְמוֹת הַמוֹזָאוֹן הַנֶּצֶחַ עוֹלָה לְמִשְׁפָּט

וְהַקִּירוֹת מְהַדְדִים וְעַקֵּת קוֹל לְשׁוֹן:

"כִּי נִרְאִית גְּאֵלָה אַחֲרַי שְׁעוֹבֵר מִסְפִּיק זְמַן"

אֲבָל קִצָּה חֵיוֹכָה שֶׁל מוֹנָה לִיזָה חוֹשֶׁף

שֶׁגַם לָהּ הָיָה בְּלוֹז דְּרָכִים טוֹרֶף

וְעַשׂ לִילָה פְּרִימִיטִיבִי קוֹפֵא עַל הַקִּיר

כְּשֶׁנֶּשְׂמִים עִם פְּנֵי ג'לִי מִתְעַטְשׂוֹת בְּקוֹל שְׁבִיר

וְשִׁפְסָם עִם פְּרִצוֹף מְזַדְדֵּק: "אֲשַׁמְדָּאִי!"

אֲנִי לֹא מוֹצֵא אֶת בְּרַכְיָא!"

הו, כָּל הַתְּכַשִּׁיטִים וְהַמְשַׁקְפוֹת הַעֲמָסוּ עַל צְנֹארוֹ שֶׁל הַפְּרֶד

אֲבָל הַתְּזוּנוֹת שֶׁל ג'וֹהַנָּה מְעוֹרְרִים אוֹתִי לְמַרְד

רוֹכֵל מְדַבֵּר עִכְשָׁו עִם הַרוֹזְנָת שֶׁמְעַמִּידָה פְּנִים שֶׁל דְּאָגָה

וְאוֹמֵר: "תְּגִידִי לִי מִי אֵינֹו טְפִיל, וְאֲנִי אֲשֹׂא לְמַעַנֹו תְּפִלָּה!"

אֲבָל כְּמוֹ שֶׁלֹּאִיז תְּמִיד אוֹמֵרֵת לְהֵן

"יֵשׁ גְּבוּל לְסַבְלָנוֹת שֶׁל כְּלָנוּ, לֹא כֵן?"

וְהִיא עֲצָמָה שֶׁקוֹעָה כְּכָר בְּהַכְנוֹת לְבוֹאוֹ

וְהַמְדוּנָה, הִיא טָרָם הוֹפִיעָה אֲצִלוֹ

אֲנַחְנוּ מִתְבוֹנְנִים בְּכְלוֹב הַרִיק שֶׁמִּתְחִיל לְהַחֲלִיד

כְּאֵלוֹ לֹא עֲמַדְנוּ כְּאֵן תְּמִיד

וְהַכְנָר שׁוֹב יוֹרֵד אֶל הַדְּרֶף

כּוֹתֵב לְפֶרֶדָה: "כָּל הַחֹבוֹת הַחֲזָרוּ, בְּעֶרְףְךָ!"

עַל גַּב מְשֹׂאִית דְּגִים הַפּוֹרְקֵת סְחוּרָה

כְּשֶׁמְצַפּוֹנִי מִתְפּוֹצֵץ בְּקוֹלוֹת יְכֻבָּה

מְפוֹחִיֹּת מְנַגְנוֹת גְּשָׁם וְצִלְיִלִי חֲלוּדָה

וּמְלַבֵּד הַתְּזוּנוֹת שֶׁל ג'וֹהַנָּה נִפְשֵׁי אֲבוּדָה

## Visions of Johanna / Bob Dylan

Ain't it just like the night to play tricks when you're tryin' to be so quiet?

We sit here stranded, though we're all doin' our best to deny it

קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – **Take This Poem And Copy It**

And Louise holds a handful of rain, temptin' you to defy it  
Lights flicker from the opposite loft  
In this room the heat pipes just cough  
The country music station plays soft  
But there's nothing, really nothing to turn off  
Just Louise and her lover so entwined  
And these visions of Johanna that conquer my mind

In the empty lot where the ladies play blindman's bluff with the key chain  
And the all-night girls they whisper of escapades out on the "D" train  
We can hear the night watchman click his flashlight  
Ask himself if it's him or them that's really insane  
Louise, she's all right, she's just near  
She's delicate and seems like the mirror  
But she just makes it all too concise and too clear  
That Johanna's not here  
The ghost of 'lectricity howls in the bones of her face  
Where these visions of Johanna have now taken my place

Now, little boy lost, he takes himself so seriously  
He brags of his misery, he likes to live dangerously  
And when bringing her name up  
He speaks of a farewell kiss to me  
He's sure got a lotta gall to be so useless and all  
Muttering small talk at the wall while I'm in the hall  
How can I explain?  
Oh, it's so hard to get on  
And these visions of Johanna, they kept me up past the dawn

Inside the museums, Infinity goes up on trial  
Voices echo this is what salvation must be like after a while  
But Mona Lisa musta had the highway blues  
You can tell by the way she smiles  
See the primitive wallflower freeze

קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – **Take This Poem And Copy It**

When the jelly-faced women all sneeze  
Hear the one with the mustache say, “Jeeze  
I can’t find my knees”  
Oh, jewels and binoculars hang from the head of the mule  
But these visions of Johanna, they make it all seem so cruel

The peddler now speaks to the countess who’s pretending to care for him  
Sayin’, “Name me someone that’s not a parasite and I’ll go out and say a prayer for  
him”  
But like Louise always says  
“Ya can’t look at much, can ya man?”  
As she, herself, prepares for him  
And Madonna, she still has not showed  
We see this empty cage now corrode  
Where her cape of the stage once had flowed  
The fiddler, he now steps to the road  
He writes ev’rything’s been returned which was owed  
On the back of the fish truck that loads  
While my conscience explodes  
The harmonicas play the skeleton keys and the rain  
And these visions of Johanna are now all that remain



אהבה פחות אפס / אין גבול / בוב דילן

אהובתי מדברת כמו שתיקה  
בלי אידאליזם או אלימות  
היא לא צריכה לומר שיהיא נאמנה  
אבל היא כזאת, כמו קרח, כמו אש.  
אנשים נושאים ורדים  
מפריחים הבטחות בכל שעה  
אהובתי צוחקת כמו הפרחים  
מאהבים לא יכולים לקנות אותה.

בחגיגות ובתחנות האוטובוסים  
אנשים מדברים על מצבים  
קוראים ספרים, חוזרים על צטוטים,  
מציירים מסקנות על הקירות.  
כמה מדברים על העתיד  
אהובתי היא מדברת ברכות  
היא יודעת שאין הצלחה כמו פשלון  
ושפשלון אינו הצלחה בכלל.

הגלימה והפגיון מתנדנדים  
גבירות מדליקות את הנרות  
בטקסי פרושי השחקמט  
אפלו החיל חזב לנטר טינה.  
פסלים שנבנו מגפרורים  
קורסים אחד אל תוך השני  
אהובתי קורצת, היא לא טורחת,  
יודעת יותר מדי מכדי לשפט.

הגשר בתצות רועד  
רופא הכפר משוטט  
אתנייות הבנקאים מחפשות שלמות  
מצפות למתנות שחקמים מביאים.  
הרוח מיללת כמו פטיש

הלילה נושף קר וגשום  
אהובתי כמו איזה עורב  
בחלונני עם כנף שבורה.

### Love minus zero/No limit / Bob Dylan

My love she speaks like silence  
Without ideals or violence  
She doesn't have to say she's faithful  
Yet she's true, like ice, like fire  
People carry roses  
Make promises by the hours  
My love she laughs like the flowers  
Valentines can't buy her

In the dime stores and bus stations  
People talk of situations  
Read books, repeat quotations  
Draw conclusions on the wall  
Some speak of the future  
My love she speaks softly  
She knows there's no success like failure  
And that failure's no success at all

The cloak and dagger dangles  
Madams light the candles  
In ceremonies of the horsemen  
Even the pawn must hold a grudge  
Statues made of matchsticks  
Crumble into one another  
My love winks, she does not bother  
She knows too much to argue or to judge

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

The bridge at midnight trembles  
The country doctor rambles  
Bankers' nieces seek perfection  
Expecting all the gifts that wise men bring  
The wind howls like a hammer  
The night blows cold and rainy  
My love she's like some raven  
At my window with a broken wing

פעמוני חופש / בוב דילן

הרחק בין סוף השקיעה לבין צלצול חצות השבור  
חמקנו אל הפתח לקול התנפצות רעם  
כשפעמוני ברקים מלכותיים הכו צללים בתוך הצלילים  
נראים כאלו הם פעמוני החפש המנפנפים  
מהבהבים למען הלוחמים שחסנם הוא לא להם  
מהבהבים למען הפליטים בדרך הלא-תמושה של המנוסה  
ולמען כל אחד מהחילים חסרי הסכוי בליקה  
ואנחנו התבוננו בפעמוני החפש מהבהבים.

בכבשן העיר המתה במפתיע צפינו  
עם פנינו חבויות כשקירות הוצרו  
כשההד של פעמוני החתנה לפני הגשם השורק  
התפרק אל תוך פעמוני הברקים  
מצלצלים למען המורדים, מצלצלים למען הנקלים  
מצלצלים למען חסרי המזל, הנטושים והזנוחים  
מצלצלים בשביל המגדים הבוערים ללא הפסק על המוקד  
והתבוננו בפעמוני החפש מהבהבים.

דרך הנקישות המיסטיות המטרפות של הברד המשתולל  
הרקיע פצח את שיריו בתהיה עירמה  
שדבקות פעמוני הכנסיה הדפה אל תוך הרוח  
משאירה מקום רק לפעמוני ברקים ורעמיהם  
הולמים למען העדינים, הולמים למען טובי הלב  
הולמים למען השומרים והמגנים של הנפש  
והמשורר והציר הרחק אחר זמנם הנכון  
ואנחנו התבוננו בפעמוני החפש מהבהבים.

דרך הערב הקתדרלי הפרוע הגשם פרם מעשיות  
בשביל הצורות המפשטות ריקות הפנים של חסר העמדה  
מצלצל למען הלשונות שאין להן מקום להביא את מחשבותיהן  
כלן שבויות במצבים בהם הן מוכנות מאליהן  
מצלצלים למען החרש-עור, מצלצלים למען האלם

## קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

מצלצלים למען האם המקפחת, הרוקה, המתנגת כפרוזה  
למען פורע החק, הנדחק והמרמה על-ידי המרדף  
והתבוננו בפעמוני החפש מהבהבים.

למרות שוילוננו הלבן של ענן נצניץ בפנה רחוקה  
והערפל ההיפנוטי המתז התחיל להתפוגג  
אור חשמלי עוד הפה כמו חצים, נורה רק עבור אלו  
שנדונו להסחה או להיות מנועים מהסחפות  
מצלצלים למען המחפשים, בנתיבם חסר המלים  
ולמען האוהבים עזובי הלב להם ספור אישי מדי  
ולמען כל נשמה עדינה ולא מזיקה שהושמה בטעות בתוך כלא  
והתבוננו בפעמוני החפש מהבהבים.

מכפבי עינים וצוחקים כפי שאני זוכר שנתפסנו  
לכודים כי לא שמנו לב לשעות שנותרו עומדות  
כשהקשבנו פעם אחרונה והסתכלנו במבט אחרון  
מכשפים ומרתקים עד שהצלצול פסק  
מצלצל למען הפואבים שלפצעייהם אין מרפא  
למען אין סכור המבלבלים, מאשמים, מנצלים ומתוהים  
ולמען כל אדם דחוי בכל קצוני תבל  
ואנחנו התבוננו בפעמוני החפש מהבהבים.

## Chimes of Freedom / Bob Dylan

Far between sundown's finish an' midnight's broken toll  
We ducked inside the doorway, thunder crashing  
As majestic bells of bolts struck shadows in the sounds  
Seeming to be the chimes of freedom flashing  
Flashing for the warriors whose strength is not to fight  
Flashing for the refugees on the unarmed road of flight  
An' for each an' ev'ry underdog soldier in the night  
An' we gazed upon the chimes of freedom flashing

קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – **Take This Poem And Copy It**

In the city's melted furnace, unexpectedly we watched  
With faces hidden while the walls were tightening  
As the echo of the wedding bells before the blowin' rain  
Dissolved into the bells of the lightning  
Tolling for the rebel, tolling for the rake  
Tolling for the luckless, the abandoned an' forsaked  
Tolling for the outcast, burnin' constantly at stake  
An' we gazed upon the chimes of freedom flashing

Through the mad mystic hammering of the wild ripping hail  
The sky cracked its poems in naked wonder  
That the clinging of the church bells blew far into the breeze  
Leaving only bells of lightning and its thunder  
Striking for the gentle, striking for the kind  
Striking for the guardians and protectors of the mind  
An' the unpawned painter behind beyond his rightful time  
An' we gazed upon the chimes of freedom flashing

Through the wild cathedral evening the rain unraveled tales  
For the disrobed faceless forms of no position  
Tolling for the tongues with no place to bring their thoughts  
All down in taken-for-granted situations  
Tolling for the deaf an' blind, tolling for the mute  
Tolling for the mistreated, mateless mother, the mistitled prostitute  
For the misdemeanor outlaw, chased an' cheated by pursuit  
An' we gazed upon the chimes of freedom flashing

Even though a cloud's white curtain in a far-off corner flashed  
An' the hypnotic splattered mist was slowly lifting  
Electric light still struck like arrows, fired but for the ones  
Condemned to drift or else be kept from drifting  
Tolling for the searching ones, on their speechless, seeking trail  
For the lonesome-hearted lovers with too personal a tale  
An' for each unharmed, gentle soul misplaced inside a jail

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

An' we gazed upon the chimes of freedom flashing

Starry-eyed an' laughing as I recall when we were caught

Trapped by no track of hours for they hanged suspended

As we listened one last time an' we watched with one last look

Spellbound an' swallowed 'til the tolling ended

Tolling for the aching ones whose wounds cannot be nursed

For the countless confused, accused, misused, strung-out ones an' worse

An' for every hung-up person in the whole wide universe

An' we gazed upon the chimes of freedom flashing

כל גרגר של חול / בוב דילן

בזמן הודווי, בפשעת הצרף העמק ביותר שלי  
בשברכת הדמעות שלרגלי מציפה כל זרע שנולד מחדש  
יש קול גונע בתוכי שמנסה להשמע  
מפלים דרף בסכנה ובחסי היאוש.

אין לי רצון להביט לאחור אל עבר טעיות העבר  
כמו קין, גם לי שלשלת שעלי לשבר.  
בזעם הרגע אני יכול לראות את קדיו  
בכל עלה שנוצד, בכל גרגר של חול.

הו, פרחי התענוגות והעשב השוטה של השנה שעברה  
כמו פושעים הם חנקו את נשימת המצפון והרצון הטוב.  
החמה מכה במדרגות הזמן כדי להאיר את הדרף  
להקל בכאב העצלות ובזכרון הנוון.

אני בוקה אל תוף השער של להבת הפתוי הזועמת  
ובכל פעם שאני עובר שם אני שומע את שמי.  
ובהמשך מסעי אני מבין  
שכל שערה ספורת כמו כל גרגר של חול.

עברתי מסתובות לעשר בצער הלילה  
באלימות חלום של קיץ, בצנת אור חרפי,  
ברקוד המריר של בדידות הנמוגה בקלל,  
במראה השבורה של התמימות בכל פרצוף נשכח.

אני שומע את הצעדים הקדומים כמו תנועת היים  
לפעמים אני פונה ומישהו שם, לפעמים אני לבד.  
אני תלוי באזון של תכנית גמורה ומשלמת  
כמו כל בעל כנף שנופל, כמו כל גרגר של חול.



## Every Grain of Sand / Bob Dylan

In the time of my confession, in the hour of my deepest need  
When the pool of tears beneath my feet flood every newborn seed  
There's a dyin' voice within me reaching out somewhere  
Toiling in the danger and in the morals of despair

Don't have the inclination to look back on any mistake  
Like Cain, I now behold this chain of events that I must break  
In the fury of the moment I can see the Master's hand  
In every leaf that trembles, in every grain of sand

Oh, the flowers of indulgence and the weeds of yesteryear  
Like criminals, they have choked the breath of conscience and good cheer  
The sun beat down upon the steps of time to light the way  
To ease the pain of idleness and the memory of decay

I gaze into the doorway of temptation's angry flame  
And every time I pass that way I always hear my name  
Then onward in my journey I come to understand  
That every hair is numbered like every grain of sand

I have gone from rags to riches in the sorrow of the night  
In the violence of a summer's dream, in the chill of a wintry light  
In the bitter dance of loneliness fading into space  
In the broken mirror of innocence on each forgotten face

I hear the ancient footsteps like the motion of the sea  
Sometimes I turn, there's someone there, other times it's only me  
I am hanging in the balance of the reality of man  
Like every sparrow falling, like every grain of sand

עוד כוס קפה (אל העמק הטוב) / בוב דילן

נְשִׁימָתָךְ מְתוּקָה  
עֵינַיִךְ שְׂתִי מְרַגְלִיּוֹת בְּרַקִּיעַ.  
גִּנְדָה זְקוּרָה, שְׁעָרָךְ תִּלְקַח  
עַל הַפֶּר הַמְרַגֵּיעַ.  
אֶבֶל אֲנִי לֹא חֵשׁ חֶבְהָה  
לֹא הַכֶּרֶת תּוֹדָה אוֹ אֶהְבֶּה  
נְאֻמָּנוּתָךְ אֵינָה כְּלָפִי  
אֶלָּא לְכּוֹכְבִים מְעֻלִי.

עוד כוס קפה אחת לפני הרחוב  
עוד כוס קפה אחת לפני שאַעֲזֹב  
אל העמק הטוב.

אֶבִּיךָ פּוֹרֵעַ חֵק  
וְנִגַּד בְּמַקְצוֹעוֹ  
הוּא לְמַד אוֹתָךְ לְקַחַת  
וְאֵיךְ לְהַשְׁלִיךְ אֶת לְהַבּוֹ.  
הוּא צוֹפֶה עַל מְמַלְכָתוֹ  
כִּי שָׁזָר לֹא יַעֲבֹר  
קוֹלוֹ רוֹעֵד כִּשְׁהוּא קוֹרָא  
לְמַגֵּשׁ אֶכֶל לַעֵת אוֹר.

עוד כוס קפה אחת לפני הרחוב  
עוד כוס קפה אחת לפני שאַעֲזֹב  
אל העמק הטוב.

אֶחֻתָךְ חוֹזֶה אֶת הַעֲתִיד  
כְּמוֹךְ וְכִמוֹ אִמָּךְ.  
מֵעוֹלָם לֹא לְמַדָּתְךָ קָרָא וְכָתַב  
אֵין סִפְרִים עַל מַדְפָּךְ.  
וְהַנְּאֻתָךְ לֹא יוֹדֵעַת גְּבוּלוֹת  
קוֹלָךְ הוּא כְּמוֹ צְפוּר שִׁיר

קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – **Take This Poem And Copy It**

אָבֿל לִבֿךְ הוּא כְּמוֹ אוֹקֵינוֹס

הַשּׁוֹף וְעֵשִׂיר.

עוֹד כּוֹס קַפֵּה אַחַת לְפָנַי הַרְחוּב

עוֹד כּוֹס קַפֵּה אַחַת לְפָנַי שְׁאֵעֵזֵב

אֶל הָעֵמֶק הַטּוֹב.

**One More Cup Of Coffee (Valley Below) / Bob Dylan**

Your breath is sweet

Your eyes are like two jewels in the sky

Your back is straight, your hair is smooth

On the pillow where you lie

But I don't sense affection

No gratitude or love

Your loyalty is not to me

But to the stars above

One more cup of coffee for the road

One more cup of coffee 'fore I go

To the valley below

Your daddy he's an outlaw

And a wanderer by trade

He'll teach you how to pick and choose

And how to throw the blade

He oversees his kingdom

So no stranger does intrude

His voice it trembles as he calls out

For another plate of food

One more cup of coffee for the road

One more cup of coffee 'fore I go

To the valley below

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

Your sister sees the future  
Like your mama and yourself  
You've never learned to read or write  
There's no books upon your shelf  
And your pleasure knows no limits  
Your voice is like a meadowlark  
But your heart is like an ocean  
Mysterious and dark

One more cup of coffee for the road  
One more cup of coffee 'fore I go  
To the valley below

אומרים: "לכל דבר יש תחליף"  
אך יש מרחק שאינו קרוב.  
על כן למדתי לשנן את הפנים  
של כל האנשים שנעלו אותי בפנים.  
אני רואה את אור חיי עולה, זורח,  
מן האופק האחד עד אל האחר.  
כל יום עכשיו, כל יום עכשיו,  
אני עומד להשתחרר.

אני רואה את אור חיי זורח  
מסוף המערב ועד לב המזרח  
כל יום עכשיו, ממש כל יום,  
שער הכלא יפתח.

אומרים: "כל אדם זקוק להגנה",  
אומרים: "כל אדם חייב ליפול".  
ועם כל זאת אני נשבע,  
שהשתקפותי מופיעה ברקיע הכחול.  
אני רואה את אור חיי עולה, זורח,  
מן האופק האחד עד אל האחר.  
כל יום עכשיו, ממש כל יום,  
אני עומד להשתחרר.

עומד לידי בתוך קהל האנשים הבודדים  
אדם הנשבע בנקיון כפיו.  
כל היום קולו קורא באוזניי  
צועק על שהפלילו אותו שוביו.  
אני רואה את אור חיי עולה, זורח,  
מן האופק האחד עד אל האחר.  
כל יום עכשיו, ממש כל יום,  
אני עומד להשתחרר.

## **I shall be released / Bob Dylan**

They say ev'rything can be replaced  
Yet ev'ry distance is not near  
So I remember ev'ry face  
Of ev'ry man who put me here  
I see my light come shining  
From the west unto the east  
Any day now, any day now  
I shall be released

They say ev'ry man needs protection  
They say ev'ry man must fall  
Yet I swear I see my reflection  
Some place so high above this wall  
I see my light come shining  
From the west unto the east  
Any day now, any day now  
I shall be released

Standing next to me in this lonely crowd  
Is a man who swears he's not to blame  
All day long I hear him shout so loud  
Crying out that he was framed  
I see my light come shining  
From the west unto the east  
Any day now, any day now  
I shall be released

עכשיו הכל נגמר, בייבי בלו / בוב דילן

עזוב עכשיו, קח כל מה ש'ת'חושב שיעמוד במסע.  
אחוז מהר בכל מה שלא יהיה למעמסה.  
שם עומד היתום שלך עם רובה,  
ממרר בבכי כמו שריפה על החמה.  
היזהר, הנביאים באים מן המדבר  
ועכשיו הכל נגמר, בייבי בלו.

הכביש שייך למהמרים, כדאי להיזהר.  
קח כל מה שצברת מן ההפקר.  
הצייר ריק הידיים מרחובותיך  
רושם דוגמאות מטורפות על פני סדינייך.  
והשמיים, גם, הם מתקפלים תחתיך  
ועכשיו הכל נגמר, בייבי בלו.

כל מלחייןך חולי-הים, הם חותרים הביתה.  
וצבאות האיילים שלך, הם באים הביתה.  
המאהב שפשוט יצא את סף דלתך  
לקח את כל שמיכותיו מריצפתך.  
השטיח, גם, נע תחת רגלך  
ועכשיו הכל נגמר, בייבי בלו.

שכח את אבני המדרכה, מישהו קורא לך.  
הרפה מן המתים שעזבת, הם לא ילכו בעקבותיך.  
הנווד אשר נוקש על סגור דלתך  
מתכסה עכשיו בכובד מעילך.  
הדלק עוד גפרור אחד, התחל מעפר  
ועכשיו הכל נגמר, בייבי בלו.

**It's all over now, baby blue / Bob Dylan**

You must leave now, take what you need, you think will last  
But whatever you wish to keep, you better grab it fast  
Yonder stands your orphan with his gun  
Crying like a fire in the sun  
Look out the saints are comin' through  
And it's all over now, Baby Blue

The highway is for gamblers, better use your sense  
Take what you have gathered from coincidence  
The empty-handed painter from your streets  
Is drawing crazy patterns on your sheets  
This sky, too, is folding under you  
And it's all over now, Baby Blue

All your seasick sailors, they are rowing home  
All your reindeer armies, are all going home  
The lover who just walked out your door  
Has taken all his blankets from the floor  
The carpet, too, is moving under you  
And it's all over now, Baby Blue

Leave your stepping stones behind, something calls for you  
Forget the dead you've left, they will not follow you  
The vagabond who's rapping at your door  
Is standing in the clothes that you once wore  
Strike another match, go start anew  
And it's all over now, Baby Blue



# stories

**Ana min al yahoud – I'm one of the Jews / Almog Behar**

translated by Vivian Eden

1.

At that time, my tongue twisted around and with the arrival of the month of Tammuz the Arabic accent got stuck in my mouth, deep down in my throat. Just like that, as I was walking down the street, the Arabic accent of Grandfather Anwar of blessed memory came back to me and no matter how hard I tried to extricate it from myself and throw it away in one of the public trash cans I could not do it. I tried and tried to soften the glottal `ayyin, the way my mother had in her childhood, because of the teacher and the looks from the other children, but strangers passing by just rooted me to the spot; I tried to soften the pharyngeal fricative het and pronounce it gutturally, I tried to make the tsaddi sound less like an "s" and I tried to get rid of that glottal Iraqi quf and pronounce it like "k," but the effort failed. And policemen started to head assertively towards me on the streets of Jerusalem, pointing at me and my black beard with a threatening finger, whispering among themselves in their vehicles, stopping me and inquiring as to my name and my identity. And for every passing policeman on the street I would want to stop walking and pull out my identity card and point out the nationality line and tell them, as if I were revealing a secret that would absolve me of tremendous guilt: "Ana min al yahoud, I'm a Jew." But suddenly my identity card started to vanish precisely when I was very much in need of it. And thus, every evening and every morning the police would arrest me without anything in my wallet that would agree to protect me. Then at home I would find the identity card rolled up between two NIS 20 bills, or in my pocket outside my wallet I would find my driver's license as though I had taken it out for some reason, or in my knapsack among the papers my military reserve service card would appear as though I had forgotten it there unintentionally. But when the policemen stopped in front of me I couldn't find any document at all that would tell them about my past and my future. And then I would start to make phone calls, telling the policeman, look, it's only since yesterday that my accent has been Arab like this, heavy like this, and it isn't even Palestinian, it's Iraqi, and you don't look to me like you spoke Yiddish in your parents' home yourself, maybe you learned it somewhere outside, maybe your own grandfather had an accent like mine and listen, I'm calling friends, my friends, listen to what a beautiful accent they have, Hebrew as Hebrew should be spoken, without any accent, and if these are

## קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

my friends, then who am I.

But all of a sudden my Ashkenazi friends weren't answering me at all, they wouldn't hear the plea of my ringing and only in the evening or the next day would they call me back, ask what I wanted and refuse to identify my voice. And I'd remain standing there facing the policemen all alone and start to call my friends whose parents were from Aleppo or Tripoli or Tunisia saying maybe their Hebrew is not perfect, it isn't so pure, but nevertheless it's better than mine. And they'd answer right away, not hesitating at the sound of the ringing, and suddenly they too had such a heavy Arab accent and they'd be listening to some meandering oud in the background or some persistent qanoun, and they'd greet me with "ahlan bik" and call me "ya habibi" and ask me "ashlonek" and take their leave of me with "salamatek" and what could the policemen do, how could they believe me, after all of my friends had abandoned me, that I was an Israelite and not an Ishmaelite. And then they'd check me slowly, rummaging in my clothes, going over my body with metal detectors, stripping me of words and thoughts in their thorough silence, searching deep in the layers of my skin for a grudge, seeking an explosive belt, an explosive belt in my heart, eager to defuse any suspicious object. And when the policemen presented themselves to me in pairs, the one would say to his companion a few minutes into their examination, look, he's circumcised, he really is a Jew, this Arab, and the other one would say, an Arab is also circumcised, and explosive belts don't care about circumcision, and they would continue their search. And really, during the time when I left my body to them explosive belts began to be born on my heart, swelling and refusing to be defused, thundering and thundering. But as they were not made of steel or gunpowder they succeeded in evading the mechanical detectors.

In the end, when the policemen had left me alone, I would continue on my way from the beautiful Belgian Consulate building and the circle at the top of Jabotinsky Street and walk down Marcus Street to the Jerusalem Theater. There I would wait to see some American film plentifully endowed with Oscars, but suddenly there was no theater at the end of the street, and suddenly it wasn't Marcus Street, it was a street with an Arabic name, and the house had gone back to being Arab, and so did the Belgian Consulate, and the people in the yards, family by family, were Arabs, not only construction workers, not only street cleaners and renovators.

2.

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

And I would start to walk the streets of Katamon and the streets of Talbieh and the streets of Baqa and instead of seeing the wealthy Jerusalemites who had gathered there in the spacious homes, and instead of reading there on the street signs "Kovshei Katamon" and "Yordei Hasira," I'd once again see the wealthy Palestinians, and they were the way they had been before the 1948 war, as if there had never been a 1948 war. I see them and they are strolling in the yards among the fruit trees and picking fruit as though the newspapers had not told them that the trees would wither, that the land would be filled with refugees. And it was as though time had gone through another history, a different history, and I remembered that I had asked my mother why we talked history so much, enough history, we've had enough of history, because this history binds me, leaving nothing inside me, and also nothing inside you.

And really, we have become so fixed in our history, and extinguished, but here for a moment history has followed a different trajectory. And I would walk through the wealthy Palestinians' streets, and I thought that perhaps they would speak to me respectfully, not like the policemen. I hoped that I would be able to tell them how much I had read about the writer and educator Khalil al Sakakini, and how much I wanted to make friends with his grandchildren, and I would walk among them, approaching their yards and I do not succeed in mingling with them because all I have at my disposal is Hebrew with an Arabic accent and my Arabic, which doesn't come from my home but from the army, is suddenly mute, strangled from my throat, cursing itself without uttering a word, hanging in the suffocating air of the refuges of my soul, hiding from family members behind the shutters of Hebrew. And all the time, when I tried to speak to them in the small, halting vocabulary of the Arabic I knew, what came out was Hebrew with an Arabic accent, until they thought that I was ridiculing them, and had my accent not been so Iraqi, had it not been for that, they would have been certain that I was making fun of them.

But like that, with the accent, they were confused, they thought I was making fun of the Iraqis, the Saddam Husseins, or maybe some old Iraqi who had kept his accent but forgotten his language. And I didn't make friends there even though I wanted to, and I remembered how I had once heard an uncle of mine say of those Arabs of the wealthy neighborhoods of Jerusalem, they are effendis, they wear Western suits and tarboushes on their heads, and I heard the word effendi at that time with a kind of scorn, even though now I can remember that he hadn't said it that way and I had heard the scorn as though I were some Palmachnik in sandals and shorts who scorns the

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Arab landowners and praises his own holy socialism and that of all the Zionists. They are effendis, my uncle told me, and he meant it respectfully, but I had lost their language and they didn't know my language and between us remained the distance of the police forces and the generations.

On my way back home, only the bus drivers were accepting of my accent, knowing that it is impossible to expect what the accent of a passenger who boards a bus in Jerusalem might be. And my heart did not know I had returned to my heart, he didn't know, and my fears didn't know they had all returned to me, they did not know.

### 3.

And thus my voice was replaced by my grandfather's voice, and suddenly those streets that had become so accustomed to his death and his disappearance and his absence from them began to hear his voice again. And suddenly that beautiful voice, which had been entirely in my past, started coming out of me and not as a beggar and not asking for crumbs, but truly my voice, my voice strong and clear. And the streets of Jerusalem that had grown accustomed to my silence, to our silence, had a very hard time with the speech, and would silence the voice, gradually telling it careful, telling me careful, telling me I am alien telling me my silences are enough. And despite my fear, and even though this voice was foreign from the distance of two generations of forgetting, I spoke all my words in that accent, because there was speech in me that wanted to come out and the words would change on me as they came out of the depths of my throat. And a stranger who didn't know me would have thought that I was a loyal grandson, and would not have known how much I had piled non-memory on memory over the years, and would not have guessed how much my memory had blurred and how many times, how many, many times, I had not made the connection to my grandfather on my lips.

And when I returned home from that first walk in the streets with my new accent and the policeman's searches of my body, my life's companion wondered about my voice, and as she spoke to me and advised me to stop she was infected by my transformation and her lips connected to a jumble of her father's Yemenite Arabic accent and her mother's Istambouli Ladino accent. And a few days later, she began coming home from work with reports that there was anxiety going around the different departments and a small plague was spreading among the people at her office and the old accents that were hoped to have vanished are coming out again. And a small item in the

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margins of one of the major newspapers revealed that the security authorities are keeping track of who has been infected by whom with the forbidden accents, and there is already concern that the country will be filled with Arabs, many, many Arabs, and therefore they have decided to reinforce the radio with announcers whose Hebrew is so pure that we will feel alien in our speech. And shortly thereafter, my life's companion was explaining to me in an unsteady voice, one moment veering north to the Straits of the Bosphorus and one minute veering south towards the Gulf of Aden, that this dybbuk was also haunting Ashkenazim. For them, the change would develop more slowly, she prophesized, because their children were convinced that their parents' accent and their grandparents' accent had originally been American, and they have less concrete memories of their old speech. But in a little while the Polish and the Hungarian and the Rumanian and the German and the Ukrainian accents will be heard again in the streets, and this is what is most feared by those who are responsible for public security, their fear being that they will no longer be able to find announcers to send to the armies of the radio and teachers will not be found to instruct our children in the secret of the correct accent.

And despite her prophecies of a huge wave of change, my parents stood staunchly against me and against the plague, remembering the years of effort they had invested to acquire their clean accent, and they began to hint strongly to me to cease and desist, reminding me of my plans to study. And they would ask me earnestly what could I do, how I could cover up my longings, my longings so suddenly in this voice that is so foreign to me, and I am so sorry and regretful that it is coming out of me, but I can't, I can't stop it just like that in a single moment, because there is no barrier inside me and no brakes. If you persist in this speech that keeps coming out of you, you will distance yourself from the scholarships, said my father, and he was very, very right, if you don't come back to our plain speech, what will become of you, said my mother, and she was very, very right. In all my interviews all the professors and the women professors were very surprised at my accent, trying to find a different speech in me, something more like university speech, more academic, even though the words were almost the same words, perhaps a bit more broken. How will you go on if you speak like this, they said plaintively, and they are very concerned about my future, and neither my heart's ruined tranquillity nor my heart's broken stones nor my heart's sharp corners could help lift the decree from me. But during those days of their worry my ears were not opened to hearing them, and my language became deaf and their

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accent became alien to me and distant, and I took pleasure as cycles of the moon went by and my life companion's prophesies were being fulfilled and the streets of Jerusalem were changing and my own parents were alone in their non-transformation. And I revealed to her ear that I had started to write my stories in Arabic letters, and soon the important departments would be shocked again. And some days later she came home to tell me that the department heads had laughed and said, let him write like that. Let him write stories that only he can read, his parents or his children will not read them and our children will not fall into the danger and, if he applies, we will give him all the government prizes for Arabic literature without having read a word in his books.

And of course the department heads were right, and my wife began to prophesize the future in Ladino proverbs, telling me this proverb my mother had used and though I don't remember how she said it in her language, I do remember the accent. This is the last visit of health before death, she would whisper and then begin to explain, these are death throes and not the resurrection and in the highest of the departments they already know, they've decided that it is possible to relax, they will assign job slots for correct Hebrew speech and everyone will think back to the source of his income, earning his living and his family's penury, and then regular Hebrew will return as if there had never been a plague.

#### 4.

And my heart began to give indications in my voices, saying this is my voice and this is not my voice, this is a lamed coming out of my mouth and this is an alien quf, alien to my heart. And I would slow down the pace of my thoughts, in order to think, to think about my thoughts and not only about my thoughts, but I had no time and I would scatter words to the wind like the sea salt that certainly no one is scattering into the sea. And my grandfather would speak to me, asking me in my voice whether there is any end to this story, and why is this history of mine mixed up with yours, how I have come to trouble your life, I am the generation of the desert and how have you arisen to renew me. You are the generation for which we waited so that there would be no difference between its past and the past of its teachers, because our past was already very painful and we remained in the desert for the birds of prey to eat us for your sake, so that you would not remember me, so that you would not be hurting like me and how is it that your teeth are again biting into my words and where, the

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districts of Jerusalem are different, there are no teahouses, there is no Tigris River flowing through the city for pity's sake, but I did not meet my death in Jerusalem, nor in the city of my birth, but rather in the desert between them, a great desert of silence. Build extensions in your heart, my grandson, he would say to me, make many departments, and lodge me in one of the hidden departments, and live in the rest of them. Or move into the silence department, because the change that you thought is occurring is too simple, and what is going to change if a different accent is spoken? Will I live again, will you live my new life? Enough of the streets for you, go to your parents, my accent will not convince them, they know it and have already raised the flags of many revolts. Perhaps silence will put the present's fear of the past and of the future into their hearts. And why don't you show them your story, perhaps that way they will wake up, said my grandfather from the dead, almost making me swear an oath.

And I started to measure my silences, this is a day's silence, this is a week's silence, this is a month's silence, well-framed inside the walls of my house, and no mouth opens and no window opens and the scenes of the profane do not come in, but there is nothing sacred either, and nothing is subtracted and nothing is added. And everything is the voice of my silences, my silences are many, many silenced words, and I am not being, and I am not becoming, and there is no end to the story and there is no before there was the story, there is no beginning. And I was silent for more and more time, until my parents would say speak, if you don't speak how will you get a scholarship, how will you continue your studies and what will you do with your life, and where are your smiles and where have they gone into hiding, speak, speak in any accent because the fear of silence has descended upon us.

#### 5.

There is no Tigris flowing through Jerusalem, and its murmur does not silence the borders that rise up against us, the borders that separate myself from myself. I am not here not there, not East not West, not my voice now and not the voices of my past, and what will happen in the end. I walk through the streets mute and also somewhat deaf. This time only my appearance worries the police, my thick beard and my stubbornness not to utter a word. Again the month of Tammuz is waning in me and despite the heat I wrap myself in coats to cover up the explosives belt of my heart. And thus out of the policemen's devotion to duty I am brought to the jail and my



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parents come after me, to see their son and where he is being taken.

I stay silent in front of my parents, and how they will respond, I stay silent in front of my parents and give them all my stories that I had concealed from them, hinting here I have written about you, Mother, and here about you, Father. Here I have written poems of opposition to Hebrew in Hebrew. I give them many more signs, because I have no other language to write in, out of so much shame you have not bequeathed me anything. And these times prohibit me poetry and force me to sing, and while they are crowding in on me, crowds and crowds, crowding in on you too, and the language that has become my language is commanding me to pour my soul in it, to be an empty flute for its gusts, until together we produce a sound, and together we would become nay – an arab flute, we would be disguised as a different language, an absent language. And this really is the same story, recurring over and over again, how many stories do I have, Mother, Father, how many stories does a person have? Each time he tries to tell the story in different words, each time he tries to resolve the unsolved story a bit differently, and aren't you identifying your own story here, nevertheless your silence has told me a little. Look, now I've tried to write the story in the Arabic accent, but what has come of it. Look where we are meeting. Take them, read my story, Mother Father, read all my stories that I have hidden from you for many years, you too are the same exile, the same silence, the same alienation between heart and body and between thought and speech, perhaps you will know how the plot will be resolved.

And the first speech my parents uttered was a denial, Father said this is not our son and this is not the beard we have raised, said Mother, and where, we don't have this accent, they said in chorus to the officials, he had nowhere to inherit this accent from, not from the nuclear family, his grandfather Anwar died before he was born, our son wasn't there.

And the second speech they uttered was the implication that if thou doest not well we shall go home from the jail disappointed in the cycle of generations and if thou doest well and drop the stories, this story, this speech and this silence and speak to us in our language, we will stay here with you until you are judged fit to go free, until all of us together are judged.

And my parents did not know that I had returned to their heart, they did not know, and they did not know that all of their fears had returned to me, they did not know.

Adar Bet, 5765, Jerusalem (March-April 2005)

1.

בזמן שהוא התהפכה לשוני, ועם שהגיע ראש חודש תמוז נתקע לי בפה, עמוק עמוק בגרון, עמוק מן הגרון, המבטא הערבי. כך כשהייתי באמצע הליכת רחוב חזר אלי המבטא הערבי של סבא אַנְוָאר עליו השלום, וכמה ניסיתי להוציאו מתוכי ולהשליכו באחד הפחים הציבוריים ככה לא הצלחתי. ניסיתי ניסיתי לרכך את העי"ן לרכך את העי"ן כמו אמא שעשתה זאת בילדותה נוכח המורים ומבטי שאר התלמידים, אבל זרים עוברים רק קיבעו אותי במקומי, ניסיתי לרכך את התי"ת ולעשות אותה כ"ף, ניסיתי להרחיק את הצד"י מן הסמ"ך, ניסיתי לצאת מן הקו"ף העיראקית הזאת, ולא צלח המאמץ. ושוטרים התחילו לעבור מולי ברחובות ירושלים תקיפים, התחילו להצביע עלי ועל זקני השחור באצבעות מאיימות, התחילו להתלחש ביניהם בניידות, התחילו לעצור אותי ולדרוש פְּשמי וְכִזְהוּתי. ואני מול כל שוטר עובר ברחוב הייתי מבקש לעמוד מהליכתי ולשלוף את תעודת-הזהות שלי ולהצביע על סעיף הלאום ולומר להם, כאילו אני מסגיר סוד שִׁיפְטור אותי מאשמה גדולה: "אנא מן אל-יהוד, אנא מן אל-יהוד".

אבל פתאום התחילה נעלמת לי תעודת-הזהות דווקא כשהייתי נזקק לה מאוד. וכך היו עוצרים אותי השוטרים ערב וערב ובוקר ובוקר כשאין בארנקי תעודה אשר תסכים לגונן עלי. אחר-כך בבית הייתי מוצא את תעודת-הזהות מגולגלת בין שני שטרות, או בכיס מחוץ לארנק היה מתגלה לי רישיון הנהיגה, כאילו ככה הוצאתי אותו בשביל איזה דבר-מה, או בתיק הגב בין מסמכים היתה נחבאת תעודת המילואים כאילו שכחתי אותה שם בלי כוונה. אבל כשהשוטרים היו נעצרים מולי לא היתה נמצאת לי ולו תעודה אחת שתספר להם על עברי ועתידי. ואז הייתי מתחיל עושה טלפונים, אומר לשוטר, תראה, רק מאתמול המבטא שלי ערבי ככה, כבד כזה, והוא בכלל לא פֶּלְסְטִינִי הוא עִירָאקִי, וגם אתה לא נראה לי דובר יִיֶדִיש מן הבית, אולי למדת אותה באחד המקומות החיצוניים, ובכלל, אולי גם לסבא שלך היה מבטא כמו שלי, ותשמע, אני מתקשר לחברים, חברים שלי, תשמע איזה מבטא יפה יש להם, עברית כמו שצריך לדבר עברית, בלי שום מבטא, ואם אלו חברי אז מי אני.

אבל החברים האשכנזים שלי פתאום לא היו עונים לי בכלל, לא היו שומעים לתחינת צלצולי, ורק לעת ערב או ביום המחרת היו מתקשרים אלי חזרה, שואלים לרצונותי ומסרבים לזהות את קולי. ואני הייתי נותר לעמוד מול השוטרים לבד, מתחיל להתקשר לחברים החלְפִים והטְרִיפּוֹלִיטְאִים והתוֹנִיטְאִים שלי, אומר, אלה אולי אין להם עברית מושלמת, אינה צחה כל-כך, אינה כפי שעברית צריכה להיות, אבל בכל זאת טובה היא משלי. והם היו עונים מיד, לא מתמהמהים למשמע הצלצולים, ופתאום גם להם נעשה מבטא ערבי כל-כך כבד כל-כך, והם בדיוק היו שומעים ברקע איזה עוד פתלתל או קאנון עיקש, והם היו מברכים אותי "אֵהֶלֶן בֵּינִי" ומכנים אותי "יָא חֲבִיבִי" ושואלים אותי "אֵשְׁלוּנֶךָ" ונפרדים ממני ב"סֶלְמַתְךָ", ומה יכלו השוטרים, איך יכלו להאמין לי, אחרי שכל חברי זנחו אותי כך, שאני בן ישראל ולא בן ישמעאל.

## קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

ואז היו בודקים אותי באיטיות, מפשפשים בבגדי, עוברים על פני גופי עם גלאי המתכות, מפשיטים אותי בשתיקתם היסודית ממילים ומחשבות, מחפשים עמוק בשכבות כסויזות עורי את טינתי, תרים אחר חגורות נפץ, חגורות נפץ בלבי, ששים לנטרל כל חפץ חשוד. וכשהיו השוטרים ניצבים עלי בזוגות ונתארכה בדיקתם כמה רגעים, היה אחד אומר לשני תראה הוא נימול, הוא באמת יהודי הערבי הזה, ושני היה אומר, גם ערבי נימול, וחגורות הנפץ אינן מעניין המילה, והיו ממשיכים בחיפושיהם. ובאמת באותו הזמן שהנחתי את גופי להם החלו נולדות חגורות נפץ על לבי, החלו תופחות ומסרבות להיות מנוטרלות, רועמות רועמות. אבל בגלל שלא היו עשויות פלדה או אבק שריפה הצליחו לחמוק מן הגלאים המוכשרים.

ובסוף כשהיו השוטרים עוזבים אותי לנפשי חופשי אך לא חף, הייתי ממשיך בדרכי והולך בדרך מרפוס היורדת לתיאטרון ירושלים מן הבניין היפה של הקונסוליה הבלגית והכיכר שעל רחוב ז'בוטינסקי. הייתי מחכה לראות שם איזה סרט אמריקאי מרובה אוסקרים, אבל פתאום לא היה שם תיאטרון בקצה הרחוב, ופתאום לא היה זה רחוב מרכוס, היה זה רחוב עם שם ערבי, והבתים היו שבים להיות ערביים, גם הקונסוליה הבלגית, וגם האנשים בחצרות, משפחות משפחות, היו ערביים, לא רק גברים צעירים פועלי בניין, לא רק מנקי רחובות ועושי שיפוצים.

2.

והייתי מתחיל להתהלך ברחובות קטמון וברחובות טלפיה וברחובות בקעה, ובמקום לראות את עשירי ירושלים שהתכנסו שם פבתים המרווחים, ובמקום לקרוא שם "כובשי קטמון" ו"יורדי הסירה" פשמות הרחובות, ראיתי פתאום שוב את עשירי פלסטין, והם היו שם כמו שהיו לפני מלחמת ארבעים ושמונה, כמו לא היתה מלחמת ארבעים ושמונה. אני רואה אותם והם הולכים בחצרות בין עצי הפרי וקוטפים פירות כמו לא סיפרו להם העיתונים כי יקמלו העצים, כי הארץ תימלא פליטים. והיה כאילו הזמן הלך היסטוריה אחרת, שונה, וזכרתי ששאלתי את אמא למה אנחנו מרבים כל-כך לדבר היסטוריה, די עם ההיסטוריה, די לנו מהיסטוריה, כי ההיסטוריה הזאת כובלת אותי, כובלת אותך, לא משאירה בי דבר, לא משאירה גם לך.

ובאמת נעשינו קבועים כל-כך בהיסטוריה שלנו, גם כבויים, אבל הנה היא הלכה לרגע מהלך אחר. והייתי אני צועד ברחובות עשירי פלסטין, וחשבתני אולי ידברו אלי הם בכבוד, לא כמו השוטרים, קיוויתי אוכל לספר להם כמה קראתי על הסופר והמחנך ח'ליל אל-ספאפיני, וכמה רציתי להתיידד עם נכדיו, והייתי הולך ביניהם, מתקרב לחצרות ואיני מצליח להתערות ביניהם, כי לרשותי עומדת רק העברית במבטאה הערבי, ואילו הערבית שלי, שלא באה לי מן הבית אלא מן הצבא, פתאום הערבית שלי אילמת, חנוקה מן הגרון, מקללת את עצמה בלי להוציא מילה, ישנה באוויר המחניק של מקלטי-נפשי, מסתרת מבני-המשפחה מאחורי תריסי העברית. וכל הזמן כאשר ניסיתי לדבר אליהם ערבית מן הקצת והעילג שידעתי, יצאה לי איזו עברית במבטא ערבי, עד שחשבו כמעט אני לועג עליהם, ואלמלא המבטא שהיה עיראקי כל-כך, אלמלא זה, היו הם בטוחים שאני לועג להם.

### קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

אבל ככה עם המבטא התבלבלו, חשבו אולי אני לועג לעיראקים, לסדאם חוסיינים, או אולי אני איזה עיראקי יָשָׁן, שנותר לו מבטאו אבל נשתכחה שפתו. ולא עשיתי שמה חברים למרות רצוני, ונזכרתי איך שמעתי פעם דוד אחד שלי אומר על הערבים הללו של השכונות העשירות של ירושלים, אלה אֶפְנָדִים, אלה הולכים בחליפות מערב ותרבושים לראשם, ושמעתי אז את המילה אפנדי במין בוז כזה, למרות שעכשיו אני יכול להיזכר שהוא לא אמר אותה כך, שמעתי בה בוז כאילו הייתי איזה פלמ"חניק בסנדלים ומכנסיים קצרים שלועג לבעלי הקרקעות הערביים ומשבח את הסוציאליזם הקדוש שלו ושל כל הסֶהִיוֹנִים. אלה אפנדים, אמר לי הדוד, והתכוון לומר כבוד, אך נעלמה ממני שפתם והם לא ידעו את שפתי, ונשאר בינינו מרחק המְשֻׁטָּרוֹת והדורות.

ובדרכי חזרה הביתה רק נהגי האוטובוסים היו מקבלים היטב את מבטאי, יודעים כי אין לְצַפּוֹת מה מבטאו של נוסע אשר עולה לְאוֹטוֹבוּס בירושלים. ולא ידע לבי כי שבתי אל לבי, לא ידע, ולא ידעו פחדני כי הם כולם שבו עלי, לא ידעו.

3.

וכך התחלף קולי בקול סבי, ופתאום הרחובות האלו שהתרגלו כל-כך למותו והיעלמו והעדרו מהם, פתאום התחילו שוב לשמוע את קולו. ופתאום הקול הזה, היפה, שהיה כלוא בתוך עברי, פתאום הוא היה יוצא ממני ולא כמבקש נדבות ולא כמבקש לזכות בפירוורים, אלא ממש קול שלי קול שלי חזק ורם. ורחובות ירושלים שהתרגלו לשתיקתי, לשתיקתנו, התקשו מאוד מאוד מול הדיבור, והיו משקיטים את הקול, משקיטים אותו לאט לאט אומרים לו זהירות, אומרים לי זהירות, אומרים לו אתה זר, אומרים לי די לך בשתיקתך. ולמרות פחדני, ולמרות שגם לי היה הקול הזה זר ממרחק שני דורות של שכחה, השמעתי את כל מילותי במבטא ההוא, כי לא יכולתי להתמיד בשתיקה, כי היה בי דיבור רוצה לצאת, והמילים היו משתנות לי עת היו יוצאות מעומק הגרון. וזר שלא היה מכיר היה חושב אני נכד נאמן, ולא היה יודע כמה הרבתי אי-זיכרון על זיכרון לאורך השנים, ולא היה מנחש כמה זיכרוני היטשטש וכמה זמנים הרבה הרבה זמנים לא קשרתי את קשר סבי על שפתי.

וכששבתי הביתה מן ההליכה הראשונה ברחובות עם מבטאי החדש וחיפושי השוטרים על גופי, היתה זוגתי מתפלאה על קולי, ותוך כדי דיבורה אלי והמלצתה לי לחדול התחילה נדבקה משינויי ובשפתייה הִתְקַשְּׁרוּ בערבוביה המבטא התימני של ערבית אביה והמבטא האִיִּסְטֵמְבּוֹלִי של סֶפְנִיּוֹלִית אמה. ואחר כמה ימים החלה חוזרת הביתה מעבודתה מדווחת כמה חוששים במדורים, כבר מתפשטת מגיפה קטנה בין אנשים במשרדה, יוצאים המבטאים הישנים שֶׁמְקוֹנָה היה כי נעלמו. וידיעה קטנה בשולי אחד העיתונים החשובים גילתה כי הממונים על הביטחון עוקבים מי נדבק ממי במבטאים האסורים ומקוננים איך מתהפך להם יובל שנים של חינוך מוצלח, והם כבר חוששים כי תימְלֵא הארץ ערבים, הרבה הרבה ערבים, על כן החליטו לתגבר את הרדיו בקריינים בעלי עברית כה רהוטה כך שיובטח לנו כי נחוש זרים בדיבורנו.

## קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

ועוד מעט, היתה מסבירה לי זוגתי ודיבורה רועד, רגע מצפין אל מצרי הַבּוֹסְפוֹרוֹס ורגע מדרים אל מפרץ עֶדֶן, הדיבוק הזה נוגע גם באשכנזים. אצלם תהא הַשְּׁתַנּוּת איטית יותר, התנבאה, כי השתכנעו ילדיהם שמבטא הוריהם והורי הוריהם היה במקורו אמריקאי, אצלם מועט יותר הזיכרון המוחש של דיבורם הישן. אבל עוד מעט יישמעו כאן מחדש ברחובות המבטא הפולני וההונגרי והרומני והגרמני והאוקראיני, ומכך חוששים יותר מכל הממונים על ביטחון הציבור, חששם שאז לא ימצאו קריינים לשלוח אל צבאות הרדיו, לא ימצאו מורים להורות סוד מבטא נכון לילדינו.

ולמרות התנבאויותיה על גל גדול של השתנות, הוֹרֵי עֵמְדו עֵיקְשִׁים מולי ומול פְּנֵי המגיפה, זוכרים בכמה שנים של מאמץ קנו להם את מבטאם הנקי, והחלו רומזים לי נחרצות לחדול, מזכירים לי את תוכניותי ללמוד. והיו מבקשים מאוד מה יכולתי לעשות, איך אוכל לכסות על געגועי וגעגועי פתאום בתוך הקול הזה שהוא כל-כך זר לי, ואני מצר ומצטער כי הוא יוצא ממני, אבל גם לא יכול ככה, ככה סתם ברגע אחד לעצור אותו כי אין בו מחסום מתוכו ואין בו מעצור. אם תמשיך את הדיבור הזה הנמשך ממך תרחק מן המלגות, אמר אבי וצדק מאוד מאוד, אם לא תשוב אל דיבורנו הפשוט מה יהיה עליך, אמרה אמי וצדקה מאוד מאוד, בכל ראיונותי היו כל הפרופסורים והפרופסוריות תמהים נורא על מבטאי, מבקשים למצוא בי דיבור אחר, אוניברסיטאי יותר, חרף שהיו המילים כמעט אותן מילים, אולי מעט יותר שבורות. איך תמשיך אם תדבר כך, אמרו ביקשו הורי מאוד, מה יכולתי לעשות, והם דואגים מאוד את עתידי, ולא שלוות לבי החֶרְבָה, ולא אבני לבי השבורות, ולא פינות לבי המחודדות, לא יכלו לעזור להעביר ממני את הגזירה.

אבל אותם ימים של דאגתם לא היו אוזני פקוחות לשמע דיבורם, ונעשתה שפתי חירשת ונעשה לי מבטאם זר ומרוחק, ונהייתי איך חולפים כך וכך היִרְחִים ונבואות זוגתי מתגשמות ומשתנים רחובות ירושלים, רק הורי נשארים לבד עם אי-השתנותם. וגיליתי את אוזני זוגתי, אמרתי לה התחלתי כותב את סיפורי פְּאוֹתִיּוֹת הָעֶרְבִיּוֹת, שוב יזדעזעו במדורים החשובים. והיא אחרי מספר ימים חזרה הביתה לספר כי צחקו ראשי המדורים, אמרו, יכתוב כך, יכתוב סיפורים שרק הוא יוכל לקרוא, לא יקראו בו הוריו או ילדיו, וגם ילדינו לא ייפלו בסכנה, ואנחנו נעניק לו, אם יבקש, את כל פרסי ראש-הממשלה לספרות ערבית בלי שנקרא מילה מתוך ספריו.

וצדקו כמובן ראשי המדורים, וזוגתי החלה מתנבאת על המציאות בפתגמים סְפִינּוֹלִיִּים, אומרת לי פתגם זה בו אמי היתה משתמשת, אמנם איני זוכרת איך היתה אומרת בשפתה, אך את מבטאה אני זוכרת. זה הביקור האחרון של הבריאות לפני המוות, לחשה ואז החלה מבארת, אלו פרפורי גוסס ולא תחיית מתים, וכבר יודעים בגבוהים שבמדורים, החליטו כי אפשר להירגע, יִתְּנו את המשרות בדיבור העברי הנכון, ויחשוב כל אחד למקורות פרנסתו וכלכלת ימיו ודוחק משפחתו, ואז תשוב העברית הרגילה כמו לא היתה כאן מגיפה.

4.

## קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

ולבי התחיל נותן בקולותי סימנים, אומר זה קולי וזה אינו קולי, זאת לְמִ"ד יוצאת מפי וזאת קו"ף זרה זרה היא ללבי. והייתי מאט את קצב מחשבותי, כדי לחשוב, לחשוב גם על מחשבותי ולא רק את מחשבותי, אבל עת לא היתה לי, והייתי זורה מילים לרוח כמו המלח של הים אשר ודאי איש לא זורה אותו אל תוך הים. והיה סבי מדבר אלי, שואל אותי בקולי האם יש סוף לסיפור הזה, ומה היסטוריה זו שלי מתערבת בשלף, איך באתי להפר חייך, אני דור מדבר ואיך אתה קם לחדש אותי, אתה הדור חיכינו אותו שלא יהיה מבדיל בין עברו לעבר מוריו, כי כבר כאב מאוד עברנו, ונשארתי במדבר למאכל עופות דורסים בשבילך, כדי שלא תזכור אותי, שלא תהיה כואב כמוני, ואיך שיניך נוגסות שוב את מילותי, ואיפה, מחוזות ירושלים אחרים, אין בתי-תה, אין חידקל חוצה את העיר לרחמים, אבל אני לא מצאתי את מותי בירושלים, גם לא בעיר הולדתי, אני מת במדבר שביניהן, הרבה מדבר שתיקה.

בנה אגפים בלבך, נכדי, היה אומר לי, עשה אותו מדורים מדורים, ושפן אותי באחד המדורים הנחבאים, ובשאר המדורים חייה. או עבור למדור השתיקה, כי השינוי אשר חיפשתי כי מתחולל פשוט מדי, ואם ידובר מבטא אחר מה ישתנה, האם אחיה שוב, האם תחיה אתה את חיי חדשים? די לך מן הרחובות, לך אל הוריך, אותם לא ישכנע מבטאי, הם מכירים אותו וכבר הניפו אלף מרידות. אולי שתיקה תשים בלבם פחד ההווה מן העבר והעתיד. ולמה לא תראה להם את סיפורך, אולי כך יתעוררו, אמר סבי כמעט משביע אותי מן המתים.

והתחלתי מודד את שתיקותי, זאת שתיקת יום, זאת שתיקת שבוע, זאת שתיקת חודש ממוסגרת היטב בתוך קירות הבית, ואין פוצה פה, אין חלון פוצה, ואין אוויר נכנס, ואין תמונות החול מגיעות אבל אין גם קודש, ואין מחסיר, ואין מוסיף. והכול הקול שתיקותי, שתיקותי הרבה מילים הרבה מילים נשקקות, ואין אני הווה, ואין מתהווה, ואין גמר סוף הסיפור, ואין כבר טרם שהיה הסיפור, אין התחלה. ושתיקתי עוד ועוד הרבה זמנים, עד שהורי היו אומרים דבר, אם לא תדבר איך תקבל מלגה איך תמשיך בלימודיך ומה תעשה עם חייך, ואיה חיוכיך, לאן הלכו מקום מסתור, דבר, דבר בכל מבטא כי בא עלינו פחד השתיקה.

5.

אין חידקל חוצה את ירושלים, והמייתו לא משתיקה את הגבולות הקמים עלינו, הגבולים המפרידים ביני לבין עצמי, אני לא שם לא כאן, לא מזרח לא מערב לא מזרח במערב לא מערב במזרח, לא קולי עכשיו ולא קולות עברי, ומה יהיה בסוף. אילם אני הולך ברחובות וגם מעט חירש, הפעם רק חזותי טורדת את השוטרים, רק זקני העבות, ועקשנותי לא להוציא מילה מפי, שוב חודש תמוז הולך גוע בתוכי, ולמרות החום אני מתעטף במעילים לכסות על חגורות הנפץ של לבי. וכך מתוך נאמנות השוטרים למשימתם אני מובא אל בית-המעצר והורי באים אחרי, לראות את בנם ואנה הוא מובל.

אני שותק מול הורי, ואיך יגיבו, אני שותק מול הורי ומוסר להם את כל סיפורי שהסתרתי מהם, רומז הנה כאן כתבתי עליך אמא, וכאן עליך אבא. הנה אני כותב שירי התנגדות לעברית לעברית, אני מרבה את רמזי, כי אין לי שפה אחרת לכתוב בה, מרוב בושה לא הורשתם לי דבר. והזמן הזה אוסר עלי

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שירה בזמן שהם מתגודדים עלי גדודים גדודים, מתגודדים גם עליכם, והשפה שהיתה לשפתי מצווה עלי להשתפך בה, להיות חליל ריק למשביה, עד שנפיק ביחד צליל, נהיה נאי צרוד יחדיו, נתחזה שפה אחרת, נעדרת. וזה באמת אותו סיפור שוב ושוב חוזר, כמה סיפורים יש לי, אמא אבא, כמה סיפורים יש לאדם, אותו סיפור הוא מנסה לספר כל פעם במילים מעט שונות, כל פעם מנסה לפתור מעט אחר את אותו סיפור בלתי-נפתר, והאם אין אתם מזהים כאן גם את סיפורכם, בכל זאת מעט סיפרה לי שתיקתכם. הנה עכשיו ניסיתי לכתוב את הסיפור במבטא הערבי, אך מה עלה מכך, תראו היכן אנחנו נפגשים. קחו, קראו את סיפורי, אמא אבא, קראו את כל סיפורי שכך הסתרתי מכם שנים רבות, הרי גם אתם אותה גלות, אותה שתיקה, אותה זרות בין לב לגוף ובין מחשבה לדיבור, אולי תדעו כיצד תיפתר העלילה.

והורי דיבור ראשון התכחשו, אמר אבא לא זה בננו ולא זה הנקן אותו גידלנו, אמרה אמא ואיפה, לנו אין מבטא הזה, אמרו ביחד לפקידים לא היה לו מאין לרשת מבטא זה, לא מן המשפחה הפנימית, סבא שלו אגוואר מת טרם לידתו, בן שלנו לא. דיבור שני רמזו, ואם לא תיטיב שאת נשוב הביתה ממתקן הכליאה מאוכזבי דורות, ואם תיטיב שאת ותעזוב את הסיפורים, את הסיפור הזה, את הדיבור הזה והשתיקה הזאת ותדבר עמנו בשפתנו, נשאר כאן עמך עד שתהיה נידון לצאת לחופשי, עד שנהיה כולנו יחד נידונים.

ולא ידעו הורי כי שבתי אל לבם, לא ידעו, ולא ידעו כי פחדיהם כולם שבו עלי, לא ידעו.

## Shrinking / Almog Behar

Translated by Sondra Silverston

At night, she often suggests that I shrink myself so that I can hide inside her. I would hide her inside me if I could, so I make myself relax, and shrink. I try to enter the gate of her body many times, but don't shrink enough, so it hurts and she blinks as if she's about to retract her suggestion so I ask could you please soften yourself to make it easier for me. And she slowly draws me back inside her bustling uterus filled with sounds like the breathing of the sea. And when most of my body is already inside her I ask whether after all of me is inside her I can expand again and return to the world, and she envelops my body with the soft muscles of her flesh making me limp and my question irrelevant, and the parts of my body left outside also find room inside her. And suddenly the navel opens again the mouth closes again my blood flows to the rhythm of her heartbeat again. And I learn how to suck her nipples from inside and my hand moves to stroke the pulsing core of her pleasure, and I am happy to see her begin to spill out of the taut skin of her everyday life, less cautious than she was before I shrank.

But a few weeks pass and I begin to worry that I may have shrunk too much I might not be enough to satisfy her large body. I start to prepare for the following nights when she might offer her body to men who still haven't shrunk. I recite erotic stories into her sleep and see how her body stretches how her blood glistens how her head falls back onto the pillow and all the rivers of her body awaken in a storm of dreams. Many nights I create whirlpools inside her but they gradually grow smaller until even I don't feel them. And one night, I'm happy when her body fills with alcohol that floats me on its fumes between her liver and her lungs. Then I'm sad to discover that another man bigger than I am now is banging at the gates of her body hard enough to bring them down. In a desperate attempt to defend my fortress I attack his huge organ in the darkness but my blows elicit only a growing crescendo of cries of pleasure at the beating of my frail fists. Admitting my failure to drive him away I retreat and stand like a goalkeeper to stop his sperm as they gallop towards her egg and my body is pierced by thousands of seeds till they fall dead and I drift happily into sleep because her uterus has not been filled with new life.

Several nights pass and again I hear her in her sleep suggesting this time to him that he shrink himself so he can hide inside her body and he tries for many hours, hurting



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himself but unable to do it, his muscles are too solid his arms too thick. And in the morning he passes over the threshold so small soft exhausted that I'm quick to take pity on him and bring him to the uterus bed and the nipple tears. He's slightly surprised by my presence and my naked body, already used to being alone inside her dark body, but he puts himself in my hands. After several nights we are already friends and I teach him all the secrets of her body: the places to keep away from and the places to move close to and what is to his benefit and what to her benefit. And we switch all the time – he sucks her breasts from inside then I do, he rests in her uterus then I do, he rubs her vaginal lips and I listen to the music of her heartbeat, I stick my head out through her pubic curls for a breath of air and he moves closer to her head to hear her dreams. And when a new man arrives we aren't afraid, we strike his huge organ together not in hate but in joy and encourage his pleasure and hers, then we both battle the flood of seeds attacking a new egg and keep our place free of multiplying children, wait for him to shrink and join us.

And when he arrives new and shrunk in her body we welcome him with understanding and undress his weary body together, carry him to the uterus together, rub him with oils and perfumes and let him sleep the sleep of the just. Later, when he wakes up we instruct him in the ways of our life and tell him to be aware of the inside of his body, there are no longer any bones, everything inside it and around it is soft and squishy he has to be less cautious when falling. We tell him about biting the organs of new men and stopping the seeds and we explain that each of us in turn sucks and each of us in turn climbs through her honey vaginal lips and then returns diving deep inside her.

A year has passed and there are almost twenty of us and we're multiplying moving around all the part of her body and each of us makes do with one-twentieth of her milk and one-twentieth of resting time in her uterus and one-twentieth of the pleasures of her lips and the dreams in her mind and the beating of her heart. Some have wandered all the way to her feet and occasionally we don't see them for weeks until it's their turn to stand as goalkeepers defending her uterus against the attacking seeds, and then we welcome the new man undress him and smile reassuringly at him. When we aren't at one of our posts we spend our free time sitting in the chambers of her heart playing backgammon and checkers and think happy thoughts about our little lives inside her to bring her joy and we guess who the next man to join us will be and worry about what will happen when there are one hundred of us. None of us misses

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the time before we shrank maybe only when we dream at night and picture women the same size as we are, women we don't have to share with others.

## התכווצויות

פלילות היא מציעה לי לכווץ את עצמי כך שאוכל להסתתר בתוכה. גם אני הייתי מסתיר אותה בתוכי לו יכולתי, אני מרגיע את עצמי ומתכווץ. אבל פעמים רבות קורה שהתכווצותי אינה מספקת וכואבת לי הכניסה בשער גופה והיא ממצמצת כאילו עומדת לחזור בה מהצעתה אז אני מבקש אולי תקל עלי ברכותה. והיא אט-אט קולטת אותי בחזרה אל תוך רחמה ההומה המלא קולות כמו נשימות של ים. וכשרוב איברי כבר בתוכה אני שואל אותה האם כשאהיה כולי בגופה אוכל לחזור ולהתרחב ולצאת לאוויר העולם, והיא עוטפת את גופי בשרירי בשרה הרכים המשרים על גופי רפיון ופותרים אותי מן הצורך להתעמת עם השאלה, וכל שאר איברי שנותרו בחוץ גם הם מוצאים מקום בתוכה. ופתאום שוב הטבור נפתח שוב הפה נסגר שוב מחזור הדם שלי מתאים עצמו לקצב פעימותיה. ואני לומד איך אפשר לינוק מן הפטמות גם מבפנים וידי נשלחת ללטף את לב הנאתה הפועם, ואני שמח לראות איך היא מתחילה להישפך החוצה מתוך הקליפה היציבה של חיי היומיום שלה, פחות זהירה משהיתה לפני התכווצותי.

אבל כמה שבועות עוברים ואני מתחיל פוחד אולי התכווצתי יותר מדי אולי גופה הגדול לא יוכל להסתפק רק בי. ואני מתחיל להתכווץ ללילות הבאים אולי בהם היא תציע את גופה לגברים שעוד לא התכווצו. אני מתחיל לדקלם לה סיפורים ארוטיים אל תוך שנתה רואה כיצד גופה נמתח כיצד דמה מבריק כיצד ראשה נופל אחור שפוף על הכרית וכל נהרות גופה מתעוררים בגעש חלומות. כך הרבה לילות אני עושה בה מערבולות אך הן הולכות וקטנות עד שגם אני איני מרגיש בהן. ולילה אחד אני שמח איך גופה מתמלא אלכוהול איך אדיו גורמים לגופי לרחף בין הכבד לריאות. ואז מתעצב כשמתגלה לי שגבר אחר עכשיו גדול ממני דופק בשערי גופה להפילם. בניסיון נואש להגן על מבצרי אני מתנפל בחשכה על איברו הענק אך כל מכה שלי נענית בצעקות המתגברות שלהם הנהנות מאגרופי הדקיקים. מודה בכישלונני להדוף אותו כליל אני נסוג ומתייצב כשוער לעצור את שעטת זרעיו אל הביצית וגופי נדקר על-ידי אלפי זרעונים עד שהם נופלים מתים ואני נרדם שמח כי לא יתמלא רחמה בחיים חדשים.

כמה לילות עוברים ושוב אני שומע אותה מציעה מתוך שנתה הפעם לו לכווץ עצמו כך שיוכל להסתתר בפנים גופה והוא מנסה הרבה שעות, כואב ולא מצליח, שריריו מוצקים מדי זרועותיו עבות מדי. ובבוקר הוא עובר את המפתן הרך קטן מותש כל-כך עד שאני ממהר לחמול עליו ולהביאו אל מיטת הרחם ואל דמעות הפטמות. והוא רק משתאה מעט על נוכחותי מולו ועל מערומי גופי שהתרגל לחיות לבד בתוך גופה החשוף אך מפקיר את כל גופו בידי. ואחרי כמה לילות אנחנו כבר חברים ואני מלמד אותו את כל סודות הגוף: מהיכן רצוי להתרחק ולאן כדאי להתקרב ומה לתועלתו ומה לתועלתה. וכל הימים אנחנו מתחלפים – פעם הוא יונק מפנים שדיה ופעם אני יונק, פעם הוא נח ברחמה ופעם אני נח, פעם הוא מתחכך בשפתי ערוותה ואני מקשיב למוזיקה של פעימות לבה, ופעם אני מוציא את ראשי נושם אוויר בין תלתלי ערוותה והוא מתקרב לראשה לשמוע את חלומותיה. וכשמגיע גבר חדש שוב איננו פוחדים, אנחנו מכים יחדיו באיברו הענק לא בשנאה בשמחה וממריצים הנאתו והנאתה, ואז נלחמים שנינו בשטף

### קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

הזרעונים התוקפים ביצית חדשה ומצילים את מקומנו מפני ריבוי הילדים, ממתינים לו שיצטרף אלינו מכוון.

וכשהוא מגיע חדש ומכוון אל תוך גופה אנחנו מקבלים אותו שנינו בהבנה ומפשיטים ביחד את גופו המותש, סוחבים אותו יחד אל הרחם, מורחים עליו שמנים ובשמים ומניחים לו לישון שנת ישרים. ואחר-כך כשהוא מתעורר אנו מדריכים אותו באופני חינו ומספרים לו כי ישים לב לפנים גופו, כבר אין בו עצמות, כבר הכול רך תוכו וסביבו רכים וריריים צריך להיזהר פחות בנפילה. ואנחנו מספרים לו על שליחת הנגיסות באיברי הגברים הזרים ועצירת הזרעונים ומסבירים כי כל אחד בתורו יונק ובתורו מטפס אל חוץ שפתי דבש ערוותה ואז חוזר צולל ומעמיק.

שנה עברה ואנחנו כבר קרוב לעשרים ומתרבים מסתובבים בכל חלקי גופה וכל אחד מאתנו מסתפק באחד חלקי עשרים החלב שלה ובאחד חלקי עשרים ממנוחת רחמה ומתענוגות שפתייה וגם מחלומות ראשה ופעילות לבה. כמה מאתנו נדדו עד אל כפות רגליה ולעתים אין אנו רואים אותם שבועות עד שמגיעה משמרתם להתייצב למגננה כשוערים מול הזרעונים התוקפים את רחמנו, ואחר-כך הם מקבלים את פני החדש מפשיטים אותו ומעניקים לו חיוכים מרגיעים. כאשר אין אנו באחת המשמרות זמננו פנוי ואנחנו יושבים בחדרי לבה משחקים שש-בש ודמקה וחושבים מחשבות שמחות על חינו הקטנים בתוכה כדי לשמח בהן את לבה מנחשים מי יהיה הבא שיצטרף אלינו וחוששים מה יקרה כאשר נהיה מאה. אף-אחד מאתנו לא מתגעגע לימים שלפני התכווצותו אולי רק כשאנו חולמים בלילות ומדמיינים נשים שגודלן כגודלנו, שאין צורך לחלוק אותן עם אחרים.

## Alas, Baghdad Sits Solitary / Almog Behar

Translated by Lisa Katz

I've been walking the streets of Jerusalem, pungent arak sweat on the back of my neck, trying to avoid the suicidal buses that threaten to take me with them, and the wail of ambulances tearing my ear drums and heart's flesh. My black beard darkens and lengthens from day to day and I accede to its demands, noticing the way my neighbors glance at me in surprise and refusing to grant them comforting smiles in return. My voice is nearly inaudible even to me, and if a stranger approaches me on the street I won't know what to say.

If only my parents and teachers had been stricter with me about learning Arabic poetry, I'd know by heart the words of Nizar Qabbani that ring in my head, without having to depend on the hazy memory of one distant reading. In any case I test my ability and my forgetfulness. As I remember, they go something like this: "Each day, or decade, or year, a different Arabic city kills itself in its distinctive, disparate way, loses its name, attempts to forget its past, or feign its future. From Granada to Jaffa, Beirut and Baghdad, Arab cities commit suicide, and large pillars of black smoke rise up from the chimneys of government palaces toward the emptying skies, signifying their defeat in the victory parade."

But what is the power of translated poetry, of thousands of pages watered down and ceaselessly erased? I know that until I have a command of all the secrets of Arabic letters, those that join together and those that do not, I won't be able to become what I am: a Jewish Arab or an Arab Jew. All the translations into Hebrew and English won't help me, for until I revisit those years when my grandfather spoke Judeo-Arabic in the Baghdadi dialect in tea houses overlooking the Tigris River, until I return to the months before my grandmother's death in Ramat Gan, which was Ramat Baghdad when she began again to speak only Arabic and no Hebrew, until I go back to the days of my mother's childhood when she had the good fortune to hear the many terms of endearment available in Arabic, I can't be a genuine Arab Jew. But 50 years distant from Baghdad have made their mark on me, too; my mother forgot or chose to forget her language, our language, when placed in a Hebrew school and made to soften her guttural, that is, Arabic sounding pronunciation of the Hebrew letters *ayin* and *khet*.

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And now, during my Jerusalem days and nights, perhaps I shouldn't leave the house, better to avoid the streets that have been handed over to buses, and lower my gaze from the sky that has been given over to airplanes. Instead I will confine myself to my room and watch the flickering television screen, tonight's news items casting a bluish light near the white wall: this night's new-ancient war in which darting American warplanes once again light up the black skies of Baghdad. But the television newscasters speak in a military language of machines and bombs that is foreign to me, linking me against my will to army communication networks. Silent archival footage slakes my thirst, broadcasting Baghdad direct to me: the bridges over the Tigris River, Haroun a-Rashid Street, the homes we left behind, and the faces of people similar to me and my family. I respond to Nizar Qabbani in new words of resistance: "Each week, or day, or century, a new Arabic city is born in the dreams of its residents, like Granada, Ramla, Ramallah and Beirut, and tall towers are erected to the call of the muezzin," Sometimes, I join his protest: "Each day or week or decade, another Arab city seeks to be the capital of all Arabs, inheritor of splendid caliphates, and sinks into imperialist dreams that are oblivious to the numerous inhabitants of its suburbs."

Nizar Qabbani bore his exile in suitcases and in words; we don't even bother to hang ours as posters on yellowing walls. Learning about Baghdad from news broadcasts and books, we forget the distant streets and reduce our lives to the new streets. The Baghdad where I was not born, where my mother did not become pregnant with me, from which she was transported as a tender child dressed in a soft *abayah* and taken on an airplane crowded with hope and pain to a country so near and yet so far and filled with the tents and tin sheds of immigrant transit camps—what is the secret of Baghdad's enchantment that sends my thoughts back to it again and again? In my mind's eye I see Qabbani carrying in his suitcases the exiled craft of poetry from Arab city to Arab city, reading his predictions about the future of those cities at their gates and in tea houses, a prophecy of an increasing number of automobiles at crossroads and squares, and the sadistic clashes of racing cars. He secrets the love of women he met in the cities he's left between the pages of his poetry, and speaks like an Arab to Arab women and men, explaining that only crazy people and poets can truly express the exiles that comprise their souls. And I stutter in Hebrew; who will translate my words back into Arabic? Who will hear my longings

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for Iraq in a language that is not Arabic? How will I express these longings in Hebrew?

My grandfather Saleh, now of blessed memory, often used to say to me when I was a child, before he died and took much of the flavor of Baghdad with him and taking also the proper way to drink tea, that it was easier to speak Baghdadi Arabic than Hebrew with *Allah*, and there was no need to run away from God like our prophet Jonah. In Israel he spent his entire life in an attempt to escape the divine language, the cruel Hebrew of the desert and its square Assyrian letters. He explained to me that the Hebrew he knew from the Baghdad synagogue was all right, but this new Hebrew in the mouths of Israelis? What softness they used to veil a great harshness! With what lightness they concealed the most threatening gravity! This is what he said, sharing his sorrow with my grandmother Gurjiya, also now of blessed memory, over leaving their Baghdad and the loss of their former lives. They tried to console the youthful me, confused by their grief: in Baghdad too, you would have been born as you were here, but more Iraqi in your clothes, your accent, your thinking. Meanwhile they have gone, leaving me behind, bound to the tough Hebrew of my parents and friends, lacking Baghdadi Arabic, and with this harsh God who threatens me from windows and dreams. All my life I've been trying to convince Hebrew of my love for it and to please it with false tributes—with endearments to God and my faith in Him. Perhaps the time has come to give up these barren attempts and to change my name, which is so Hebrew and so new, to Saleh, the name of my grandfather, and to change my language to Iraqi Judeo-Arabic, the language of my grandfather, until I achieve some of the Baghdadi lightness of speech with God.

But God is silent now, as always happens during times of war.

איכה ישבה בגדאד

אני הולך ברחובות העיר הזאת כבר כמה חודשים, זיעת עראק חריפה על עורפי, מנסה לחמוק מטינת האוטובוסים המאיימים להתאבד עמי, ומיללות האמבולנסים הקורעים את עור התוף ואת בשר לבי. זקני שחור משחיר ומאריך פני מיום ליום, ואני נכנע לדרישות שהוא מציב לי, רואה כיצד שכני שולחים בי מבטים מבוהלים, ומסרב להעניק להם חסד חיוכים מרגיעים. וקולי שלי עתה בלתי-נשמע גם לעצמי, ואם יפנה אלי זר ברחוב לא אדע מה לענות.

לו היו הורי או מורי מקפידים עמי יותר על לימוד השירה הערבית, הייתי יודע לצטט עכשיו על-פה את מילותיו של ניזאר קבאני המצלצלות בראשי, בלי שאצטרך להיות נסמך על טשטוש זיכרוני מן הקריאה האחת, הרחוקה. ובכל זאת אני מנסה את כוחי ואת השכחה שלי: "כל יום, או עשור, או שנה, מתאבדת עיר ערבית אחרת בדרכה המיוחדת, המשונה, מאבדת את שמה, מנסה לשכוח את עברה, או לזייף את עתידה. מגרנדה, ועד יאפא, פירות ופגנדאד, הערים הערביות מאבדות עצמן לדעת, מעלות תימרות עשן שחור מלב ארמונות המושלים אל השמים המתרוקנים, ומסמנות את תבוסתן בתהלוכות של מנצחים".

אבל מה כוחה של שירה מתורגמת, ומה כוחם של אלפי דפים שנטבלו במים עד ריכוכם האינסופי? אני יודע שעד שלא אשלוט בכל רזי האותיות הערביות, המתחברות ושאינן מתחברות, לא אוכל לשוב ולהפוך להיות מה שהנני, ערבי-יהודי או יהודי-ערבי. ולא יעזרו לי כל התרגומים לעברית ולאנגלית, כי עד שלא אשוב לאותן שנים בהן דיבר סבי ערבית-יהודית בניב בגדאדי בבתי-התה שעל שפת החידקל, עד שלא אשוב לחודשים שלפני מותה של סבתי ברמת-גן, היא רמת-בגדאד, בהם חזרה לדבר רק ערבית, בלי עברית, עד שלא אשוב אל ימי ילדותה של אמי בהם זכו אוזניה לשמוע את כל שמות החיבה האפשריים בערבית, לא אוכל להיות ערבי אמיתי. אבל חמישים שנה של ישיבה הרחק מבגדאד כבר נתנו בי את אותותיהם, ואמי כבר שכחה או בחרה לשכוח את שפתה, שפתנו, כשהוכנסה אל בית-הספר העברי ונדרשה להקל מכובדן של העי"ן והתי"ת.

ועכשיו ימי ולילותי ירושלמיים, ואולי כדאי לי לא לצאת את פתח הבית, ולהימנע מן הרחובות, כי אלו ניתנו לאוטובוסים, ולהסיר מבטי מן השמים, כי אלו ניתנו למטוסים בינתיים. ובמקום זאת אסתגר בחדרי המצומצם, ואצפה במסך הטלוויזיה הממצמץ באורו הצבעוני-כחלחל בסמוך לקיר הלבן את ידיעות הלילה ההווה הזה, לילה של מלחמה חדשה נושנה, בה מטוסים אמריקאיים חמקניים שוב מדליקים את שמיה השחורים של בגדאד. אבל קרייני הטלוויזיה מדברים אלי שפה צבאית של מכונות ושל פצצות, הזרה לשפתי, ומחברים אותי בעל-כורחי אל רשתות הקשר של הצבאות. ואני שותה פצימאון את תמונות הארכיון השותקות, המשדרות לי את בגדאד, את הגשרים על החידקל, את רחוב הארון אל-רשיד, את הבתים אותם עזבנו, ואת פרצופי האנשים הדומים כל-כך לפרצופי ולפרצופי משפחתי. ואני שר לניזאר קבאני במילים חדשות של התנגדות: "כל שבוע, או יום, או מאה, גם נולדת עיר ערבית חדשה בחלומות יושביה, כמו גרנדה, רמלה, רמאללה ופירות, ומקימה בלבה מגדלים גבוהים לקריאות מואזין". בימים אחרים הייתי יודע גם להצטרף למחאתו: "כל יום, או שבוע, או עשור, עיר ערבית אחרת מבקשת להיות



## קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

בירת כל הערבים, יורשת לְחַ'ליפות המפוארת, ושוקעת בחלומות אימפריאליים המשכיחים ממנה את יושבי פרבריה המרובים".

ניזאר קבאני נשא עמו את גלותו בְּמזוודות וְכְמילים, ואנחנו לא תולים אותה אפילו כפוסטרים על הקירות המצהיבים, לומדים על בגדאד משידורי החדשות ומן הספרים, ושוכחים את רחובותיה הרחוקים, מצמצמים את חיינו לרחובותינו החדשים. ובגדאד זו שלא נולדתי בה, שלא הרתה אותי בה אמי, שהובהלה ממנה אמי כילדה רכת עֶבְיָה ושנים במטוס צָפוֹף תקוות וכאבים לְאַרץ קרובה-רחוקה המלאה באוהלים ובפחונים צרים, מה הוא סוד הקסם שלה המחזיר אותי אליה כל הזמן בְּמחשבה? אני רואה בראשי את ניזאר קבאני נושא עמו במזוודות את גלות מלאכת השירה בין הערים הערביות, מקריא בשערים ובבתי-התה שירים ונבואות על עתידות כל הערים הערביות, על התרבותם של כלי-הרכב בצמתים ובכיכרות, על ההתנגשויות הסדיסטיות בין מכוניות המרוץ הארורות. הוא מצפין בין דפיו שירי אהבה לנשים שפגש ולערים שעזב, ומדבר כערבי אל הערבים והערביות, מסביר שרק המטורפים והמשוררים מיטיבים לבטא את הגלויות המרכיבות את נשמתם. ואילו אני מגמגם עברית, ומי יתרגם את מילותי חזרה אל הערבית? מי ישמע את געגועי אל המולדת העיראקית בשפה שאינה ערבית? איך אצליח לבטא את הגעגועים הללו בעברית?

סבא שלי, צֶאֱלַח, כבר זיכרוננו לברכה, היה אומר לי לא פעם בילדותי, לפני שנפטר ולקח עמו הרבה מטעמה של בגדאד, וְאַתָּה גם את הדרך בה ראוי לשתות את התה, שעם הערבית העיראקית היה קל יותר לדבר עם אללה, ולא היה צורך לברוח ממנו כמו נביאנו יונה. וְכֶאַרץ חיים שלמים הוא כילה בניסיון לחמוק משפת האלוהים, מן העברית האכזרית של המדבר ואותיותיה האשוריות המרובעות. מילא, הוא היה מסביר לי, העברית של בית-הכנסת שעוד הכרנו בבגדאד, אבל העברית החדשה הזאת של הישראלים? באיזו רכות הם מסתירים את הקִשְׁיוֹת הגדולה מכל? באיזו קלות הם מחביאים את הרצינות האיומה מכל? כך הוא היה אומר ומצטער יחד עם סבתי גוֹרְגִ'יָה, גם היא כל זיכרונה כבר לברכה, על עזיבת בגדאד שלהם וכל אובדן חייהם הקודמים. גם בבגדאד, היו הם מנסים לנחם אותי הקטן המבולבל מצערם, היית נולד כפי שהנך, רק עיראקי יותר בלבוש, במבטא, במחשבה. ובינתיים הם הלכו והותירו אותי כאן כבול אל העברית הקשה הזאת של הוֹרֵי וחבְרֵי, החסרה את הערבית הבגדאדית, ועם אלוהים הקשה, המאיים עלי דרך כל החלונות והחלומות. וכל ימי אני מנסה לשכנע את העברית באהבתי לה, ומנסה לרצותה במנחות שווא של מילות חיבה לְאֵל ושל אמונה בו. אולי הגיע כבר הזמן שאוותר על כל הניסיונות העקרים הללו, אשנה את שמי העברי כל-כך, והחדש כל-כך, לצאלח, כשמו של סבי, ואחליף את שפתי לערבית היהודית העיראקית, כשפת סבי, עד שאשיג מעט מן הקלות הבגדאדית בְּדיבור אֵל הָאֵל?

אבל אלוהים שותק לי עכשיו, כפי שקורה תמיד בזמנים של מלחמות. ואני לא מסוגל לצאת אל הרחובות. לא יודע איך אענה על שאלות האנשים הסובבים אותי, על משחקה של אמריקה ועל גורלה של עיראק. וכך יום-יום אני מתעורר, ושותפתי לשינה פוקחת עלי את עיניה החומות, ואני יודע שאם היו לה בלילה חלומות של גלות הם כוונו אל מרחבי פולנו-אוקראינָה, ולא אל אגדות בבליות. אבל אני גם יודע שלה אין כנראה געגועים לשם, אל כל המולדות בהן לא נולדנו, אל כל הגלויות מהן גלינו. כל החורף היא

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הכינה לנו מרקים סמיכים, כדי לפרנס את שירתי, ועתה היא מתפללת שלא יבוא קיץ להפריע את אהבתנו. היא שותלת סביבנו פרחים בהמון צבעים, וכשאני מתבונן במבט עשן הסיגריה שלה, הממוסגר בין ריסי מרציפן, לפעמים נדמה לי שאני מצליח לקרוא את מחשבותיה וחששותיה.

אני מציץ בה מן הצד עומדת שעות ארוכות מול המראה, מתבוננת בריכוז עצום בעצמה ומתלבטת, ואני מרגיש שבראשה מתגלגלים ויכוחים עזים בינינו, שבסופם היא נואמת לקהל הדמיוני שלה. וגם אני עומד בביתי ארוכות מול המראה, בצאתי מן המקלחת, ואז אני נושא פקול את כל אותם נאומים שאני מדמיין שעוברים בראשה, ומספר לעצמי בשמה: "הוא חוזר בתשובה. ככה לפחות נראה לי. כבר חודשיים שלושה שהוא מגדל זקן, ועדיין אין לו כיפה, אבל אני יודעת שזה רק עדיין... כל שבת הוא הולך בערב ובבוקר לבית-הכנסת הקטן שמול הבית שלי, שם כיפה לבנה קטנה על הראש, ואני רואה איך הוא ייראה עוד כמה שנים, עם הזקן השחור הגדול, והכיפה שתהיה שחורה עוד יותר מן הזקן וגדולה... והוא תמיד אומר לי כשהוא חוזר מהתפילה, שלתפילות של בתי-הכנסת הספרדיים של שכונת נחלאות הוא התגעגע כל החיים. ואני תמיד אומרת לו: מה אתה כל-כך מתגעגע לתפילה? מתי בכלל התפללת בחיידך? והוא עונה לי לפעמים בתשובות קצרות שרק מרגיזות אותי. הוא אומר: אתם האשכנזים שכחתם. אתם האשכנזים... הוא מהמזרחים החדשים האלו, שאחרי חיים שלמים שחיו בכפר-סבא ושמעו אריק איינשטיין ובוב דילן וכל מיני להקות של רוק מתקדם, פתאום קראו כמה ספרים של שמעון בלס ושירים של ארז ביטון והתחילו להקשיב לשירים האינסופיים של אום פול'ום ולדבר על זהות יהודית-ערבית. מאז שאני אָתו הוא קונה את כל הדיסקים שהוא מוצא של מוניר פֶּאשִיר, והולך להופעות של כל התזמורות האנדלוסיות למיניהן, ומנסה לבטא את העי"ן בכל מיני מילים, וזה קצת מצחיק כי הדיבור שלו יותר רך משלי, ולפעמים, בטעות, האל"ף שלו יוצאת כמו עי"ן גרונית מרוב מאמץ לדבר מזרחית. ועוד מעט הוא ילמד ערבית ואולי גם ספניולית כדי להתחבר לשורשים שלו, ובטח הוא גם ירצה לדבר ככה עם הילדים שלנו, כלומר, אם יהיו לנו, והוא לא זוכר בכלל שהוא גם רבע אשכנזי, שיש לו סבתא מדרום גרמניה, ושהוא צריך ללמוד לדבר גם גרמנית. אני אשכנזייה נטו, מתחום המושב של היידיש שבין אוקראינה לפולין, אבל יש לי לב של עיראקית. אני מכינה לו סֶמְפוֹסֶק עם חומוסים שקילפתי בידיים שלי ממש, ומרק קוֹפָה צמחוני כי הוא לא אוכל בשר, ואני לא חושבת שהוא יותר מזרחי ממני, הוא שלא נכנס למסעדות של ערבים כי הן לא כשרות. זה מה שיעשה אותו מזרחי, זה שהוא הולך לבית-כנסת או מגדל זקן או מהלל באוזני את המוזיקה הערבית וסיפורי אלף לילה ולילה? ועוד מעט הוא יחזור לי בתשובה, ויחשוב שהוא יותר טהור ממני ולא ייגע בי כשייזל לי דם בין הרגליים... ונראה לי שהוא בכלל לא מאמין באלוהים. גם אני לא מאמינה באלוהים".

לפעמים אני מדמיין שהורי היו שניהם עולים כל לילה מלילות הקיץ בבגדאד לישון על הגגות, למרות שאבי נולד הרחק משם באירופה, בן לניצולי שואה ששפתם ספרדית-יהודית וגרמנית. לעתים אני מדמיין גם את עצמי ישן שם ביניהם על הגגות כתינוק, מביט על כל הכוכבים והמזלות שבשמים, למרות שנולדתי כל-כולי בבית-חולים בתל-אביב. ובזמן ההווה סביבי עכשיו אני מדמיין אותנו כמשפחה בגדאדית המחפשת מסתור כל לילה מן הפצצות הנופלות. אבל איך אני יכול לספר על הדמיונות הללו לאנשים סביבי? אפילו אמי, שסיפרה לי שהיא ואחיותיה התחילו לדבר על האפשרות של עריכת ביקור

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תיירותי בארץ מולדתן כפולת הנהרות, בחסות הכיבוש האמריקאי המתקרב, לא הבינה אותי כשאמרתי לה שאני לא חושב שאחזור לבגדאד בקרוב, כל עוד היא תהא שבויה ביד זרים. איך תחזור? היא מיהרה כל-כך לשאול אותי והמשיכה, הרי מעולם לא היית שם, ולמה תחזור? החיים שלך הם כאן, ובגדאד לא צריכה לעניין אותך. ואני לא ידעתי איך אסביר לה שבגדאד שלה היא גם שלי, למרות מה שהיא אמרה בזמן מלחמתה הקודמת של אמריקה בעיראק, כשנפלו טילים לא הרחק מביתנו והיא הודיעה שבגדאד זאת בגידה. אני כל-כך רוצה להיות שם, בעירם של אבו-נוואס וג'עפר אַל-בַּרְמַכִּי ורבנו יוסף חיים, אבל גם מפחד לראות בעיני מה הסתתר מאחורי כל המילים בספרים והדיבורים בארוחות המשפחתיות. ומה אם לא אוהב את הרחובות או האנשים? ומה אם הם לא ישמחו על חזרתי? ומה אם יתעוררו בי בבגדאד געגועים לירושלים? האם אכתוב אותם בערבית או בעברית?

בינתיים אני מחכה בשקט, בלילות הללו של ההפצצות, נזכר בשיריו של ניזאר קבאני על דמשק ובירות, וכותב שירים משלי. אני כותב את גלותי אל תוך השירים, ויודע שבשונה מניזאר קבאני אנחנו לא יושבים על המזוודות, ולא ממתנינים לרכבת הימים. כבר שכחנו אותה. מלתעות איזה זמן אוחזות בנו, אוחזות גם בי ומושכות אותי להיבלע בהן ולהשקיט את סיפורי, את כל סיפורי ההולכים בי. ובלילות אני מקשיב לקצב פעימות לבי וקצב פעימות לבה של אהובתי, מתרעם על שערות ראשי הנושרות בין הדפים, ושמח כאשר מתוך שנתה היא מגלה לי את כל סודות אהבתה. ולפעמים אני רוצה לומר לאהובתי "אַנָּא בְּחִיבָּךְ", אבל מתבייש ונבוך אני מתאפק ואומר לה רק "אני בחיבה כלפיך". ומאז נכנס חודש אדר אנחנו מרבים כְּעֵס ובהתקוטטויות. היא תובעת לדעת מתי נעבור לגור יחד בדירה אחת, ונפסיק לנדוד בין מקומי למקומה. ואני אומר לה בהתחמקות שעדיין איני בטוח אם אני רוצה לגור בעיר הזאת, הממלאה את לבה באיבה ומקיפה את עצמה בחומות ובהרים נישאים של קברים, וחושב בראשי שהיא, אהובתי, עדיין לא מוכנה לשמוע את פִּירוּז, זְמִירַת הלבנון, שרה כשאנחנו מתקלחים, ואני, אהובה, עדיין לא מוכן לקצץ את ציפורני יְדֵי ורגלי לפני שהן מתארכות ומותירות כל לילה שריטות בכל פינות גופה. ועדיין, הולכת בינינו הרבה חיבה של בצלים, של התקלפויות, של ריחות בכי עדינים ואהבה חורפית. ואנחנו מעבירים את זמננו באכילה בלילות ובימים, מתאמנים בהתפחת כרסים ובהריונות קטנים. ומעט לפני השינה אני מודה לָאל על כל איבר מאיברי גופה של אהובתי, וכשהיא נרדמת אני לוחש באוזנה: את לִילָא ואני מְגִ'נוּן.

ובוקר אחד, אחרי כמעט שבוע של מלחמה, היא מעירה אותי בפרצוף רציני, מוציאה אותי מן השינה ומושיבה אותי לאכול אֶתה כדי לומר לי במונולוג דברים שחשבה בשעות ארוכות של ערות: "לא מספיק שאתה הופך לי לדתי, לאחרונה החלטת שאתה ערבי, ערבי-יהודי, באמצע כל המלחמות האלו והפיצוצים שם וכאן. ואני שמחה שיש לך חברים פלסטינים שלוקחים אותך אֶתם אל בתי לִיפְתָא הנטושים ומנגנים בעוד ועושים לך טוב על הנשמה, וככה אתה יכול לדמיין לעצמך מדי פעם שאתה שוב יושב בבתי-התה של בגדאד. ואני מחייכת כשאתה מתייחס אל מחמוד דרוויש בתואר "אח שלי" ומקריא לי תרגומים נוראיים של שירת הג'אֶהְלִיָּה. אבל איך אני יכולה לחייך כשאתה יוצא עם הדמיונות האלו לרחוב, עם שער הראש השחור והזקן השחור והחלומות העיראקיים-פלסטיניים, כשבחוץ משתוללות שתי מלחמות ובסוף אתה עוד תקבל כדור תועה שלא נועד לך, במלחמות חסרות השמות הממלאות כאן את האוויר. אמרתי לך להתגלח, וגם שלושה שוטרים של משטרת ישראל שניגשו אליך כדי לבדוק לך

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תעודות באמצע הרחוב המליצו לך להתגלח כשהבינו שאתה יהודי. אבל אתה עקשן. כל הבקשות שלנו רק מחזקות את ההתנגדות שלך. אבל מילא, תהיה דתי וערבי בו-זמנית, ותנסה לקחת אותי להופעות של התזמורת הערבית של נצרת ושל אָמל מוֹרְקוּס, רק תפסיק כבר לדבר כל הזמן על פוליטיקה, נואם לי על הכיבוש כאילו אנחנו חיים בדרום-אפריקה והאשכנזים הם הלבנים, והערבים והמזרחים הם שני שבטים מקופחים שהלבנים ניצלו ועדיין מנצלים ומנסים לסכסך זה בזה, בזמן שהם בעצם צריכים להתאחד ולקבל את זכויותיהם כרוב. אתה רוצה לעשות אֶתם בריתות וקואליציות של מוזיקה ופוליטיקה, ושוכח את הברית שלך אֶתִי".

אמא שלי עשתה את הבחירה שלה בילדותה, בעידוד המורים, והחברים, והצבא, וכל משרדי הממשלה. היא הבינה שעדיף לה לכרות ברית עם האשכנזים, ולשכוח ככל האפשר את קרבתה אל הערבים. וכך היא היתה ממהרת להיכנס בדלת בית הוריה לפנינו בכל פעם שביקרנו שם ומכבה את מכשיר הרדיו אשר שמר על חיבתו לתדרים של הארצות השכנות ושר ערבית. ועל שאלותיהם של אביה ואמה שנאמרו לה בערבית היא היתה עונה בעברית. ואני הייתי לומד את אצילותו של סבא צאלח, את שילוב ידיו מאחורי זקיפות גבו, את תנועות ידיו בקילוף תפוח, את הקפדנות בה סידר את שער הכסוף ואת שפמו הלבן. הייתי לומד את קומתה של סבתא גורג'יה, את עוז רוחה במשחקי קלפים, את געגועיה העזים אל הבית בבגדאד. ובשנים-עשרה השנים שהאריכה לחיות אחרי מותו של צאלח, בהן היא נדדה בין בתי שבעת ילדיה ונזכרה בשש-עשרה שנותיו של צאלח בבגדאד לפני לידתה, היה לבי נופל יחד עם גופה שנה אחר שנה על קברו, וזועק לשובו אל החיים.

ועכשיו, בימים הללו של מלחמת אמריקה-עיראק השנייה, הזקנים אצלנו, שכולם כבר צעירים מסבי, אומרים שבגדאד השתנתה. ואני יודע שזאת דרכם לומר שאנחנו השתנינו, שאנחנו יודעים שלעולם לא נשוב לחיות בבגדאד כקהילה. איש מאתנו לא עומד לחזור לשם, ואפילו הם, זקני וזקנות השבט, רוב חייהם כבר עברו עליהם בישראל. גם אמי אמרה לי יום אחד, כשהפרזתי לטעמה בחקירות על תולדות משפחתנו שם, שהחיים שלנו הם כאן, וביקשה שלא אטעה או אשכח. ואולי הגיע הזמן שלי שאקום ואלך אל הרחובות רמת-גן, ואכנס את כולם, ואציע שאם לא נשוב אל עירנו בגדאד, אזי לפחות נקרא לרחובות רמת-גן בשמות הרחובות בגדאד, וכך יהפוך רחוב בן-גוריון לְשֶׁאֲרִיעַ אֶל-רְשִׁיד.

אבל בחיים אין זמן לפילוסופיה, ואין גם זמן לוויכוחים בעלמא על שמות של רחובות בבגדאד ורמת-גן. איש לא יבוא אחרי לכינוסים דמיוניים שכל כולם מלחמה אבודה מראש על חיותו של זיכרון אשר דרכו, כפי שמסבירים לי כולם, לגווע. לראש-העיר של רמת-גן יש צרות אחרות לשכוח, וכך גם לראש העיר של בגדאד, אני בטוח, וגם לי יש בעיות דחופות יותר להכריע בהן. מכתב שהגיע אלי בדואר בראשית המלחמה מן הצבא במעטפה חומה הטריד את מנוחת התיבה שלי ימים מספר, בלי שיהיה מי שיזיזו ממקומו. רק היום הסכמתי להוציא, וגיליתי צו מילואים שנושא את שמי ודורש את התייצבותי הבהולה לשמירה בעזה. ואני נשארתי בגללו להישען על התיבה, חש את עצב כפות רגלי העייפות, המתלבטות בין ירושלים, עזה ובגדאד, וחשבת: מי סֶכֶסך את ההיסטוריה שלנו, והציב אותי זקיף לאורך מגדלי השמירה הגבוהים הצופים על שערי עזה הכבדים? מי סֶכֶסך את ההיסטוריה שלנו ושלכם כאשר רק לפני פחות משישים שנה ישבנו יחד בבתי-התה והקפה וגלגלנו שיחות בערבית גרונית על יפהפיות

### קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

הנילוס, המגרב והחידקל? מי הלביש אותי מדי צבא ושלה אותי לעמוד מולכם ולשמור עליכם כאשר עלינו להיות אחים? ואיך נהפוך את השערים הכבדים לשערי שירה, כשתחתם עומדים לנו שמשונים מתאבדים המבקשים להפיל עלי ועליכם את כל העמודים והבתים?

צו המילואים, עם חזותו העגמומית ותוכנו הרשמי, הזכיר לי שאיני יכול להישאר עוד בביתי הירושלמי, כלוא בלי יכולת תנועה בכיסאי בין ערימות כבדות של ספרי שירה. צבא הגנה לישראל דורש ממני להכריע לאן אלך. לוי רק יכולתי הייתי הולך מחר לְצ'אִיִּתְאָנָה האחרון, בית-תה עיראקי נסתר באחד מרחובותיה הקטנים של רמת-גן. שם הייתי יושב ומשוחח עם זקני וזקנות העדה הבבלית, עד שהייתי לומד את שפתי ואת כל זיכרונות עירי. אבל אמי סיפרה לי לפני מספר חודשים על מותו העצוב של בעל המקום בגיל תשעים ושלוש. וכך אט-אט מצטמצמות בלבי האפשרויות. אולי קיים בכל זאת עדיין סיכוי בשבילנו, בשבילי ובשבילכם, ערבים-יהודים וערבים-מוסלמים-או-נוצרים, שנחזור לחיות היסטוריה אחת? מחר, מעט לפני שיעלה השחר, אלך אל פתח עירי ירושלים, אל בתי לִיִּפְתָּא הנשפכים במורד ההררי בלי רועה שיכנסם, והם חצי הרוסים, חצי עזובים, קוראים תיגר על השמות החדשים. אקרא משם לכמה מחברי הפלסטינים, אשר עדיין לא ריסנו בלבם את קולות הגעגועים, ולכמה מחברי הבגדאדים, אשר יסכימו להחליף את ערביותם העיראקית בפלסטינית, ויחד אולי נקים את הכפר מחדש. שם בליפתא החדשה נגור יחד אהובתי ואני, אם היא רק תסכים, ונקים צ'איחאנה בגדאדי שבמרכזו מקולים נוסטלגיים שישמיעו את צליל זרימת המים בחידקל, ובכל ערב יפקדו את המקום נגנים של עוד וקאנון ופִּמְנָג'ה ונאי.

ולבי אולי ימצא סוף-סוף את המילים הנכונות לשוב בהן אל האלוהים. לשוב בהן אל לבי

שהסתתר.

**From the Novel "Rachel and Ezekiel" by Almog Behar, chapter 1**

Translated by Dan Cern

Halacha *le-Moshe mi-Sinai* (the law given verbally to Moses at Sinai), that Amnon, the eldest son of David, King of Israel, hates his sister Tamar and that Sarah hates Ishmael. Ezekiel's thoughts drifted as the words of the rabbi kept pouring endlessly into his ears. Trying to recall the loves and hatreds he came across, his head sank forward a bit, closing his eyes with sweet laziness.

Without warning, he started feeling heavier, as a pleasant mist filled his head. His eyes squinted and his body experienced a growing tremble until nap overtook him. His swaying body occasionally bumped into the person sitting next to him in the crowd or into the stool piled with books awakening him into the next sentence the rabbi conveyed, thus enriching his dreams with new ideas.

*Women's wear is not for use by men and vice versa.* The words of the great Torah scholar, Hakham Ovadya, penetrated and integrated into his passing thoughts. Ezekiel recalled that as a child he used to wait all year for the return of the Purim holiday only to put on a fancy women's dress. How his mother urged him once to dress up as a rabbi, a cantor, an insurance agent or go for a magician's costume. How he wept when asking her for a dress and a long smooth hair wig he could caress. He yearned to see her happy for his wish to impersonate her.

Why for heaven's sake, do you always seek the very same costume, his mother asked. One might think that all year round you are dressed in costume and only on Purim do you slip into your real dress. In his disrupted sleep he deliberated who Amnon and Tamar were and why Amnon hated Tamar. As the words of the Hakham kept circling him, he saw in his mind's eye Tamar mourning with ashes overhead, wearing Yosef's torn striped garment, crying her heart out in lonesome agony. Recalling her story, he joined her mourning over Amnon's love which turned into hatred. He despised Amnon. He loathed him as did Amnon's half-brother, Avshalom, who was famous for his beautiful curly hair.

The mere thought he too might end up like *Aminon*, twisting his name with loathe, and other men who could exchange love with hatred after seduction of their own sister terrified his soul. He recalled how Amnon schemed a posture of sickness to draw his pretty virgin sister closer, to ask her *come lie with me* and once performing lewd acts, he asked his servants to *send now this one away from me, outside*.

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The Hakham explained that Amnon hated his sister while *his heart was merry* with the pancakes she had prepared for him. Avshalom hated his brother Amnon when *his heart was merry from wine*. None had Tamar in mind but rather their own pride. Ezekiel wanted to ask whether their father, King David, loved Tamar, Amnon, Avshalom, Jonathan and his 5 year old handicapped son Mefiboshet? And who was Rizpa Bat Aya whose name translates to *floor* or *burning coal* and was King Saul's mistress. Her sons, Mefiboshet and Arimoni, were later handed to the Hivites to appease them. When the Hivites murdered them, she guarded their corpses from being eaten by animals for months. The biblical scripture testified that *she suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night*. The words of the Hakham then resonated. *Such is the reward of Torah studies* he carried on answering questions asked by angels. *This is the Torah to be studied and studying it is mandatory. I must study* echoed Ezekiel's thoughts. He recalled his past years of study, his parents sitting with him in the narrow house in a train long building on Bar Yochai street in the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> sections of the Katamon neighborhood. They would order him to devote himself to the Bar Mitzvah studies shortly before his 13<sup>th</sup> year. When reaching 14, he once told one of his teachers, a red headed Kurdish woman, that his future did not work out for him and there is no point in studying any longer as he has had his share of it. He recalled his beloved childhood synagogue where he held the rim of his father's *tallit* and sang Eliyahu Hanavi and Bar Yochai songs. His father was a saint who treasured the Torah with the greatest affection. He recalled the two weeks after his Bar Mitzvah at which his father blessed him. He stood and placed a heavy hand on his head saying *Blessed is He who has now freed me from the responsibility of this boy*. He perished much too fast after this as if getting rid of a heavy burden with no future goals left to accomplish in this world. His mother stopped his ongoing sobbing by saying *enough, I buried a husband, I have mourned him, Torah will serve as my witness to how much I have cried, but you my boy should eat, should study and draw colorful drawings. Enough with crying all day. Don't forget you also have a mother*. He silenced and thought to himself *I have a mother too, I also have a mother, a mother I have*. *Moses taught Torah from the broken tablets*, the Hakham voiced and stomped his feet as if to remind the listeners of the shattering sound of the stone tablets with the panic and tumult of those who have just celebrated to the golden calf. And Ezekiel thought,

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Moses taught Torah from the fractures of the tablets, and I can't find refuge from my troubling thoughts. He tried to count the ruptures he had collected while others dispersed to find that this task is more demanding than that of Moses. He then recalled that 3 years ago when pacing the King George Street, he saw his reflection in the display windows and realized that he is gradually acquiring his father's image. He observed that his hands are gathered behind his back as was his father's habit. His slow cautious walk behind his mother was no different than his father's and the same goes for his practice to be silent during the last 4 years. Every time he shaved, he left his father's style mustache and found himself standing in front of the mirror for long minutes seeing his very own father's face looking back at him. Only when tears started to arise did he place the blade over the mustache while saying in his father's voice "blessed is he who has freed him [my father] from the responsibility for me" not being able to proceed with the shave with occasional bursts of cry.

And the Hakham went on reading lists with great moderation: Hadassah is Esther, Iscah is Sarai meaning Sarah, Job is Moses, Kohelet is Solomon, Ya'akov is Yeshurun meaning Israel, Eliyahu is Yinon, Jesus is that man, Haman is Hitler the wicked, meaning Amalek, Esau is Rome, the Christian kingdom and Ishmael is the Arab tribes and desert. And Ezekiel draws the big white skullcap to observe it and the thought of covering his head with this big skullcap throughout the day and not just in synagogue, appeals to him. He then contemplates thinking that such a change should be done in complementary to other religious obligations, *mitzvot*, and when that happens I shall wrap myself with the *tzitzit*. This will be done in due course as I am still bound in sin he told himself.

Perhaps sweet lemon tea would prevent my naps, maybe the sweetness of some rice in milk would revive me. His thoughts swept again to the Rabbi's beard thinking he should perhaps stop the daily shave which cuts his skin and grow a beard that makes the face seem longer with added impression of Torah serenity. He grants the Hakham a touching smile and receives a meaningful smile in reply with words that are directed at him.

A prayer is like a tilted wall, explains the Rav. At times it cures sadness and on other occasions it triggers sadness itself. And Ezekiel thought to himself that perhaps that is the essence of the prayer. To draw water from the well. He knows that when the Rav Hakham Ovadya will age, his disciples, who now nickname him with great affection, Hakham Abdullah – a worshiper of God, will stop attending his lectures. This will



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happen once he loses his strength to put his hand and head pieces of his phylacteries on by himself. The Hakham's lips would then mumble prayers and preaches with a voice that could hardly be heard by anyone other than God, and he, Ezekiel, would continue to visit and assist him with the phylacteries to make sure the Hakham is able to enjoy the delight of Torah studies to his last day. The Hakham would then lecture to Ezekiel alone even when Ezekiel's eyes would become heavy from the day's labor. He must attend work even on Friday nights, God forbid, as his pocket is in great need of money and the employer is in need for the last drop of Ezekiel's strength of the hands and back.

By the time Ezekiel turned 18, he counted 3 years of visits to the Hakham's lectures and 5 years of uncertainties and anguish from his father's death at which he hadn't visited a synagogue or placed a book in his school bag.

During those 5 years he was very silent. He disappeared from his narrow home and evaded his mother, wandering in the Jerusalem streets at which he sleeps in, estranged from both school and shul. He was not able to make his mind up whether his dream to become a women's hairdresser started during those last 5 years or before his Bar Mitzvah. He dreamed he would not have the same occupation as all other men in the family at the Solel Bone construction company but rather a different job. But when his world shattered at the death of his mother, the Hakham paid them a visit instructing him to stay at home for the 7 days of mourning and distance himself from street life. The Hakham stayed to tell his story of his youthful years, before his beard whitened. In those old days he had a wholehearted disciple, Liyahu Nashawee, Ezekiel's father, of blessed memory, who treasured the words of the sages with radiance. After the 7 days of mourning and shaving his 30 days long beard, he asked the Hakham to teach him Torah and assist him in finding a woman to start a decent life. He had no wish to serve the army since no one has ever done any service to him until now. He might as well have a fresh start of repentance rather than of war. And the Hakham informed Ezekiel on his first lesson that the one who sees Jerusalem in its ruin must tear a slash in his garment and then mend it as not to have shredded clothes. And Ezekiel asked himself, what kind of Jerusalem is this? His thread would not be enough to mend the streets he grew in, which are all in visible wreck. His daily visits to these streets that stretch from San Martin and Bar Yochai streets to Pat intersection made this very evident. He was cautious when speaking to the Hakham, careful not to respond instantly, remembering his father's words that there are 2 hidden sides to the

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coin. His father revealed to him that there are thousands of concealed Halakhot many of which are still in dispute since the People of Israel had been exiled from Mount Sinai. Even the illustrious Rabi Akiva, was not able to decode these Halakhot from the calligraphic ornaments assigned by God to the Torah letters so how could he, the least knowledgeable of all, address such halachic questions.

The Hakham started chanting songs with added commentary in synagogue, lecturing that while all discuss *Akedaht Yitzhak*, The Binding, they seem to forget that much the same happened to *Yitzhak's brother*, Ishmael, to their father, Abraham and to their mothers Hagar and Sarah.

Ishmael was bound when he collapsed under the heavy slaughtering knife of the cruel desert virtually dying of thirst, his mother distancing herself to avoid the sight of her perishing son. The rescuing angel appeared only after he died from inside and left with a hollow heart.

And Sarah has always hated Ismael. Ezekiel listened graciously as the Hakham continued chanting a description of how Abraham got up early in the morning, saddled the donkey and filled the water canteen after which he took his only son, the one he loved twice as much as he loved the other, to a destination that silenced all heavenly voices. Sarah laughed when Hagar was banished and wept when Yitzhak was taken. She did not follow the first into the desert and could not bear the distance from the last. Ezekiel felt that the Hakham knew of his half-brother from another woman and the swollen stomach his father left in Beit Safafa, the southern Arab neighborhood in Jerusalem. His father's love to her was not sound enough for him follow her or ask her to follow him. Instead, he married a proper wife who bore him two additional sons. This first woman of the Arab village, washed stairways ever since until his maturing years in Hashomer Street and in Rabi Zadok Street and in the school he went to until her back broke. Ezekiel saw his older half-brother only once coming from distance approaching her when he, his father and mother walked along the street. This made his father very silent not saying a word to him nor to his mother who was jealous of the other woman. He studied his older brother's face looking for resemblance to their mutual father but found none. Only later, when he recalled his facial features during the mourning over their father which wasn't held together, did he find the resemblance. And he knew the Hakham would say that this is Sarah's hatred to Ishmael, the son of the other woman. Relentless jealousy separated them but

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Abraham found no hatred towards Ishmael. On the contrary, he loved him and adored him and enjoyed his close presence.

After the Hakham saw that Ezekiel persists with Judaic studies for as long as seventeen months, he told Ezekiel *Here I stand, and match you a woman to make you a man like all others. She would be a container full of good qualities, as well as modest and pleasant. You shall be blessed with fear of the Devine, and be granted with God fearing offspring, be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth. May you be two containers that empty and refill, well intertwined.* And after eleven months, when he found a bride for Ezekiel, he guided him with soft words saying quietly and with sanctity, *you are entering the chuppah, and I stand beside you to sanctify. Despite the fact that the mitzvah of sexual intercourse is commanded by the Torah, it is not proper to practice it on daily basis. All along the week one should be devoted to work, to his prayers and to educate himself as well as his family. Address this particular mitzvah on the Sabbaths when the body and soul are unrestricted. This mitzvah shouldn't be done in the beginning of the Friday night as each of his neighbors is able to hear such activity. It must also be avoided early in the night when one may suffer from a full stomach, a proud heart over the meal one had and the home so wonderfully prepared for the holy Sabbath. One shouldn't do this act in the morning when abundant light floods your dearest, and bring about pride of her beauty while the stomach is empty, hungry and in a rush to the morning's prayer in the synagogue. One should only practice this mitzvah at midnight and awake with respect after midnight like scholars who do their best to find bits and pieces of glimmer in the fields and wake her up slowly approaching her indirectly telling her that As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters and approach her with words of praise, play and softness with delicate butterfly like kisses. He mustn't curse her nor himself and keep in mind that he is doing God's will of interaction between man and woman upon which the divine spirit resides within their connection.*

Halacha: Rachel's love for Yaakov is not the same as the love of Yaakov to Rachel. Boaz's love to Ruth is not the same as the love of Ruth to Boaz and both are not in comparison to Sampson's love to his hair and to Balaam's love to his she-ass. And Ezekiel recalled their first night, how he suspended his approach to his bride and how she came near him with words of praise starting to surround her loved one and kiss him while he responded with broken sentences saying *I am full from the wedding feast... midnight like scholars ...and distanced himself from her.*

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He observed that he avoids her body as Amnon did *after* that act but no such thing happened between him and his wife who avoided it to begin with. God forbid, he did not hate her but rather held his body to distance it from her limbs and body saying with whispers Blessed Are You Hashem, our God, who created man with wisdom and created in him many openings so wisely with many cavities for passion Blessed Are You, Hashem, Who heals all flesh and does wonders.

His whole body quoted hear says he recalled from the Hakham to recover his body and find the strength to come closer to her. Each new born is a new creation that descends from the very beginning of days all the way to the origins of darkness when the spirit of God hovered over the surface of the waters. When Earth and heaven was unformed and void divided the waters from waters while chaos was commanded. Substance was then created from void and great pillars of air were excavated and could not be grasped. Asukkah shaped structure poured water on top until it became Earth. Birth and creation are constructed by speech and the giving of the name and this means that what the mouth cannot say and the ear cannot hear, cannot be created. He told her that if he lacks the energy to talk about their deed they will not have a new creation and so he delayed their love from one night to the other until she felt her body in panic thinking what kind of husband was I matched with? He does not fulfill the act of engagement and marriage between us. And after three weeks and four days, at midnight of a Sabbath he whispered in her ear that the Rav told them to undertake the mitzvah of giving birth to a male boy and a female girl blessing them to be fruitful, and to multiply. He said that the world is a mysterious thing in which things are created and then taken apart and vice versa and tonight is a night of creation. She woke up to feel his body with delight and upon planting his body into hers he moved away from her kisses saying this should be done with moderation, not when in hunger nor in fullness.

His doings that night had shaken him to the extent that for two whole months he did not repeat it. And then he consoled himself and returned to her moderately every Friday night just after midnight and began the course of action with prayer and concluded the process with a special prayer that he composed with his Rav.

*Safe guard me, my God, as the apple of the eye and secure my eyes with merciful wings from need to see anything. May your feathers penetrate my inner ear to prevent any sound and help me with great mercy not to say a word and not to wrong and be liable for anything and save me from uttering your sacred name with vain. Prevent my*

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*heart from feeling and my thoughts from distinguishing right from wrong and my legs from not going anywhere, neither far nor close, and with the last feathers for me construct a tent over my nakedness with kindness. I wish not to have any sexuality neither of a male nor a female and I pray not to produce myself a different body without memory, a mother's womb or with the possible pride of being circumcised.*

And she would hear his words and his request and turn sad. What kind of matchmaking did the Hakham arrange for her and why doesn't her husband seek the love which gushes inside her. She wants to hear him and see into him but he stays like a blocked flowerbed in heaven or a safeguarded concealed fruit. She concluded that she should place ashes on her head and release a cry saying she is desolated.

Moses taught the nutshell, the spiritual impurity, saving the concealed fruit, secured for the sages.

Ezekiel found that his mind storms, leaving him quite awake and listening to the words of the Hakham he was presently hearing. When he reflected on the time which passed, he felt that the Rav's lecture lengthened beyond most of his dreams, guessing that it will reach its end soon. Most likely, the Hakham would now say that his sentences comprise double meanings. One that the concealed fruit is left to the sages to retrieve and the other is that it is secured from the sages only leaving the common people who are not learned people to have as they wish. But instead of all that, he equated the bride to the concealed fruit explaining that the betrothal means the revelation of the concealed fruit meaning that the virgin bride which is the real Torah, is given only to sages having exclusive rights to do as they wish with it as its rightful owners, as the rights a groom to his bride to be. The sages alone have intellect to appreciate the secrets of the truthful Torah while for others it is as if they took their bride's virginity to waist without appreciation.

He commenced mumbling, *Who is like unto Thee, O LORD, among the mighty? Who is like unto Thee?*

*You are holy and Your Name is wholly and holy ones praise You every day forever. Holy, holy holy is Hashem the whole world is filled with your glory.*

Any minute the Hakham will finish his talk and Ezekiel is puzzled. He is expecting a boy or a girl in three months, *male and female created He them*, and the bride he gave him threatens to approach the Hakham to disclose that this *shiduch*, the matchmaking, with a husband that may possess love for the Torah but not for her. No true love for her. And she can't bear it, being unloved, lonesome with him in their own

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home. With her stomach full, undertaking a mitzvah of the Torah to produce offspring with misery, not knowing how she could leave him with a baby filling the space of her stomach. And Ezekiel tried to dissuade her from going to the Hakham. First by his silences, then with sweet words saying that his love is like light that cannot be described on paper unless darkness is added all around showing the brightness of the inside and he continued with tears saying *what would the Hakham say if he finds out? I am like an only son to him and not notable as he had told you and himself, far from faultless. Please don't hint that to him by unsound deeds.*

Ezekiel decided to be cautious and say nothing of his own taking it step by step and trust God. He would listen to what the Hakham has to say, perhaps the Hakham wouldn't make much of what she said or perhaps it is all known to him or perhaps she hasn't spoken to him yet for if she had, he would have surely felt it during the lesson and that was not the case. But it is possible that she will speak to him today or any other day and then he still has a chance to stop her. He loved the Hakham and his wisdoms. His wife hints she means to leave him and he is swept in thoughts like how much he wanted a boy and at the same time didn't want him but unable to go about it himself, he planted his body in hers for her to bear the child. Despite all, he does love her and like her motions during pregnancy and adores her morning nauseas and the commotion she created in his silent life. Perhaps, not as silent as his old man. He recalled how one night, a week or two ago when their separation seemed adjacent as his breaths, he attempted to explain to her that in his childhood there was plenty of sadness everywhere and went on covering her body with loving kisses.

The Hakham finished his homily and hinted to Ezekiel to approach. Ezekiel had set foot in an attempt to evade the encounter but unable to pretend not seeing the Hamah's request, he approached. Hakham Ovadya motioned to him to bend his head down in front of him and so he did, allowing the heavy hand to be placed on his hair replacing the skull cap. He then uttered with a restraint whisper *Baruch She'Petarani Me'Onsho Shel Zeh*, Blessed are You who has exempted me from the responsibility to this boy. And the Hakham said that now all praises and curses lay on *your* head and I shall not come to wherever the Divine spirit lays between husband and wife.

Ezekiel vacillated, thinking, *good riddance to bad rubbish, good riddance to my bad rubbish is blessed.*

Ezekiel came out of the synagogue heavily, walking slowly in moderate steps, trying to assess the double hidden meanings behind the Hamah's hints. He recollected his

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memory of his father's death and felt his hands very heavy. He questioned himself of his capacity for love. How does such a feeling creep in or out.

He recounted his nickname said in his father's accent, *Heskel Heskel*. He started towards home and wife wondering who created such opposites and made the acquaintance thus denying the similar of their own kind.

He glanced at the narrow street which is close to his childhood street not hearing voices of singing rising from nearby synagogues. The sun's fireball descended only to ascend again, giving Ezekiel the feeling that he had been sitting there for two full days listening to sweet halachic instructions as if he managed to pass through the backstage screen and return. He was unsure of his feet weight and the weight of the sidewalk and caused his head to wake up with chants that belonged to other festivals. He hesitated whether the Rav knows or not and tried to collect letters into words imaging them dressed as street lamps and becoming all the more excited. Morning inched and he found himself in confusion over the morning blessings. *Thankfully acknowledge You, for You have compassionately restored my soul within me. Bless the LORD, O my soul Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment And I will betroth thee unto Me forever Blessed are You who has made me a bondman for thy creator Blessed are You who has made me a as He wishes blessed He.*

מתוך הרומן "צ'חלה וחזקל", פרק ראשון

הלכה למשה מסיני: אמנון שונא לתמר ושרה לישמעאל. שמע חֲזַקֵּל את דברי הרב, שהיו מתגלגלים לפניו כבר שעה ארוכה, וידע שעוד שעה ארוכה יימשכו, מושכים אחריהם את רעיוניו. ניסה לחשב בלבו דברי אהבות ושנאות שפגש, ותוך כדי כך שיקע את ראשו מעט לפניו ועצם את עיניו במתיקות עצלה. גופו נדמה עליו פתאום כבד משהיה, ונפלה עליו תנומה חצויה או מחולקת לרבעים, והנמנום שהתחיל בעיניו המכווצות מילא את ראשו ערפל נעים, ואילו שאר גופו היה רועד ורעידתו מתגברת בתנודות קטנות עד שהיה נופל ומתנגש באחד משכניו לקהל או באחד הדרגשים לשים עליהם ספרי קדושה, ואז היה מתעורר אל תוך אחד ממשפטיו של החכם, והמילים היו נכנסות אל תוך מחשבותיו.

לא יבואו על גבר בגדי אישה ולא תיזדרש אישה לכלי גֶבֶר. מילותיו של חכם עובדיה נמסכו אל תוך הרהוריו והתפתלו ביניהם, ויחזקאל נזכר איך כשהיה ילד היה מחכה שנה שלמה שיבוא שוב פורים וילבש בגדי אישה. ואיך אמרה לו אמו שנה אחת, אולי הפעם תתחפש לרב או חזן או קוסם או סוכן ביטוח, ואיך בכה לה הרבה וביקש שמלה ופאה עם שערות חלקות וארוכות שיוכל ללטף, וביקש את שמחתה על שרצה להתחפש לה. למה כל שנה אותה תחפוש, שאלה האם, אפשר לחשוב כל השנה אתה מחופש ורק בפורים אתה חוזר למלבושיך האמיתיים. ומתוך שנתו הקטועה התחבט מי היה אמנון ומי היתה תמר ולמה שונא אמנון לתמר, ומאי שם בראשו וזמן לימודו אצל החכם ריחפה ובאה תמר האבלה, אפר על ראשה, לגופה כתונת יוסף קרועה, והיא הולכת וזועקת ויושבת שוממה, והוא נזכר בסיפורה. התאבל עמה על אהבת אמנון מְקַדָּם שהיתה שנאה, והיה שונא לאמנון עם אבשלום אחיו יפה התללים, נחרד, כי נפשו מצוּוה, עיקשת, לא להיות כְּאִמְנוֹן ויתר הגברים, לא לומר בואי שכבי עמי אחותי, לא להחליף אהבה בשנאה ושנאה באהבה, לא לבקש שִׁלְחוּ נָא אֶת זֹאת מֵעָלַי, לא לגעת בתמר הבתולה והיפה ולא להִתְחַלּוֹת. והחכם מסביר: אמנון שונא היה לתמר אחותו כטוב לבו בלביבות ידיה, ואבשלום שונא היה לאמנון אחיו כטוב לבו ביין, ושניהם לא חשבו על תמר, חשבו כבוד. ורצה חזקל לשאול, ודוד אביהם היה אוהב לתמר? ולאמנון? ולאבשלום? וליהונתן? אוהב גם לְמִפִּי-בִשָּׁת בן-יהונתן בן-שאול נכה רגליים בן חמש שנים? ומי היתה רצפה בת-איה, ששמה נותר מעין איום בגורל איוֹם?

זו תורה וזה שכרה, סיפר החכם שאלות של מלאכים, וענה בתשובה משלו, תורה היא וללמוד אני צריך. ללמוד אני צריך, חשב חזקל, ונזכר בכל שנות לימודיו לאורך השנים, איך היו שני הוריו יושבים עמו בביתם הצר באחד השיכונים הארוכים מעשה רכבות ברחוב בר-יוחאי בקטמון ח' או ט' ומצווים עליו ללמוד, בימים שקודם לבר מצווה, ואיך אמר למורה אחת שלו, כורדייה אדומת שיער, כשהיה בן ארבע-עשרה, העתיד שלי לא הסתדר לי, אני כבר לא אלמד יותר, למדתי די. ואיך אהב בילדותו את בית הכנסת, החזיק בשולי טליתו של אביו ושר שירים לְלִיָּהּ ולבר-יוחאי, זה הקדוש הנורא שאף פעם לא עבר ברחוב, ובאמת התורה, אהב את אביו אהבה עזה, וכמה כאב כשהוא מת, שבועיים אחרי הבר מצווה שלו, עמד ואמר לו עם כף ידו הכבדה על ראשו, ברוך שפטרני מעונשו של זה, והלך ונפטר מן העולם כל כך מהר, כאילו נפטר מעול כבוד וכבר אין לו עוד תפקיד בעולם אז באמת התפטר ממנו. וכמה בכה אחריו, עד שאמו כבר אמרה, די, אני קברתי בעל, אני ביכיתי אותו, באמת



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התורה, הרבה בכיתי, אבל אתה ילד שלי צריך לאכול וצריך ללמוד וצריך לצייר ציורים בהרבה צבעים, די לבכות כל היום, יש לך גם אמא. והוא שתק לה ובלבו גלגל: יש לי גם אמא, יש לי גם אמא, יש לי גם אמא.

משה לימד תורה מן השברים של הלוחות, השמיע החכם ורקע ברגליו כאילו ניסה להזכיר ליושבים את קול ניפוץ לוחות הברית ואת בהלת העם החוגגים לעגל. וחזקל חשב, משה לימד תורה מן השברים של הלוחות, ולי אין זמן פנוי ממחשבות, וניסה לספור כמה שברים היו לו בחייו, כמה אסף, כמה התפזר, ומצא כי מלאכתו קשה משל משה רבנו. וחשב על רגע אחד, כשהלך ברחוב קינג ג'ורג' לפני שלוש שנים וראה את השתקפותו בחלונות הראווה, והבין כמה הוא נעשה דומה לאביו עם השנים, למד כי ידיו אסופות מאחורי גבו כשלו, וכי הילוכו זהיר ואיטי כשלו, רחוק מאחורי אמו, וכי הוא שותק כבר ארבע שנים כמוהו. וכל פעם כשהיה מתגלח היה משאיר לו שפם כשל אביו, עומד מול המראה כמה דקות ומתבונן ורואה את פני אביו מוליידו מביטות בו, ורק כשדמעות מתחילות לצוף בעיניו היה מעביר את התער על השפם ואומר לעצמו בקול אביו: ברוך שפטרנו מעונשו של זה, ברוך שפטרנו, ומניח יד קלה על ראשו, מנסה ולא מצליח להכביד. ואחר בוכה או לא בוכה.

והחכם מקריא רשימות במתינות עצומה: הדסה היא אסתר, יספה היא שְׁרִי היא שרה, איוב הוא משה, קהלת הוא שלמה, יעקב הוא ישורון הוא ישראל, אליהו הוא אֶלְיָהוּ הוא ינון, ישו הוא אותו האיש, המן הוא היטלר הרשע הוא עמלק, עֶשָׂו הוא רומי ממלכות נוצרים, וישמעאל אלו שבטי ערב והמדבר. וחזקל מושך מעליו את הכיפה הלבנה הגדולה להתבונן בה, נמשך לכסות ראשו כל השעות בכיפה גדולה, לא רק בבית הכנסת, אבל אומר לעצמו, כשאשלם עוד כך וכך מצוות אמשוך על ראשי כיפה ואעטה על גופי ציצית, בינתיים עדיין אני עובר בכמה איסורים. חושב, אולי כוס תה בנענע ולימון והרבה סוכר תמנע אותו מלהירדם כל כך, אולי מתיקות מעט אורז בחלב בפיו תשובב רוחו. ומחשבותיו נמשכות אל זקן הרב, אולי יחדל גם הוא מן הגילוח היומיומי הפוצע בעורו ויגדל זקן כזה המאריך את הפנים ונוסך עליהן שלוות תורה, והוא מחייך אל החכם חיוך הנוגע אל הלב והחכם מזכה אותו בחיוך תשובה ואחריו אומר מילים מלאות בהתכוונות כלפיו.

תפילה היא קיר נטוי, מסביר הרב, לפעמים היא מחתרת נגד הצער, לפעמים היא הצער עצמו. וחזקל חושב לעצמו, אולי זאת התפילה, לשאוב מים מן העין. הוא יודע כי גם כשיזקין הרב חכם עובדיה מאוד ויפסיקו תלמידיו, המכנים אותו עתה בחיבה גדולה חכם עבדאללה-עבד-אדוני, לפקוד את דרשותיו, ולא יהיה בידיו כבר כוח למשוך על עצמו תפילין של יד ותפילין של ראש ושפתותיו ימלמו את התפילות והפסוקים והדרשות בקול חלוש שאיש כבר לא ישמע מלבד האלוהים, הוא ימשיך לבוא אצלו ויסייע לו בהנחת התפילין ולא ימנע מן החכם את עונג תלמוד התורה, והחכם ימשיך ללמדו עד יומו האחרון, רק אותו, ימשיך ללמד גם כשעיניו של חזקל תהיינה כבדות ונעצמות הרבה מן העבודה בלילות, גם בלילות שבת, רחמנא לצלן, הכיס זקוק לכסף והמעביד לכוח הסבל שבידיו ובגבו.

שלוש שנים חזקל פוקד את שיעוריו של החכם. חמש שנים ראשו התמלא ספקות ונאכל ממות אביו ולא פקד את בית הכנסת ולא הכניס בילקוטו ספר, חמש שנים, עד שמלאו לו שמונה-עשרה. חמש שנים היה

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שותק הרבה, ונעלם לאמו מן הבית הצר, ומסתובב ברחובות ירושלים וישן בהם, ולא מחבר מילה של בית למילה של ספר ולא מילה של בית למילה של כנסת. ולא הצליח להיזכר כשניסה, האם רק בחמש השנים הללו התחיל חולם להיות סֵפֶר של נשים, או כבר לפני בר המצווה חלם זאת ואחר כך עוד נשאר החלום, רק ידע שחלם לא לעבוד בסולל בונה כמו כל הגברים במשפחה, חלם על עבודה אחרת. ואז קרה אותו השבר הגדול, שמתה עליו גם אמו, ופקד החכם את ביתם והורה אותו להישאר בו לשבעה, לִבְכוֹת את אמו, ולהתנתק מן הרחובות. ונשאר הרב לספר, לפני שנים בצעירותו קודם שזקנו הלבין לימד גם את אביו של חזקל, את לְיָהוּ נְשֵׂאוֹי כָל זִכְרוֹנוֹ וזָכְרוֹ בְרַכָּה, והיה ליהו לומד לפניו במאור גדול ומושך מן כוחותיו הגשמיים אל הרוחניים ומתמסר לדברי חכמים. ואחרי שיצא חזקל מן השבעה ואחרי שגילה את זקנו בן שלושים הימים ביקש מן החכם ללמדו תורה, לסייע לו להכניס אישה לביתו ככל האדם, ולא לילך לצבא, כי מה עשה צבא זה בשבילו ומה עשו חיים אלו בשבילו, רוצה להתחיל חיים חדשים, של תשובה ולא של מלחמה. והחכם שיעור ראשון הודיע את חזקל הלכה: הרואה ירושלים בחורבנה יקרע קרע בבגדו, ואז יתפור הקרע, שלא יהיו בגדיו עשויים קרעים-קרעים. וחזקל שאל את עצמו, איזו ירושלים זאת, הרחובות בהם גדל, סן מרטין ובר-יוחאי עד צומת פת, והרי הוא רואה אותם יום-יום בחורבנם, לא יספיק החוט בביתו לתפור את הקרעים. אבל היה זהיר בשאלות החכם ולא ענה מיד, זכר דברי אביו כי לכל דבר פנים שניים, נסתרים, נזכר כי אביו גילה את אוזנו שקיימות אלפי הלכות העומדות עדיין סתורות ונסתרות, אלפי שנים מאז גלותם של ישראל מהר סיני, הלכות אותן אפילו רבי עקיבא הגדול בישראל לא למד מן הכתרים והתגים שנתן האלוהים מעל האותיות שבתורה, ואיך הוא הקטן בישראל יעמוד מול שאלות של הלכה. ורק חשב, והרואה אדם בחורבנו, מה יעשה, מה יעשה הרואה אדם בחורבנו.

התחיל החכם אומר שירה ופירושים בחלל בית הכנסת, דורש, כולם אומרים עקדת יצחק, אבל גם ישמעאל האח נעקד, וגם אברהם האב נעקד, וגם הגר ושרה האמהות נעקדות. ישמעאל נעקד כשכרע תחת מאכלת המדבר הכבדה, כשכמעט כלה בצמא ואמו התרחקה שלא לראות במות בנה, וגם לו בא המלאך הגואל רק אחרי שמת בפנימו ולבו התעוור, ושרה היתה שונאת לישמעאל. והחכם התחיל מרבה בפייטנות, וחזקל הרבה בהקשבה, שומע איך השכים אברהם בבוקר פעמיים, וחבש את חמורו ומילא החֶמֶת מים, ולקח את בנו את יחידו אשר אהב כפליים, עד שגָדְמו כל הקולות מן השמים, וצחקה שרה כאשר גורשה הגר, והתייפחה ביום בו נלקח יצחק, ולא שלחה את רחמיה למדבר, ולא יכלה לשאת את המרחק. והרגיש חזקל כי ידע החכם על אחיו בן האישה האחרת, על הבטן התפוחה שהשאיר אביו בבית צפאפא, על שלא היה בכוח אהבתו ללכת אחריה או לקרוא לה ללכת אחריו, על שנשא במקומה אישה כשרה והוליד שני בנים נוספים פחות אוהב. והאישה האחרת עוד היתה שוטפת כמה חזרי מדרגות כשגדל, ברחוב השומר וברחוב רבי צדוק ובבית הספר שבו למד, עד שהכריע אותה שיברון הגב, ואת אחיו הבכור ראה רק פעם אחת מרחוק בא לקראתה, כשהוא ואביו ואמו עברו ברחוב, ואביו שתק מולה ומולו ואמו קינאה בכל פניה באישה האחרת, והוא התבונן בפני אחיו הבכור, חיפש דמיון ולא מצא. אחר כך, כשנזכר בתווי פניו בימי האבל על אביהם, שלא הפך משותף, מצא דמיון. וידע כי יאמר החכם, זאת

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שנאת שרה לישמעאל, הוא בן האישה האחרת, תמיד קנאה ביניהן, ואין אברהם שונא לישמעאל אלא להפך, הוא אוהבו ומחבבו ומקרבו ושומרו בסתר פניו.

אחרי שראה אותו הולך בדרך תלמודו ישר שבעה-עשר ירחים אמר לו החכם לחזקל, הנה אני עומד ומשדך לך אישה שתהיה ככל האדם, שתהיה היא כלי מלא דברים טובים וצנועים ונאים, ותרבה בך יראת אלוהים ותקיימו פרו ורבו ומלאו את הארץ, ותהיו שני כלים מתרוקנים ומתמלאים, שלובים. ואחרי אחד-עשר ירחים, כשמצא לו כלה, הדריכו במילים רכות, אמר בשקט ובקדושה אתה נכנס אל החופה ואני עומד לצדך ומקדש, ואף על פי שמצוות תשמיש מיטה מן התורה היא, אין זה נאה להתנאות בה יום-יום, אלא לאורך השבוע לא יפסיק מעבודתו ותפילותיו וחינוך עצמו ומשפחתו, ואת המצווה יקיים בשבתות, כשהגוף פנוי והלב פנוי. ולא יקיים המצווה בראשית הלילה של ערב שבת, בשעה שיכול אחד משכניו לשמוע מעשיו והוא בטנו מלאה ולבו שבע וחזהו עמוס גאוה על סעודה שאכל ועל ביתו שהתמלא אורה לקראת שבת המלכה, ולא יקיימה בבוקר, כשאור שופע על אשת חיקו מן החלון והוא מתגאה ביופיה ובטנו ריקה והוא רעב וממהר לתפילה בבית הכנסת, אלא יקיים המצווה באמצע הלילה, ולכבודה יתעורר אחר חצות כתלמידי חכמים המלקטים ניצוצות בשדות, ויעורר אותה באיטיות ויכתוב סביב לה, ויאמר לה, את רעייתי בין הבנות כשושנה בין החוחים, ויפנה אליה בדברי משחק וקילוסין ומילים נאות ונשיקות צנועות כשל פרפר, ולא יקלל אותה ולא יקלל עצמו, ולא ישכח כי הוא עושה מצוות המקום, ובין גבר לאישה בשעת חיבורם נמצאת שכינה.

הלכה: אהבת רחל ליעקב אינה כאהבת יעקב לרחל, ואהבת בעז לרות אינה כאהבת רות לבעז, ושתינה אינן כאהבת שמשון לשער ראשו ואהבת בלעם לאתונו. וחזקל נזכר בלילה הראשון, איך התעכב לבוא אל כלתו, ואיך היא קרבה אליו במילים של קילוסין והתחילה לסובב דודה ולנשקו, והוא אמר לה משפטים קטועים, עדיין אני שבע מסעודת החתונה, באמצע הלילה כתלמידי החכמים, והתרחק ממנה. וגילה כי הוא מתרחק מגופה כהתרחק אמנון מתמר אחרי אותו מעשה, אבל ביניהם לא היה עדיין אותו מעשה. ולא היה שונא בה חלילה, רק דחוק באיבריו ונקביו הרחק מאיבריה ונקביה, אומר בלחש, תלולים חלולים בנה פחוכמה, נקבים נקבים יצר לתאוה, מלך עולם מפליא לעשות. וכל גופו ציטט שמועות שזכר מדברי הרב כדי לאושש גופו להתחזק וליקרב אליה: כל לידה בריאה מחודשת בקדמוניות העולם, וראשיתה חושך על פני תהום, ורוח מרחפת על פני מים, ותוהו ובוהו בין ארץ לשמים, ואז נמצא מבדיל בין מים למים, החוקק תוהו ובוהו ורפש וטיט, ועושה ממש את שאינו ממש, וחוצב עמודים גדולים מאוויר שאינו נתפס, ועושה אותם כמעין ערוגה, מציבם כמין חומה, מסוכך עליהם כסוכה, יוצק עליהם מים עד שהם נעשים עפר. והלידה והבריאה בדיבור ובהבדלה ובנתינת שם, ומכאן שמה שאין הפה יכול לדבר, ומה שאין באוזן יכולת לשמוע, אין לגוף בגוף יכולת לברוא. אמר לה, אם אין לי כוח לדבר במעשינו לא תהיה לנו בריאה חדשה, והיה דוחה מעשה האהבה לילה ועוד לילה עד שהיא כל גופה התבהלה, חשבה, איזה בעל זה שודך לי, אינו ממש, אינו ממש מעשה האירוסין והקידושין בינינו. ואחרי שלושה שבועות וארבעה ימים, באמצע הלילה של שבת בחושך, לחש באוזנה אמר לנו הרב, מצווה להעמיד בן זכר ובת נקבה, פרו ורבו

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אמר, אמר גלגל חוזר עובר בעולם, צר צורות ומפרק צורות, והלילה צר. התעוררה לגופו בשמחה, ואחרי ששתל את גופו בגופה התרחק מנשיקותיה ואמר, לא ברעב ולא בשובע, במתינות. והתבהל כל כך במעשיו באותו הלילה, שלא חזר עליהם חודשיים תמימים. ואז שב ועודד רוחו, והיה חוזר אליה במתינות בכל ערב שבת באמצע הלילה, באשמורת שנייה, והיה מתפלל לפניו ואחריה תפילה מיוחדת שחיבר יחד עם רבו: שְׁמֵרְנִי אֱלֹהֵי פְּאִישׁוֹן בְּתַעֲיִן, הַצֵּל נָא בְּכַנְפֶיךָ הַרְחַמְנִי עַל מַבְטְי שְׁלֵא אֲצַטְרֵךְ לְרֵאוֹת דָּבָר, הַחֲדָר נָא נֹצוֹתֶיךָ הַחֲנוּנוֹת אֶל עוֹמֵק אוֹזְנֵי שְׁלֵא יִהְיֶה עָלַי לְשִׁמוֹעַ קוֹל, חוֹס נָא עַל פִּי שְׁלֵא אוֹמֵר מִיִּלָּה, וְלֹא אֶתְחַיֵּב בְּדָבָר, וְלֹא אֶשֶׂא שִׁמְךָ הַקָּדוֹשׁ לְשׁוּא, עֲצוֹר נָא לְבִי שְׁלֵא אֶרְגִּישׁ, וְאֵת מַחְשְׁבוֹתַי שְׁלֵא אֲדַע מֵרַע עַד טוֹב, וְאֵת רַגְלֵי שְׁלֵא אֶלְךָ מֵרְחוֹק וְעַד קְרוֹב, וּבִאֲחֲרוֹנוֹת נֹצוֹתֶיךָ אֵלַי, הַעֲמֵד נָא אוֹהֵל מֵעַל עֲרוּוֹתַי בְּרוֹב טוֹבָה, שְׁלֵא יִהְיֶה בִּי מִיָּן מִזְכָּר וְעַד נִקְבָּה, שְׁלֵא אוֹלֵיד עֲצָמַי מֵחֲדָשׁ גּוֹף אַחֵר בְּלִי זִכְרוֹן, לְבוֹשׁ רְחֵם אִם אוֹ מִתְנַאֵה בְּמִצְוֹת הַמִּלָּה. וְהִיא הִיֵּתָה שׁוֹמֵעַת אַחֲרָיו אֵת בְּקִשְׁתּוֹ וְנֹעֲצַבְתָּ, מֵהַ שִׁידוּךְ שִׁידוּךְ לֵה הַחֶכֶם, לְמָה אֵינְךָ מִבְּקֵשׁ אֵת אֶהְבֵּתָה שֶׁכָּבֵר מִפְּכָה בְּהַ, רוֹצֵה לְנִסּוֹת אוֹתוֹ, לְרֵאוֹת בּוֹ, וְהוּא נוֹתֵר לֵה עֲרוּגַת בְּשָׁמַיִם חֲסוּמָה אוֹ פְּרִי גִנוֹז שְׁמוֹר מְכֹל מִשְׁמֵר. חֲשַׁבָה בְּסוֹף תְּשִׁים אֶפְרַיִם עַל רֵאשָׁה, תִּשְׁמִיעַ זַעֲקָה, תֹּאמֵר אֲנִי כַּאֲן מוֹל הַמְּקוֹם אֲנִי שׁוֹמֵמָה.

משה לימד את הקליפה, ואת הפרי שמר גנוז לחכמים. חזקל מצא שגלגולי מחשבותיו הותירו אותו פתאום ער ממש, שומע את דברי החכם בזמן אמירתם. וכשבחן עצמו ואת הזמן החולף חש כי שיעור הרב התארך מרוב חלומותיו, אך ניחש כי הוא קרוב לסופו. ודאי יאמר עכשיו החכם כי כפולה המשמעות במשפטו, אחת שהפרי הגנוז נתון רק לחכמים למצוא אותו, שנייה שרק לפני החכמים גנוז הפרי, ואילו מי שאינו חכם ייטול וייקח. אך במקום זאת המשיל החכם את הכלה לפרי הגנוז, הסביר כי הכלולות הן הגילוי של הפרי הגנוז, ואז חילק לשניים, אחת הודיע שהכלה בבתוליה, שהיא התורה האמיתית, נתונה רק לחכמים למצוא אותה פתחים-פתחים ולהפוך לבעליה ובעליה, שנייה הודיע שרק לפני החכמים נותרת הכלה בבתוליה, ממתנה ולא נושעת ולא נודעת באמיתה, ואילו מי שאינו חכם נוטל ולוקח בתולי כלתו, תורת אמת, ולומד הסודות כאילו לא היו סודות.

התחיל ממלמל, מי כמוך באלים ה', מי כמוך, אתה קדוש ושמך קדוש וקדושים בכל יום יהללוך סְלָה, קדוש קדוש קדוש, מלוא כל הארץ כבודך. עוד רגע החכם מסיים את דרשתו וחזקל לא יודע, עוד שלושה חודשים נולד לו ילד, בן או בת, זכר ונקבה ברא אותם, והכלה שנתן לו מאיימת לפנות אל הרב, לומר כי השידוך ששידך לה, הבעל שנתן בידה, אינו אוהבה באמת, אולי אוהב הוא לתורה, אבל לא לה. והיא אינה יכולה לעמוד בכך, להיות בלתי נאהבת, שוממה עמו בתוך ביתם. והיא מסתובבת ובטנה מלאה, מקיימת בידו מצווה מן התורה לפרות ולרבות אבל אומללה, לא יודעת איך תוכל לעזוב אותו כשהתינוק ממלא חלל שבבטנה. וחזקל ניסה להניאה מללכת אל החכם, תחילה בשתיקות, אחר במילים מתוקות, אמר לה כי אהבתו כאור שאין לצייר דמותו על דף, רק אם ירבו השחזר סביב לו על הדף יראה בתוכו אור, ואחר אמר לה בדמעות, מה יאמר החכם אם יגלה, אני כמעט בנו ואיני כלי נאה כפי שאמר לך ולעצמו, איני שלם, אל תרמזי לו במעשים פסולים.

## קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

החליט חזקל עם עצמו יהיה זהיר בחכם, לא יאמר משלו, הביטחון לה', הוא ינהג מתינות, ישמע מה יש לחכם לומר, אולי לא התרגש מדבריה, אולי כבר ידע, אולי לא דיברה עמו עדיין, אם היתה מדברת עמו, ודאי היה מרגיש זאת בשיעור, ולא הרגיש. אבל אולי תדבר עמו היום, אולי יום אחר, ואולי עוד יצליח לעצור בעדה, אוהב הוא את החכם ואת חוכמותיו. אשתו רומזת אולי היא עוזבת אותו והוא מפליג במחשבות, כמה רצה ילד וכמה לא רצה, ולא יכול היה להוליד לבדו, אז שם גופו בגופה. ודווקא יש בו אהבה, מחבב הוא את תנועותיה בעת ההיריון, וגם חיבב בחילות הבוקר שלה, ואת ההפרעות בשקט שהיא הכניסה לחייו. אולי לא יהיה שקט כאביו. נזכר איך לילה אחד לפני שבוע או שבועיים, כשהפרידה הפכה סמוכה כמו הבל פה, ניסה להסביר לה שבילדותו היה הרבה עצב שפוך על סדינים וכריות, וכיסה גופה בנשיקות דודים.

סיים החכם לדרוש את דרשתו ורמז לחזקל באצבעו לגשת אליו. חזקל כבר שם רגליו לפתח וביקש לחמוק מן המקום, אבל משלא יכול היה להעמיד פנים שלא ראה בקשת החכם ניגש אליו. חכם עובדיה סימן לו לכופף ראשו לפניו, הניח את ידו הכבדה על שער ראשו אותו גילה מן הכיפה ואמר בלחש ובמתינות גמורה, ברוך שפטרני מעונשו של זה. פירש החכם ואמר, עתה עליך כל השבחים והקללות, כל הכללים והשפחות, ובמקום ששכינה באה בין אישה ואיש אין אני בא. גלגל חזקל בלבו, ברוך שפטרני מעונשו של זה, ברוך שפטר אותו מעונשי שלי, ברוך.

יצא חזקל את בית הכנסת ברגליים כבדות, הלך לאט ובמתינות, מנסה לחשוב למה רמז החכם בדבריו שתי פנים, נזכר במות אביו ובידו הכבדה מאוד עליו, ושאל מה מקום האהבה בלבו בכל שנותיו, מה המקום בו היא נכנסת, מה מקום בו היא יוצאת. קרא לעצמו חיבה במבטא אביו, חֶסֶקל חֶסֶקל, והתכוון אל ביתו ואל אשתו, תוהה מי ברא הפכים והפגישם, ומי הניח דומים והפרידם. הביט ברחוב הצר, סמוך לרחוב שבו גדל, ולא שמע קולות שירה מבתי הכנסת השוכנים לאורכו. כבר ירד גלגל חמה, או עוד רגע הוא קם ועולה, חש כאילו שתי יממות מלאות ישב ושמע דברי הלכה מתוקים, כאילו עבר את הפרגוד ושב. פקפק בכובד רגליו ובכובד המדרכה, ועורר ראשו בעזרת גלגל שירות של בקשות ופיוטים ושפחות לימים טובים ואחרים. חשב, הרב יודע, הרב אינו יודע, והחל אוסף אותיות לשמות, עד שהיו השמות מאירים בלבושם כפנסי רחוב, התרגש כל כולו, הנה הבוקר בא, והחל מתבלבל בברכות השחר, מודה אני לפניך, החזרת בי נשמת בחמלה, ברכי נפשי את ה', עוטה אור פְּשֵׁלְמָה, ואֲרֻשְׁתִּיךָ לי באמונה, ברוך שעשני עבד לבוראו, ברוך שעשני כרצונו, ברוך.

## Other texts

## **Ruh Jedide: Young Mizrahi Israelis' open letter to Arab peers**

We, as the descendents of the Jewish communities of the Arab and Muslim world, the Middle East and the Maghreb, and as the second and third generation of Mizrahi Jews in Israel, are watching with great excitement and curiosity the major role that the men and women of our generation are playing so courageously in the demonstrations for freedom and change across the Arab world. We identify with you and are extremely hopeful for the future of the revolutions that have already succeeded in Tunisia and Egypt. We are equally pained and worried at the great loss of life in Libya, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria, and many other places in the region. Our generation's protest against repression and oppressive and abusive regimes, and its call for change, freedom, and the establishment of democratic governments that foster citizen participation in the political process, marks a dramatic moment in the history of the Middle East and North Africa, a region which has for generations been torn between various forces, internal and external, and whose leaders have often trampled the political, economic, and cultural rights of its citizens. We are Israelis, the children and grandchildren of Jews who lived in the Middle East and North Africa for hundreds and thousands of years.

Our forefathers and mothers contributed to the development of this region's culture, and were part and parcel of it. Thus the culture of the Islamic world and the multigenerational connection and identification with this region is an inseparable part of our own identity. We are a part of the religious, cultural, and linguistic history of the Middle East and North Africa, although it seems that we are the forgotten children of its history: First in Israel, which imagines itself and its culture to be somewhere between continental Europe and North America. Then in the Arab world, which often accepts the dichotomy of Jews and Arabs and the imagined view of all Jews as Europeans, and has preferred to repress the history of the Arab-Jews as a minor or even nonexistent chapter in its history; and finally within the Mizrahi communities themselves, who in the wake of Western colonialism, Jewish nationalism and Arab nationalism, became ashamed of their past in the Arab world. Consequently we often tried to blend into the mainstream of society while erasing or minimizing our own past. The mutual influences and relationships between Jewish and Arab cultures were subjected to forceful attempts at erasure in recent generations, but evidence of them can still be found in many spheres of our lives, including music, prayer, language, and

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literature. We wish to express our identification with and hopes for this stage of generational transition in the history of the Middle East and North Africa, and we hope that it will open the gates to freedom and justice and a fair distribution of the region's resources. We turn to you, our generational peers in the Arab and Muslim world, striving for an honest dialog which will include us in the history and culture of the region.

We looked enviously at the pictures from Tunisia and from Al-Tahrir square, admiring your ability to bring forth and organize a nonviolent civil resistance that has brought hundreds of thousands of people out into the streets and the squares, and finally forced your rulers to step down. We, too, live in a regime that in reality—despite its pretensions to being “enlightened” and “democratic”—does not represent large sections of its actual population in the Occupied Territories and inside of the Green Line border(s). This regime tramples the economic and social rights of most of its citizens, is in an ongoing process of minimizing democratic liberties, and constructs racist barriers against Arab-Jews, the Arab people, and Arabic culture.

Unlike the citizens of Tunisia and Egypt, we are still a long way from the capacity to build the kind of solidarity between various groups that we see in these countries, a solidarity movement that would allow us to unite and march together—all who reside here—into the public squares, to demand a civil regime that is culturally, socially, and economically just and inclusive. We believe that, as Mizrahi Jews in Israel, our struggle for economic, social, and cultural rights rests on the understanding that political change cannot depend on the Western powers who have exploited our region and its residents for many generations.

True change can only come from an intra-regional and inter-religious dialog that is in connection with the different struggles and movements currently active in the Arab world. Specifically, we must be in dialog and solidarity with struggles of the Palestinians citizens of Israel who are fighting for equal political and economic rights and for the termination of racist laws, and the struggle of the Palestinian people living under Israeli military occupation in the West Bank and in Gaza in their demand to end the occupation and to gain Palestinian national independence. In our previous letter written following Obama's Cairo speech in 2009, we called for the rise of the democratic Middle Eastern identity and for our inclusion in such an identity. We now express the hope that our generation – throughout the Arab, Muslim, and Jewish world – will be a generation of renewed bridges that will leap over the walls and



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hostility created by previous generations and will renew the deep human dialog without which we cannot understand ourselves: between Jews, Sunnis, Shias, and Christians, between Kurds, Berbers, Turks, and Persians, between Mizrahis and Ashkenazis, and between Palestinians and Israelis. We draw on our shared past in order to look forward hopefully towards a shared future. We have faith in intra-regional dialog—whose purpose is to repair and rehabilitate what was destroyed in recent generations—as a catalyst towards renewing the Andalusian model of Muslim-Jewish-Christian partnership, God willing, Insha'Allah, and as a pathway to a cultural and historical golden era for our countries. This golden era cannot come to pass without equal, democratic citizenship, equal distribution of resources, opportunities, and education, equality between women and men, and the acceptance of all people regardless of faith, race, status, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnic affiliation. All of these rights play equal parts in constructing the new society to which we aspire. We are committed to achieving these goals within a process of dialog between all of the people of Middle East and North Africa, as well as a dialog we will undertake with different Jewish communities in Israel and around the world.

בישראל לבנות ובני דורנו במזרח התיכון ובצפון אפריקה

אנחנו, כצאצאיות וצאצאים לקהילות היהודיות בעולם הערבי והמוסלמי, במשרק ובמגרב, וכדור שני ושלישי של מזרחים בישראל, מתבוננים בהתרגשות רכה ובסקרנות עצומה בתפקיד המרכזי שתופסים באומץ כה רב הנשים והגברים בני דורנו ברחבי העולם הערבי בהפגנות ובמחאות למען חירות ושינוי. אנו מלאי הזדהות ותקווה באשר לעתיד המהפכות שזכו להצלחה, בתוניסיה ובמצרים, וחשים כאב ומתח לאור אובדן החיים הרב בלוב, בחריין, תימן, סוריה ומקומות נוספים.

המחאה של בני דורנו כנגד הדיכוי, כנגד משטרים משעבדים ומנצלים, והקריאה לשינוי, לחירות ולכינון משטרים דמוקרטיים, אשר יאפשרו את השתתפות האזרחים בתהליכים הפוליטיים, מסמלת רגע דרמטי בהיסטוריה של המזרח-התיכון וצפון-אפריקה שנקרע מזה דורות בין כוחות שונים, חיצוניים ופנימיים, אשר רמסו את זכויותיהם הפוליטיות, הכלכליות והתרבותיות של רוב אזרחיו.

אנחנו ישראלים, ואנחנו צאצאים ליהודים שחיו במזרח התיכון ובצפון-אפריקה במשך מאות ואלפי שנים. אבותינו ואמהותינו תרמו להתפתחות תרבות האזור, והיוו חלק ממנה. כך גם עבורנו, תרבות ארצות האיסלאם ותחושת השייכות רבת הדורות לאזור הן חלק בלתי נפרד מזהותנו. אנחנו חשים שותפות להיסטוריה הדתית, התרבותית והלשונית של המרחב המזרח-תיכוני והצפון-אפריקאי, אף על פי שדומה ש"נשכחנו" כבני היסטוריה זאת: ראשית בישראל, המדמינת עצמה כמצויה בין יבשת אירופה לבין צפון-אמריקה; שנית בעולם הערבי, אשר דומה כי קיבל פעמים רבות את הדיכוטומיה בין יהודים לערבים ואת הדמיון של היהודים כאירופאים, והעדיף להדחיק את ההיסטוריה של היהודים-הערבים כפרק שולי בעברו, או ככזה שכלל לא התקיים; ושלישית, יש להודות, בתוך הקהילות המזרחיות עצמן, אשר פעמים רבות, בעקבות הקולוניאליזם המערבי, הלאומיות היהודית והלאומיות הערבית, התביישו בעבר המשותף להן ולעמי ערב, וכך פעמים רבות ניסינו להשתלב בזרמים החזקים יותר בחברה, תוך מחיקה או צמצום של עברנו. ההשפעות ההדדיות העצומות בין התרבות היהודית לערבית היו נתונות לניסיון מחיקה קשה בדורות האחרונים, אך גם ניתן להבחין בסימניהן במרחבים רבים בחיים, ביניהם המוזיקה, התפילה, הלשון והספרות.

אנחנו מבקשים לבטא את ההזדהות ואת התקוות שלנו בשלב זה של מעבר דורות בהיסטוריה המזרח-תיכונית והצפון-אפריקאית, ומקווים כי הוא יביא פתח לחירויות ולצדק, ולחלוקה הוגנת של המשאבים של האזור, ופונים אל בנות ובני דורנו בעולם הערבי והמוסלמי בשאיפה לדיאלוג כן אשר יכיל אותנו בתוך ההיסטוריה והתרבות של האזור.

התבוננו בתמונות מתוניסיה ומכיכר א-תחריר בקנאה, לאור היכולת לארגן התנגדות אזרחית לא אלימה אשר הצליחה להוציא מאות אלפים אל הרחובות והכיכרות, ואילצה בסופו של דבר את השליטים להתפטר. גם אנחנו חיים במציאות שלטונית שעל אף התיירות להציג חזות נאורה ודמוקרטית אינה מייצגת חלקים נרחבים מאוכלוסיית המדינה, בשטחים ובתוך הקו הירוק, רומסת את הזכויות הכלכליות של רוב האזרחים, נמצאת בתהליך של צמצום החירויות הדמוקרטיות, ובונה חומות גזעניות מול תרבות

## קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

המזרח היהודית והערבית. אך בשונה מאזרחי תוניסיה ומצרים אנחנו עדיין רחוקים מן היכולת ליצור סולידריות בין הקבוצות השונות כמו זו שנראתה במצרים ובתוניסיה, להתאחד ולצעוד יחדיו, כלל התושבים, אל הכיכרות בתביעה למשטר צודק, אזרחית, כלכלית ותרבותית.

אנו מאמינים כי המאבק שלנו כמזרחים בישראל על זכויותינו הכלכליות, החברתיות והתרבותיות, נשען על ההבנה ששינוי פוליטי אינו יכול להישען על מעצמות המערב אשר ניצלו את אזורנו ואת אזרחיו לאורך דורות ארוכים. שינוי חייב לנבוע מתוך דיאלוג פנים אזורי, ומתוך חיבור למאבקים השונים המתנהלים כיום בארצות ערב, ובאופן ספציפי גם למאבקים של הפלסטינים אזרחי ישראל, לזכויות פוליטיות וכלכליות שוות בתוך מדינת ישראל, ועצירת דחיקתם הגזענית, ושל הפלסטינים בגדה ובעזה, החיים תחת כיבוש צבאי, בתביעתם לסיום הכיבוש ולעצמאות.

במכתבנו הקודם קראנו בעקבות נאום אובמה בקהיר ב-2009 לעליית הזהות המזרח-תיכונית הדמוקרטית ולשותפותנו בתוכה. עתה אנו מקווים כי הדור שלנו, בכל רחבי העולם הערבי, המוסלמי והיהודי, יהיה דור של גשרים מחודשים, שידלגו על פני החומות והאיבה של הדורות הקודמים, ויחדשו את הדיאלוג העמוק, שאנחנו איננו יכולים להבין את עצמנו בלעדיו, בין יהודים, סונים, שיעים ונוצרים, בין ערבים, כורדים, פּוּרְגֵ'ים, תורכים ופרסים, בין מזרחים לאשכנזים, בין פלסטינים לישראלים. כבעלי עבר משותף אנו מביטים בהזדהות ובתקווה גם אל עבר העתיד. אנחנו מאמינים בדיאלוג הפנים אזורי, שמטרתו לתקן ולשקם את כל מה שנהרס בדורות האחרונים, כמפתח לחידוש מודל השותפות המוסלמי-יהודי-נוצרי של אנדלוס, בעזרת השם, אינשאללה, וכפתח לתור-זהב תרבותי והיסטורי של ארצותינו.

תור-זהב זה לא יוכל להיווצר ללא אזרחות דמוקרטית שווה, ללא צדק חלוקתי כלכלי במשאבים ובהזדמנויות ובחינוך, ללא שיוויון בין נשים וגברים, וקבלת בני האדם כולם, על אמונתם, צבעם, מעמדם, מינם, נטיותיהם המיניות ועדתם, כחלקים שווים בבניית החברה החדשה לה אנו שואפים. אנו מחוייבים להשגת מטרות אלו, בדיאלוג מתמיד בין כל אזרחי האזור, ובדיאלוג שלנו עם יהודים מקבוצות שונות בארץ ובעולם.

## **An open condolences letter to the family of Mohammad Abu Khdeir and the Palestinian people**

Translated from Hebrew by Idit Arad and Matan Kaminer

**Our hands shed this blood**, our hands set Mohammad Abu Khdeir on fire, our hands fanned the flames. We have been living here for too long to claim that we did not know, we did not understand, we were not able to foresee. We witnessed the actions of the vast machine of incitement to racism and revenge operated by the government, the politicians, the educational system and the media. We watched Israeli society become neglected and poor, till the call to violence in all its different forms became an outlet for many, fighting for their place in the margins of society, teenagers and adults alike. We saw how the meaning of being Jewish has been emptied and sharply reduced to be identified with nationalism, militarism, a struggle for land, hatred of Gentiles, shameful exploitation of the Holocaust trauma and the "Teaching of the King ". More than anything, witnessed how the State of Israel through its various governments, has passed racist policies, enacted discriminatory laws, laboured to enshrine the occupation regime, preferring ongoing violence and victims on both sides rather than reaching agreement.

**Our hands shed this blood**, and we wish to express our condolences and our pain before the family of the boy Mohammed Abu Khdeir, who are experiencing an unthinkable loss, and to the Palestinian people. We oppose the occupation policy of the government. We are against the violence, racism and incitement which exist in the Israeli society. And we refuse to identify our Jewishness with it, the Jewishness which includes the words of the rabbi of Tripoli and Aleppo, the wise Hezekiah Shabtai who said: "Love thy neighbour as thy self" (Leviticus xviii). This love of one another does not only refer to the love of one Jew or Israeli to the other, but to loving our neighbours, those who are not Jews. It instructs us to co-exist with them through love, and pursue their safety and welfare. That is not only what common sense tells us, but also the holy Torah, whose ways are pleasant ways, and she commands us to go about our life in such a way, despite and in the face of the acts of state and the words of our official representatives.

**Our hands shed this blood**, contrary to the prohibition of murder in Judaism and Islam. Therefore we pledge to continue our struggle inside Israeli society, Jews and Palestinians together, in order to change society from within, fight its militarization, bring forth an awareness of those who are in the minority and therefore are its victim.

## קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

We will fight against the choice of war and indifference to the rights and lives of Palestinians and the continued favouring those who Jews within it. We shall strive to offer a human bond – a bond which is political, cultural, historical, Israeli- Palestinian and Jewish – Arab. A bond which can be in part reached through the history of many of us who are Jews of Arab origins and as such members of the Arab world. Our way is that of a struggle for civil equality and economic change, on behalf of many the marginalized and oppressed groups in our society: Arabs, Ethiopians, Mizrahim (Jews of Arab origins), women, the religious, migrant workers, refugees, and many more. The stronger side in the conflict has on the face of it the ability to break down the racist regime and the cycle of violence in a nonviolent way, and we seek to lead in such a way, in the face of the complacency of many Israelis who prefer to allow the regime of injustice and the cycle of violence remain in place, and expect “solutions” to somehow spring out of this never-ending “merry-go-round” of violence, its current face being the war against Gaza, thus bringing only more death and calls for revenge from both sides of the fence, and any sort of agreement more further away.

**Our hands shed this blood**, and our wish is to create a joint civil fight with any Palestinian group who will wish to join us in our struggle against occupation, against the violence of the regime of occupation, against the discrimination of Palestinian human rights. A fight for the end the occupation, either through the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the Palestinian territories, or through the establishing one state for all in which we will be equal citizens.

**Our hands shed this blood.** By saying so out loud in our society we are forever accused by the nationalistic propaganda of one sidedness. Of condemning only Israel's crimes and not those committed by Palestinians. To which we replay first and foremost: We think that he who supports or justifies the killing of Palestinians supports by implication and in fact encourages the killing of Israeli Jews. And vice versa, he who supports or justifies the killing of Israeli Jews supports by implication and in fact encourages the killing of Palestinians. The wheel of revenge is vast and fast-moving, and we are against any form of violence, and seek a non-violent solution to this violent situation. Objecting Netanyahu's way does not mean support for Hamas, the reality is not dichotomous, and more options exist on the axis between Netanyahu and Hamas. In addition, we must emphasize: we are Israeli citizens and the centre of our lives is in Israel, and therefore our main criticism is that of Israeli

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society, which we seek to repair. These murderers came from amongst us. There are of course grounds on which one can criticise other societies. Nevertheless we think that every person's duty is to first examine closely and critically the society in which he or she lives, any only after so doing to apply this approach to other societies. If we were Palestinians we might have turned our efforts to criticism of the Palestinian society, and perhaps we would have tried to create a left-wing alternative to its current regime. We are aware of the criticism that in matter of fact is present within Palestinian society of its rulers. Sadly support of it by us, the citizens of the occupying state, does not always help the growth of such voices within Palestinian society. We are also aware of the lack of symmetry between the State of Israel, which is a military and economic regional power occupying millions of Palestinians, denying for the last few decades their rights, and Palestinian society that suffers from an inward split, most of the sons of which are exiles, that has no independence, and which is run under Israeli military control, and is in a state of occupation.

Our hands shed this blood, and we know most of the innocent Palestinians murdered over the last sixty-six years by Israeli Jews did not receive due justice. Their murderers were not arrested, tried, or put in jail, unlike the six Israeli Jewish youngsters suspected in the murder of Mohammad Abu Khdeir. Most innocent Palestinians were killed by men in uniform, sent by the government, the army, the police or the secret services. When these men have killed innocents, whether from the air, with artillery or on the ground, this has sometimes been defined as a "human error" or a "technical glitch". Reference to them included only a faint apology (such cases were rarely investigated and mostly end with no indictments, and simply dissolve into thin air). Most are ignored by law enforcement agencies, the military and the media. The unique speed with which the suspects were apprehended this time is due to the fact that these murderers, like those of the Jewish Underground (who were quickly pardoned), like Ami Popper, Baruch Goldstein etc., were not in uniform. With the exception of the soldiers convicted of the Kufir Qasem massacre in 1956, who spent no more than a year in prison, military personnel in Israel have seldom been tried for such crimes, including in the cases of the worst atrocities.

**Our hands shed that blood**, and even now, when Benjamin Netanyahu wishes to express his condolences and to condemn the murder of Mohammad Abu Khdeir, he does so, in the same breath expressing a racist and dangerous claim of the moral superiority of Israel over its neighbours: "there is no place for such murderers in our

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society. In that we stand apart from our neighbours – In their society murderers are seen as heroes and have squares named after them. But this is not the only difference. We prosecute those who incite to hatred, whilst in the Palestinian Authority incitement is carried out by the official media and the educational system, calling by large for Israel's destruction". "Netanyahu forget that several individuals suspected to be war criminals served in Israeli governments, some under his very leadership, and that the head counted of innocent people murdered in the last 66 years of the conflict paints a very different picture. When you look at the numbers of Israeli Jewish citizens and that of Palestinians, you find the numbers of Palestinians is very much higher. He also forgets, or tries to make us forget, the widespread incitement propagated by his own government in recent weeks, and his own words on revenge after the discovery of bodies of the three Jewish boys – Gilad Sha'ar, Naftali Frenkel and Eyal Yifrah, killed two and half weeks ago, when all of us were in deep Shock: "The revenge for the blood of a small child has not yet been created the devil, nor the revenge of the blood of such young and pure boys". There were those who interpreted the "blood revenge" in terms of an eye for an eye and a child for a child, the logic of which would leave us all blind, orphaned and bereaved.

**Our hands shed this blood**, and instead to declaring days of fasting, mourning and repentance, the government has now decided to go on a military operation in Gaza, which it calls "solid rock". We call on the government to stop this operation at once and to strive for calm and for a peace agreement. Gaza has become in recent years the main opponent of Israeli governments. Gaza is the history of all of us; she is the oblivion of it too. She is the most painful place in Palestine/land of Israel, and in its very cemetery is buried the poet Rabbi Israel Najara, who might well be chanting from the heavens some words in defence of both us and the Palestinians. Gaza is mainly made out of refugees, deported from the coast in 1948 and since 1967 its sons have built up many of the houses which they are now bombing. All around Gaza, in the Israeli development towns, lives a population made out mostly of Jewish refugees from the Arab world and their descendants. They were pushed to leave their countries of origin after the war of independence in 1948, in the operation labelled poetically "from the ship to the village". As they arrived to the shores of Israel they were sent by trucks at in night time directly to those development towns, so that they do not stop in the centre of the country and "God forbid," stay there. In the south they worked in the fields and factories of the southern kibbutzim and moshavim around these towns.

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Gaza is all endless wars and invasions since the war of 1948: retaliations, 1956, 1967, the invasion of Ariel Sharon Gaza in 1970, and after in 1987, 2000, 2009, 2012, 2014. Gaza is yours and our hopelessness, and our common origins seem to be pushed further and further away: After forty years where the possibility of a painful historic compromise between the two national movements, Palestinian and Zionist, was on the table, this option is gradually evaporating. The conflict is being reinterpreted in mythological and theological terms, in terms of revenge and avenging that revenge, and all we promise to our children is many more wars for a generations to come, spreading killings amongst both people, and the building of an apartheid regime which will take even more decades thereafter to dismantle.

**Our hands shed this blood**, and we think we must examine together our common, bloody and tragic one hundred years old history in the context of that of the world. At the beginning of this time period European colonialism was at its height. It captured large parts of Asia and Africa, exploited economically and militarily the people it occupied. It treated these cultures as inferior and primitive, and massacred many. Following that many nationalistic movements, even in countries just freed from colonialism, adopted violence as a guiding organisational principal, and sought to “cleanse” those they considered foreign in their own National territory, on grounds of race / nationality / religion / ethnicity / culture, and thus brought on themselves a continuous state of war. We seek to work against this tendency in world history. Through the various communities of our society: Jews and Palestinians, Arabs and Israelis, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi, traditional, religious, secular and orthodox. We chose to oppose the walls, separation, dispossession, deportations, racism and colonization, and to offer a joint and common future as an alternative to the present depressive, oppressive and violent state of our society. A future which does not surrender to the cycle of violence and revenge but in its place offers justice, reparation, peace and equality. A future which draws on the common elements of our cultures, humanity and religious traditions, so that our hands will not shed more blood but will have to luck and opportunity to reach out to one another in peace, with the help of god, Insha'Allah.



מכתב תנחומים פתוח לבני משפחת הילד מוחמד אבו ח'דיר ולעם הפלסטיני

ידינו שפכו את הדם הזה, ידינו הציטו את הילד מוחמד אבו ח'דיר, ידינו ליבו את הבערה. אנחנו חיים כאן כבר זמן ארוך מדי מכדי שנוכל לומר שלא ידענו, שלא הבנו, שלא ציפינו. ראינו את המערכת הענפה של הסתה לגזענות ולנקמה מצד הממשלה, הפוליטיקאים, מערכת החינוך והתקשורת. ראינו כיצד החברה הישראלית הופכת מוזנחת וענייה, עד שההיענות לאלימות בביטוייה השונים הופכת מוצא לרבים, נערים ומבוגרים, הנאבקים על מקומם בשולי החברה. ראינו איך יהדותנו מצומצמת ועוברת רדוקציה חריפה ללאומנות, למיליטריזם, למאבק על קרקע, לשנאת גויים, לניצול מבזה של טראומת השואה ול"תורת המלך". ובעיקר ראינו איך מדינת ישראל, על ממשלותיה השונות, מממשת מדיניות גזענית, מחוקקת חוקים מפלים, פועלת להנצחת משטר הכיבוש בשטחים ומעדיפה אלימות מתמשכת, וקורבנות בשני הצדדים, על הסדר.

ידינו שפכו את הדם הזה, ואנחנו מבקשים להביע את תנחומינו וכאבנו לפני משפחת הילד מוחמד אבו ח'דיר, החווה אובדן שלא יתואר, ולפני העם הפלסטיני. אנחנו מתנגדים למדיניות הכיבוש של הממשלה. אנחנו מתנגדים לאלימות, לגזענות ולהסתה בחברה הישראלית. ואנחנו מסרבים לזהות את יהדותנו, שבכללה דברי רבן של טריפולי וחלב, חכם חזקיה שבת, שאמר: "וְאֶהְיֶה לְרֵעֵךְ כְּמוֹךָ" (ויקרא י"ט, י"ח) – ודבר זה לאהוב איש את אחיו, ולבוא לעזרתו, לא נצרך בין ישראל לחברו, אלא גם עם שכנו – האינם יהודים, צריך להיות עמהם באהבה, ולרדוף שלומם וטובתם, ודבר זה מלבד שהשכל מחייבו, גם התורה הקדושה, אשר דרכיה דרכי נועם, היא מחייבת אותנו על זה", עם מעשי המדינה ודברי נציגיה הרשמיים. ידינו שפכו את הדם הזה, בניגוד לאיסור הרצח ביהדות ובאיסלאם, ועל כן אנחנו מתחייבים להמשיך במאבק שלנו בתוך החברה הישראלית, יהודים ופלסטינים, כדי לשנות את החברה מבפנים, להיאבק במיליטריזציה של החברה, בתודעת המיעוט והקורבן, בבחירה במלחמה ובאדישות כלפי זכויותיהם וחייהם של הפלסטינים ובהמשך זכויות היתר ליהודים בלבד, ולהציע חיבור אנושי-פוליטי-תרבותי-היסטורי ישראלי-פלסטיני ויהודי-ערבי, בין השאר דרך ההיסטוריה של רבים מאיתנו כיהודים בני העולם הערבי, ודרך מאבק על שיוויון אזרחי ועל שינוי כלכלי-חברתי במקומן של קבוצות מודרות ומדוכאות בחברה הישראלית, וביניהן ערבים, אתיופים, מזרחים, נשים, חרדים, להט"ב, מהגרי עבודה, פליטים ועוד. לצד החזק בסכסוך יש לכאורה את היכולת לפרק את משטר הגזענות ומעגל האלימות באופן לא אלים, ואנו מבקשים להוביל לשם, מול השאננות של רבים בציבור הישראלי שמעדיפים להותיר את משטר העוול וגלגל האלימות על כנם, ומצפים ל"פתרונות" במסגרת מעגל האלימות, כפי שקורה כרגע במלחמה נגד עזה, שרק תוביל ליותר הרוגים ובקשת נקמה בשני הצדדים, ולא להסדר.

ידינו שפכו את הדם הזה, ואנחנו מושיטים יד למאבק אזרחי משותף שלנו עם כל קבוצה פלסטינית שתתעורר בכך כנגד הכיבוש, כנגד אלימות משטר הכיבוש, כנגד מניעת זכויות האדם מן הפלסטינים, ולמען סיום הכיבוש, אם בדרך של הקמת מדינת פלסטינית עצמאית בשטחים, ואם בדרך של הקמת מדינה אחת משותפת שבה נהיה כולנו אזרחים שווים.

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## קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

**ידינו שפכו את הדם הזה**, ובחברה שלנו מאשימה אותנו באופן קבוע הפרופגנדה הלאומנית בחד-צדדיות ובגינוי רק של פשעי ישראל ולא של פשעים שמבצעים הפלסטינים. על כך אנו עונים ראשית כל: לדעתנו מי שתומך או מצדיק הרג פלסטינים תומך במשתמע ולמעשה מעודד הרג יהודים-ישראלים, ולהפך, מי שתומך או מצדיק הרג יהודים-ישראלים תומך במשתמע ולמעשה מעודד הרג פלסטינים. גלגל הנקמה הוא גדול ותנועתו מהירה, ואילו אנחנו מתנגדים לכל סוג של אלימות, ומבקשים פתרון לא אליים למצב האלים. התנגדות לנתניהו אין פירושה תמיכה בחמאס, המציאות אינה דיכוטומית, ויש אפשרויות נוספות על הציר שבין נתניהו לחמאס. נוסף לכך עלינו להדגיש: אנחנו אזרחים ישראלים ומרכז חיינו בישראל, ועל כן גם עיקר הביקורת שלנו הוא כלפי החברה הישראלית, אותה אנחנו מבקשים לתקן. מתוכנו יצאו הרוצחים. ודאי שיש נימוקים לביקורת גם על חברות אחרות, ואנחנו חושבים שכל אדם מחוייב לבחינה יסודית וביקורתית של החברה שהוא חי בה, ורק לאחר מכן של חברות אחרות. אם היינו פלסטינים יתכן בהחלט שהיינו מתרכזים בביקורת על החברה הפלסטינית, ואולי היינו מנסים לקדם אלטרנטיבה משמאל לשלטון הפלסטיני. אנחנו ערים לביקורת שאכן מתקיימת בתוך החברה הפלסטינית, ולא תמיד תמיכה שלנו, כאזרחי המדינה הכובשת, תסייע לצמיחתן של עמדות ביקורתיות בתוך החברה הפלסטינית. אנחנו גם מודעים להיעדר הסימטריה בין מדינת ישראל, כמעצמה צבאית וכלכלית אזורית, הכובשת מיליוני פלסטינים חסרי זכויות לאורך עשורים ארוכים, לבין החברה הפלסטינית שסובלת מפיצול, שרוב בניה גולים, שאין לה עצמאות ואשר מתנהלת תחת שליטה צבאית ישראלית, ומצב כיבוש ומלחמה.

**ידינו שפכו את הדם הזה**, ואנחנו יודעים שרוב הפלסטינים החפים מפשע שנרצחו בשישים ושש השנים האחרונות על-ידי יהודים-ישראלים רוצחיהם לא נעצרו, לא נשפטו ולא הוכנסו מעולם לכלא, בניגוד למעצר ששת החשודים היהודים ברציחתו של הילד מוחמד אבו ח'דיר. רוב ההרוגים הפלסטיניים החפים מפשע נהרגו על-ידי לובשי מדים מטעם הממשלה, הצבא, המשטרה או השב"כ, והרג של חפים מפשע שהם ביצעו, בין ממטוסים, בין מתותחים ובין על הקרקע, הוגדר במקרים נדירים ביותר כ"טעות אנוש" או "תקלה טכנית" שכללה התנצלות רפה (והעדר חקירה או כתב אישום, או מסמוסם), ועל-פי רוב זכה להתעלמות מצד גורמי אכיפת החוק, הצבא והתקשורת. חד הפעמיות של תפיסת החשודים לרצח הפעם נובעת מהעובדה שכעת, כמו במקרה של המחותרת היהודית (ששותפיה קיבלו חנינה מהירה), עמי פופר, ברוך גולדשטיין וכו', הם פעלו ללא מדים. מלבד החיילים שנשפטו על הטבח בכפר קאסם ב-1956, ושהו בכלא לא יותר משנה, כמעט ולא נערך בישראל משפט כאשר המבצעים היו לובשי מדים, כולל במעשי הטבח הקשים ביותר.

**ידינו שפכו את הדם הזה**, ואפילו בעת כזאת, כאשר בנימין נתניהו מבקש להביע ניהומים וגינוי על רציחתו של הילד מוחמד אבו ח'דיר, הוא מבטא תוך כדי כך גם טענה גזענית ומסוכנת בדבר עליונות מוסרית של ישראל על שכניה: "מקומם של רוצחים כאלה איננו בחברה הישראלית. בכך אנחנו נבדלים משכנינו – שם הרוצחים מתקבלים כגיבורים ועל שמם נקראות כיכרות. זה איננו ההבדל היחיד בינינו. את המסיתים אצלנו אנחנו מעמידים לדין, בעוד ההסתה ברשות הפלסטינית מתבצעת בכלי תקשורת רשמיים ובמערכת החינוך, הסתה שעיקרה קריאה להשמדתה של ישראל". נתניהו שוכח שכמה חשודים

## קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

בפשעי מלחמה כיהנו בממשלות ישראל, חלקם גם בממשלותיו, ושפירת ההרוגים החפים מפשע היהודים-ישראלים לעומת ההרוגים החפים מפשע הפלסטינים במהלך הסכסוך הישראלי-פלסטיני ב-66 השנים האחרונות תעיד על מספר הרוגים פלסטיני גבוה הרבה יותר. כמו כן הוא שוכח, או משכיח, את ההסתה הנרחבת שלו ושל ממשלתו בשבועות האחרונים, ואת דבריו שלו על נקמה: "נקמת דם ילד קטן עוד לא ברא השטן, וגם לא נקמת דם של נערים צעירים וטהורים", לאחר גילוי גופות הנערים גיל-עד שער, נפתלי פרנקל ואייל יפרח, שנרצחו שבועיים וחצי קודם לכן, כאשר היינו כולנו מזועזעים. היה מי שפירש את "נקמת הדם" במונחים של עין תחת עין וילד תחת ילד, שיותירו את כולנו עיוורים, שכולים ויתומים.

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**ידינו שפכו את הדם הזה**, וכעת מחליטה הממשלה, במקום להכריז על ימי צום ואבל והכאה על חטא, על יציאה למבצע צבאי בעזה, אותו היא מכנה "צוק איתן", ואנו קוראים לה לחזור בה מכך ולחתור לרגיעה ולהסדר. עזה הפכה בשנים האחרונות ליריב העיקרי של ממשלות ישראל. עזה היא ההיסטוריה של כולנו, והיא שכחת ההיסטוריה של כולנו. היא המקום הכי כואב בפלסטין/ארץ-ישראל, ובבית-הקברות שלה קבור הפייטן ר' ישראל נג'ארה, שאולי אומר עכשיו דברי סנגוריה מפוייטים בשמיים, עלינו ועל הפלסטינים. עזה רובה פליטים, שגורשו ממישור החוף ב-48, ובני עזה בנו מאז 67 את רוב ערי ישראל שאותן הם עכשיו מפציצים. סביב לעזה בעיירות הפיתוח רוב של פליטים יהודים מן העולם הערבי וצאצאיהם, שנדחקו לצאת מארצותיהם לאחר המלחמה ב-48, ובארץ במבצע שכותרתו פסטורלית, "מן האונייה לכפר", נשלחו במשאיות בלילה שבו הגיעו לארץ מייד לעיירות הפיתוח, כדי שלא יעצרו בדרך במרכז הארץ ו"חס וחלילה" ישארו בו, ושם בדרום הם עיבדו את שדות הקיבוצים והמושבים שסביבם ועבדו במפעליהם. עזה היא אינסוף מלחמות ופלישות בשנים שאחרי 48: פעולות התגמול, 56, 67, פלישת אריק שרון לעזה ב-1970, 1987, 2000, 2009, 2012, 2014. עזה היא חוסר התקווה שלכם ושלנו, והמוצא שלנו ושלכם הולך ומתרחק: אחרי ארבעים שנה שבהן האפשרות של פשרה היסטורית כואבת בין שתי התנועות הלאומיות, הפלסטינית והציונית, היתה מונחת על השולחן, האפשרות הזאת הולכת ומתאדה, הסכסוך מפורש מחדש במונחים מיתולוגיים ותיאולוגיים, במונחים של נקמה ונקמה על נקמה, וכל שאנחנו מבטיחים לילדינו הוא עוד מלחמות רבות לשנות דור, שיהרגו בנו ובכם ללא מוצא ויביאו למיסודו של משטר אפרטהייד שיפול רק לאחר דורות רבים נוספים.

**ידינו שפכו את הדם הזה**, ואנחנו חושבים שעלינו להתבונן יחד על ההיסטוריה שלנו, המשותפת, המדממת והטראגית, בת מאה השנים, ועל מקומה בעולם. בראשיתה של תקופה זאת הקולוניאליזם האירופי היה בשיאו, וכבש חלקים גדולים מאסיה ואפריקה, ניצל כלכלית וצבאית את עמיהן, התייחס לתרבויותיהן כפרימיטיביות וערך בהן מעשי טבח נרחבים. בהמשך רוב התנועות הלאומיות, גם בארצות שרק השתחררו מן הקולוניאליזם, אימצו את האלימות כעיקרון מארגן שלהן, וביקשו "לטהר" את המרחב הלאומי מזרים בנימוקים גזעיים/לאומיים/דתיים/אתניים/תרבותיים, והביאו למצב מתמשך של מלחמה. אנחנו מבקשים לפעול נגד כיוון זה של ההיסטוריה בעולם ובקהילות השונות שלנו, כיהודים וכפלסטינים, כערבים וכישראלים, כמזרחים וכאשכנזים, כמסורתיים, דתיים, חילונים וחרדים, ולהתנגד לחומות,

**קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It**

להפרדה, לנישול, לגירוש, לגזענות ולקולוניזציה, ולהציע עתיד אלטרנטיבי משותף להווה המדכא, המדוכא והאלים של חברותינו, שאינו נכנע למעגל האלימות והנקמה, אלא מציע צדק, תיקון, שלום ושיוויון, הנשען על תרבויותינו, אנושיותינו ומסורותינו הדתיות המשותפות, כדי שידינו לא ישפכו עוד דם, ואף יזכו להיות מושטות זה לזה בברכת שלום בעזרת השם, אינשאללה.

## **Much water cannot put it out**

**As a Jew I do not justify suicide, and it does not matter if it's the suicide of the hero Samson, of those at the fortification of Masada or of Moshe Silman at the demonstration on Shabbat evening a week ago. Life is given to us without our permission and it is also taken away without our permission or objection.**

But it is not always enough to condemn the attempted suicide itself, in the hope that this condemnation and the denial of rituals (burial outside the cemetery, etc.) will deter the living from choosing suicide. Sometimes we must also look into the reasons for the suicide, in order to perhaps try to deal with them and to give hope to those who are so desperate that suicide has ceased to frighten them.

When faced with the terrible act of Moshe Silman, who set himself on fire in Tel-Aviv at demonstration of one year struggle for public housing, the only way we can give meaning to his act is to bring hope and the possibility of alternatives to those who are in a similar situation of ruin – we as a community will commit ourselves to fighting those forces that made Silman despair, until we correct the situation: to fight against the Ministry of Housing which has been gradually destroying public housing over the last ten and a half years and laying down impossible criteria (for example, because Moshe Silman owned a flat before his economic collapse, he had no chance of having the right to public housing), for public housing which respects the tenants and does not imprison them in separate ghettos; to fight for humane behavior on the part of the Bituach Leumi (Social Security), so that they understand that they should be on the side of those who come to them even if the state determines the insufficient allowances and the terrifying bureaucracy; to fight against the mafia-like behaviour of the bailiff's office, which can by law levy inhuman interest, and expropriate a person's basic property (which sometimes is his means of earning a living, like Silman's lorry), and so turn a relatively small debt into complete economic collapse; to fight for a legal system which will be accessible to people of low standing, and not closed to them (see Yuval Albeshan); to fight for the resignation of the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister who are responsible, with their consistently inhuman policies, for Silman's setting himself on fire.

**Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu reacted to Silman's act as "a great personal tragedy". Bibi made it clear by describing the tragedy as "personal" that he was rejecting the social, economic and moral reasons, and showed his outlook on the**

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**world– that collapse is only personal –this, as long as the macro results of the economic policy are good, as long as his chair is padded, with no connection to the personal fate of many citizens (this when the tycoons’ tragedies may cause them heavy losses which are not personal, and are collected as a “haircut” from citizens’ accounts, and so the banks are saved from collapse without it being claimed that their tragedy is personal and the responsibility personal).**

More extreme than Bibi, but in fact an expression of the same standpoint, was Professor Amir Hetzroni from the Academic Centre in Ariel, who wrote delicately, “The setting on fire did not make an impression on me. It may be that we have got rid of a parasite cheaply,” and added: “the heart of the matter – from a global perspective, is that such people add very little to the Israeli economy, which I am part of... true, there is a certain entertainment value in bonfires, but when we take into consideration the cost of the fire brigade –our cost outweighs our loss.”

Hetzroni wants to portray Moshe Silman as a parasite asking to live at the baron’s expense – and he considers himself as the “baron”. Of course, it is possible to examine how much Hetzroni has worked in his life compared to Silman who worked as a lorry and bus driver and as owner of a delivery company; Hetzroni’s stance, which he defined as neo-liberal, explaining that “here we have a class war between the working public and the parasites” (in parallel to his proposal that the only assistance Silman needed was admission to a mental hospital; and see the article of Eva Iluz on the psychologization of the social struggle), an idea close to Bibi’s declaration in his fight against single-parent mothers at the time of Vicky Knfo’s fight, when he spoke of the poor as lazy and parasites contrary to the reality of the working poor, doing harder work in fact); the ideas and values of these two are expressed in the arrogant self-confidence of the young-beautiful-successful to whom accidents don’t happen, and who have never been caught in a situation where they need help, and therefore, dignity means personal responsibility and independence and dependence means shame.

It could be that there are people who are really far from the possibility of needing the charity of others, even though our sages have taught us that only the eternal living God knows what the future will be, and even though we know that these people, who speak in lofty tones about personal responsibility and independence, enjoy strong connections with the wealthy who support them, without demanding that they be

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asked to embarrass themselves, and rescue them from collapsing, like the tycoons, and society pays their debts.

But, as it was reported in the newspaper “Calcalist,” around 63% of us are in a situation of “financial fragility,” in which we could not withstand a one-time unusual expense of 8000 NIS. This means that occurrences such as losing one’s job, a long delay in receiving one’s salary, bankruptcy, even divorce, and of course the serious illness or, God forbid, death of a family member, can drag a man down sharply from being apparently middle class economically to the oppressed, a position where housing security, available medical services, etc. are put in question.

It may be of course that the Prime Minister does not expect to be “financially fragile” in the future, although one never knows, and it may be that Professor Hetzroni also feels safe from this possibility owing to his strong connections. It may be that they now believe it because they are healthy, successful and protected, and “personal” or family tragedies will shatter this belief. Most of us are not in their situation, and need to know that beyond the at times empty slogans of “personal responsibility,” there is a need for a mutual community and citizen guarantee so that we will have an insurance for survival in situations of breakdown. Otherwise, it is just a question of statistics as to who this will happen to and who not (obviously, the statistics are not equal, in fact where you start off in a certain sector of the population economically indicates your future prospects, as does living in the centre or the periphery, ethnic and gender identity, etc).

Therefore, the message behind the expression “We are all Moshe Silman” during the protest last week is not an encouragement to commit suicide, but an understanding that it is not an exceptional occurrence that we could never reach, and that the only way to prevent ourselves getting to that stage, from personal, narrow and egoistical interests, is to express the great break in the system, the breakdown of total loss of faith in one’s ability to live tomorrow – in dignity, with a roof over one’s head, with the basic needs of food and medicine.

Aside from that, burying your head in the sand is not real – attempted suicide against a background of economic distress is not new, as one can see from the figures in Israel for previous years, and the rise in the rate of suicides in Greece in the last year. The difference is that Moshe Silman did not commit suicide at home, quietly, hidden, in shame, but in public, in a crowd and in a large fire, while making precise accusations.

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After the suicide, there was suddenly widespread media interest in the topic of public housing, after years of neglect. Activists who have been dealing with public housing for years, and have mostly not succeeded in interesting reporters in the stories of hardship, have been overwhelmed by requests from the newspapers. It is sad that for the media, and also perhaps for the Israeli public, we need such a shocking event to remind us of this burning issue, which is at the centre of many people's lives. In spite of this, we should not leave out the possibility that this public outpouring will pressure a change in policy, the building of public housing (combined with other housing and not in separate ghettos), new criteria, the cancellation of evictions, the accounting for the three billion stolen from public housing (see the Knesset report), although – unfortunately – such issues which come up for a while, also disappear, and we need to continue the fight for a long time.

Part of the media debate has focused on the roots of the crisis, and on the question as to how public housing has dried up in the last ten years, and who is responsible for this. Yet other sections of the press went in the direction of sensationalizing the protest: Razi Barkai, in the morning after the tragedy, asked activists whether the suicide had not damaged the protest strategy, as if this was the issue, and as if it was not the job of journalists on such a morning to ask difficult questions of the Finance Minister, the Minister of Housing, the Prime Minister, the heads of public housing companies, the Bituach Leumi, the bailiff's office and the legal system; Kobi Arieli blamed the protesters for the suicide, and forgot to blame them for the deaths of all those who committed suicide in their homes (or in the street at night) in the last year, because of financial difficulties.

Between the discussion of the roots of the crisis and the sensationalism, most journalists tended to look at the issue from the perspective of "people in need", and asked the activists to give them personal hardship stories. The framing of the story as one of an individual in need, and the replacing the story of the struggle with the story of an individual, ultimately serves the liberal standpoint which denies that the story represents an average and sees in it just a "poor" individual. What took form in the tent protest in the last year points to an alternative: groups fighting for public housing and other activists, such as "Free Be'er Sheva", the public housing team, the forum of the areas of the periphery and Hamaabara, and before that the organization "Living in Dignity", which combines individual stories of homeless people in Israel together with an ideological wide-ranging fight about principles, for changing the system. The



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joint struggle can give hope to people in need and a desire to go on, and not to be broken like Silman but to continue to fight. It is important that the media learn to present this aspect of reality as well.

Who will put out the blaze? The blaze lit by the government of Israel consumed the body of Moshe Silman, and the doctors couldn't save him. What about the blaze lit by the Israeli government in Israeli society? This fire will take a long time to put out and to rehabilitate, to create from the struggle a place for mutual bonds, for community and sanity, and not for hatred, exploitation, and cultural, economic and social oppression and humiliation.

**May God have mercy on the soul of Moshe Silman and on us.**

כיהודי איני מצדיק התאבדות, ולא משנה אם היא של שמשון הגיבור, של המתבצרים במצדה או של משה סילמן בהפגנת מוצאי-שבת לפני כשבוע. החיים ניתנים לנו בלי שביקשנו אותם, והם גם ניטלים בלי שנוכל לבקש או להתנגד.

אבל לא תמיד מספיק לגנות את ניסיון ההתאבדות עצמו, מתוך תקווה שגינזי זה, ושלל הסימונים הטקסיים שסביבו (קבורה מעבר לגדר, העדר שבעה וכו'), ירתיעו את החיים מלאמץ את דרכו של המתאבד ומליטול גם הם את חייהם. לעיתים יש לבדוק מה הן סיבות העומק להתאבדות, כדי לנסות אולי לבטל אותן ולהעניק תקווה לנואשים מכל, אלו שההתאבדות חדלה מלהפחיד אותם.

על כן מול מעשהו המכאיב והנורא של משה סילמן, אשר שרף עצמו בתל-אביב בהפגנת השנה למאבק האוהלים, הדרך היחידה שתהיה להעניק למעשה משמעות אשר תציע תקווה ואפשרות אלטרנטיבית למי שמצויים במצבים דומים על סף האבדון – היא שאנחנו נתחייב כקהילה להיאבק מול הגורמים אשר עליהם הצביע סילמן כאלו שייאשו אותנו, עד לתיקונם: להיאבק מול משרד השיכון המחסל בהדרגה את הדיוור הציבורי עשור וחצי וקובע לו קריטריונים בלתי-סבירים (כך למשל בגלל שלמשה סילמן היתה דירה לפני התמוטטות הכלכלית, אין לו כל אפשרות להיות זכאי לדיוור ציבורי), ולמען דיוור ציבורי המכבד את דייריו, ואינו כולא אותם בגטאות נפרדים; להיאבק למען התנהגות אנושית של הביטוח הלאומי, אשר מבין כי הוא צריך לעמוד לצד הבאים בשעריו גם אם המדינה קובעת להם קצבאות בלתי סבירות ובירוקרטיה אימתנית; להיאבק מול ההתנהגות המאפיונרית של ההוצאה לפועל, היכולה כחוק לגבות ריביות בלתי אנושיות, ולעקל רכושו הבסיסי של אדם (שלפעמים הוא כלי פרנסתו, כגון משאיתו של סלימן), וכך להפוך חוב יחסית קטן להתמוטטות כלכלית שלמה; להיאבק למען כך שמערכת המשפט תהיה נגישה בפועל למעמדות הנמוכים, ולא חסומה כלפיהם (ראו יובל אלבשן); ולהיאבק לפיטוריהם של ראש הממשלה ושר האוצר האחראים במדיניותם העיקבית והבלתי-אנושית גם לשריפה הזאת.

ראש הממשלה ביבי נתניהו הגיב על מעשה השריפה בכך שמדובר ב"טרגדיה אישית גדולה". הבחירה של ביבי למסגר את הטרגדיה כ"אישית" ולהרחיקה מסיבותיה החברתיות, הכלכליות והמוסדיות, מבטאת את תפיסת עולמו שבה ההתמוטטות היא אישית בלבד – כיוון שהכלכלה מתפקדת כל עוד תוצאות המאקרו שלה טובות, כל עוד כסאו מרופד, ובלי קשר לגורלם האישי של רבים מהאזרחים (וזאת כאשר הטרגדיות של הטייקונים העלולות לגרום להם להפסדים כבדים אינן אישיות, ומגובות ב"תספורות" על חשבון האזרחים, וכך גם ניצלו בעבר הבנקים מקריסה בלי שיטען שמדובר בטרגדיה אישית או אחריותם האישית).

קיצוני מביבי, אך למעשה תוך ביטוי של אותה עמדה, היה פרופסור אמיר חצרוני מן המרכז

האקדמי באריאל, שבעדינות כתב ש"עצם ההצתה לא עושה עלי רושם. ייתכן אפילו שנפטרנו בזול מפרזיט", והוסיף: "לגופם של דברים – בראייה גלובלית, אנשים מסוגו מוסיפים מעט מאוד לכלכלה

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הישראלית, שאני חלק ממנה... נכון, יש חן בידורי מסוים במדורות, אבל כשלוקחים בחשבון את העלות של כיבוי האש – יוצא שכרנו בהפסדנו".

חצרוני ביקש להציג את משה סילמן כפרזיט המבקש לחיות על חשבון הברון – כלומר, לדבריו, על חשבוננו. אפשר לבדוק כמובן כמה עבד חצרוני בחייו מול עבודתו של סילמן כנהג משאית ומונית וכבעל חברת שליחויות; עמדתו של חצרוני, שאותה הגדיר כניאו-ליברלית תוך שהוא מסביר ש"יש פה מלחמת מעמדות בין הציבור העובד לפרזיטים" (במקביל להצעה שהסיוע היחיד שהיה צריך סילמן לקבל הוא אשפוז נפשי, וראו מאמרה של אוה אילוז על פסיכולוגיזציה של מאבק חברתי), קרובה מושגית להכרזותיו של ביבי במאבקו מול הנשים החד-הוריות בעת מאבקה של ויקי קנפו, אז דיבר על העניים כעצלנים ופרזיטים) בניגוד למציאות של עניים עובדים, ודווקא בעבודות הקשות ביותר); העולם המושגי והערכי של שניהם מבטא בטחון עצמי שחצני של הצעירים-היפים-והמצליחים שלעולם חוסן, וכי לעולם לא יקלעו למצב שבו הם יזדקקו לעזרה, ועל כן כבוד פירושו אחריות אישית ועצמאות ואילו תלות פירושה בושה.

יתכן שיש אנשים הרחוקים באמת מן האפשרות שיזדקקו לחסדם של אחרים, אף על פי שרבותינו לימדו אותנו שרק האלוהים נצחי וחי וקיים ויודע את שעתיד להיות, ואף על פי שאנחנו יודעים שדווקא אנשים אלו, המדברים גבוהה גבוהה על אחריות אישית ועצמאות נהנים מקשרים חזקים עם בעלי הון הממנים אותם, בלי שידרשו להתבייש בכך, ומאלצים בנפילתם, כמו הטייקונים, את החברה לשלם את חובותיהם.

אבל, כפי שהצביעו במחקר בעיתון "כלכליסט", כ-63% מאיתנו מצויים במצב של "שבירות פיננסית", בו לא נוכל לעמוד בהוצאה חד פעמית חריגה של 8000 ש"ח. משמעות הדבר שאירועים כמו פיטורין, עיכוב ארוך של משכורת, פשיטת רגל, גם גירושין, וכמובן מחלה קשה של בן משפחה או מוות חס וחלילה, יכולים לדרדר אדם ממצב כלכלי של מעמד ביניים לכאורה אל העשירונים התחתונים באופן חד וקשה, המעמיד בסימן שאלה את הביטחון בקורת גג, בשירות רפואי זמין וכו' (ראו גם אמנון פורטוגלי).

יתכן כמובן שלראש ממשלה לא צפויה בעתיד "שבירות פיננסית", אם כי לעולם אין לדעת, ויתכן שגם פרופסור חצרוני חש מוגן מאפשרות זאת בשל קשריו האיתנים. אך יתכן שהם חשים כך כעת כאשר הם בריאים, מצליחים ומוגנים, וטרגדיות "אישיות" או משפחתיות ישברו אמונה זאת. רובנו לא במצבם, וצריכים לדעת שמעבר לסיסמאות הלעיתים ריקות על "אחריות אישית", יש צורך בערכות הדדית קהילתית ואזרחית כדי שתהיה לנו תעודת ביטוח לשרידה במצבים של קריסה. אחרת זאת רק שאלה של סטטיסטיקה למי זה יקרה ולמי לא (כמובן שלא סטטיסטיקה שיוויונית, עצם נקודת ההתחלה בעשירון מסויים מבחינה כלכלית צופה את אופקי העתיד, וכן מגורים במרכז או בפריפריה, זהות אתניות ומגדרית וכו').

על כן המסר המסתתר מתחת לביטוי "כולנו משה סילמן" בהפגנות בשבוע האחרון אינו עידוד למעשי התאבדות, אלא הבנה שהוא אינו מקרה חריג שאין שום אפשרות שנגיע אליו, ושהדרך היחידה

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למנוע את הגעתנו אליו, אפילו מאינטרס אישי צר ואגואיסטי, היא שינוי השיטה של ביבי, שטייניץ וחצרונני. סילמן לא היה משוגע, למרות הניסיונות לתארו ככזה. הוא ביטא בחייו את השבר הגדול של השיטה, את הקריסה אל אובדן מוחלט של אמון ביכולתך לחיות מחר – בכבוד, תחת גג, עם אפשרויות בסיסיות של אוכל ותרופות.

מלבד זאת, טמינת הראש בחול אינה אמיתית – ניסיונות התאבדות על רקע מצב כלכלי אינם חידוש, כפי שמראים נתונים מן הארץ משנים קודמות, וכפי שמראה מהעליה בשיעור המתאבדים ביוון בשנה האחרונה. ההבדל הוא שהפעם משה סילמן לא התאבד בבית, בשקט, בסתר, בבושה, אלא הוציא את התאבדותו אל המרחב הציבורי, בתוך קהל רב ובאש גדולה, תוך חיבור אני מאשים חברתי-כלכלי מדוקדק.

לאחר המעשה של סילמן התעורר לפתע עניין תקשורתי מקיף בנושא הדיור הציבורי, שלא זכור מזה שנים. פעילים העוסקים בדיור הציבורי זמן ארוך, ולרוב אינם מצליחים לעניין כתבים בסיפורים קשים שהם מכירים, הוצפו בפניות מעיתונאים. עצוב שלתקשורת, ואולי גם לחברה הישראלית, נדרש אירוע מזעזע כל כך כדי להיזכר בסיפור בוער כל כך, המצוי במרכז חייהם של רבים. ולמרות זאת, אין להקל ראש באפשרות שהצפת הנושא כן תתרום ללחץ ציבורי לשינוי המדיניות, לבניית דיור ציבורי (המשולב בדיור אחר ולא יוצר גטאות נפרדים), לקריטריונים חדשים, לביטול הפינויים, להשבת שלושת המליארדים שנגנבו מן הדיור הציבורי (ראו דו"ח הכנסת), אם כי לצערנו נושאים מסוג זה כפי שהם צפים ברגע, הם גם נעלמים, או שמא מועלמים, ברגע, ויהיה צריך להיאבק עוד זמן רב.

חלק מן הדיון התקשורתי הלך אל שורשיו של המשבר, ואל השאלה המתבקשת כיצד גווע לו הדיור הציבורי בעשורים האחרונים, ומי האחראים להחלטה לייבשו. לעומת זאת חלקים נוספים נטו לכיוונים סנסציוניים כנגד המחאה עצמה: רזי ברקאי, בבוקר שלמחרת המקרה הנורא, שאל פעילים האם המעשה של סילמן לא יפגע באסטרטגיית המחאה, כאילו זהו הנושא, וכאילו אין זה מתפקידו כעיתונאי להפנות בבוקר שכזה שאלות קשות לשר האוצר, לשר השיכון, לראש הממשלה, לראשי חברות הדיור הציבורי, לביטוח הלאומי, להוצאה לפועל ולמערכת המשפט; קובי אריאלי האשים את אנשי המחאה בהצתה של סילמן, ושכח להאשים במותם של כל מי שהתאבדו בסתר בתייהם (או ברחוב באפילת הלילה) בעקבות קשיים כלכליים בשנה האחרונה.

בין הדיון בשורשי המשבר לדיון הסנסציוני, נטו רוב העיתונאים לראות את הנושא מפרספקטיבת ה"אנשים במצוקה", ופנו לפעילים בבקשה להפנותם לסיפורים אישיים קשים (ראו דבריה של שיר אלונני); המסגור רק דרך סיפור המצוקה האישי, והשמטת סיפור המאבק מתוך הסיפור האישי, משרתים בסופו של דבר את הסדר הליברלי המרחיק את הסיפור מן הצופה הממוצע, והרואה בו מקרה פרטי של "מסכנות". מה שהתגבש במחאת האוהלים בשנה האחרונה בכמה הקשרים מציע אלטרנטיבה לכך: קבוצות מאבק משותפות למחוסרי דיור ולפעילים אחרים, כמו באר שבע המשוחררת, צוות הדיור הציבורי, פורום גוש הפריפריות והמעברה, ועוד קודם לכן העמותה לחיים בכבוד, אשר משלבים חיים מתוך הסיפורים האישיים של מחוסרי דיור בישראל יחד עם מאבק עקרוני, אידיאולוגי ורחב למען שינוי השיטה. האפשרות של קהילה ושל מאבק היא שיכולה להעניק תקווה למצויים במצב זה, וטעם להמשיך,

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ולא להגיע אל השבר הנורא של סילמן, אלא להמשיך להיאבק. חשוב שהתקשורת תלמד לייצג גם פן זה של המציאות.

מי יכבה את הבערה? הבערה שהבעירה ממשלת ישראל בגופו משה סילמן כילתה את גופו, והרופאים לא יכולים היו להציע לו הצלה. ואת הבערה שהבעירה ממשלת ישראל בחברה הישראלית? אותה יקח זמן רב לכבות ולשקם, וליצור בה מתוך מאבק עיקש מקום לערבות הדדית, לקהילה ולשפיות, ולא לשנאה, ניצול, דיכוי וביזוי, חברתי, כלכלי ותרבותי. ירחם המקום על נפשו של משה סילמן ועלינו.

## Letter of support for the ultra-Orthodox struggle against draft law

**We, civilians and activists – religious, masorti (tradition-committed) and secular – wish to express our support for the struggle of the ultra-Orthodox community against forced military enlistment.**

There must be an end to the empty rhetoric employed by the Israeli government and its constituent parties that are calling for the “sharing of the burden” of military service, by which they are deceiving the public. Such rhetoric is designed to divert public attention from real inequality in Israel:

Inequality among various segments of the population (including the ultra-Orthodox, whose members suffer from dire poverty);

Inequality in educational and employment opportunities in Israel;

Inequality in the moving of certain groups to the country’s periphery as opposed to the concentration of other segments of the population in the geographic center (the economic and cultural center of Israel);

Inequality in the budget allocation for Western cultural activity in Tel Aviv, as opposed to the lack of allocation for Arab, Mizrahi and Ethiopian cultural activity or for cultural activity outside of Tel Aviv in general;

Inequality in the surplus of Jewish Ashkenazi secular men in government, academia, the justice system, and in the economic elite, and in the surplus of Mizrahis, Arabs, Ethiopians and Russians in boarding schools for youth at risk and prisons, in the employment of independent contractors, and in the lower economic classes.

It appears that there is glaring inequality in every area. However, centering the debate on “equality” around the question of military service makes a mockery of the very concept of equality. This process is smokescreen to conceal the truth about severe inequality in economic opportunity, education, employment, funding for arts and culture, and other areas – inequality that does not affect the members of Knesset who spearheaded the very issue of “sharing the burden.”

It is clear to us that conscripting the ultra-Orthodox in Israel would severely compromise their ability to uphold their religious values, while forcing upon them a militaristic Zionist nationalism, which they oppose. It is lamentable that the only context in which the debate on inequality becomes popular is in a nationalist-militaristic one, in an attempt to coerce an insular community to integrate.

### קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

It is hard to avoid the feeling that those who are pushing for Haredi conscription are motivated to a large extent by the evolution of that same anti-Semitic desire in Europe to correct the Jew – to erase his repellent strangeness and “Christianize” him. In Israel, this intention returns out of deep hatred for and fear of Haredim and their strangeness – one that reminds many people of the Jews depicted in anti-Semitic cartoons. They seek to correct the Haredim by turning them into *new* Israelis and making them part of the nation through the military.

However, as Rabbi Saadia Gaon argued, “Our nation is only a nation by virtue of its Torahs,” the *Written Torah* and the *Oral Torah*. It must be noted that Jewish-Zionist definitions of nationalism, which are based on secular-European ideas of nationalism from past generations, are foreign to a large portion of the Jewish tradition and to the world of the Torah.

Conscription of Haredim would constitute a profound spiritual crisis (forced conversion from Judaism, in their words) in the same way that drafting Palestinian citizens of Israel would constitute a crisis of their national identity and would pit them against their brothers. This situation has already existed for many decades with the drafting of Bedouin and Druze citizens, whose enlistment proves that integration into the military, in and of itself, does not further their acceptance as equal citizens in Israel. Enlistment does not curb the racism experienced by these communities, help obtain recognition for the unrecognized villages of the Bedouin, fix the underfunding of the Druze towns, or help with the lack of opportunities in education and employment.

It should also be noted that the drafting of Mizrahis caused a deep crisis when they were assigned to low-status positions (which helped push them into the lower classes upon completing military service), and when they were used as cannon fodder in the recent wars. According to recent statistics, it turns out that most of those who die during military service come from the social, economic, and geographic periphery of the country.

In this context, it appears that the connection between the neoliberalism of the Yesh Atid party and the notion of drafting Haredim as a “return of Zionism” is designed to push Haredim (after their release from the army) into the same job market that has largely been reserved for Mizrahis. This would mean working for independent contractors and making minimum wage, which would keep them below the poverty line.

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It must be clearly stated: Haredim must be absolved from military service, which would allow those who wish to work to do so. Until now, the deferral of enlistment has left the ultra-Orthodox in a void between yeshiva studies and working illegally, keeping them stuck in the informal economy.

The propagandists and politicians of Yesh Atid should be reminded that many of the ultra-Orthodox *do* indeed work (many of whom work difficult jobs for poverty wages). Those who fail to see their work must not live in their neighborhoods, but rather drive SUVs between the Ramat Aviv neighborhood of north Tel Aviv and the government halls in Jerusalem. It is obvious that the current scheming against Haredim, the incitement and demonization, are part of a strategy of divide and conquer vis-a-vis various communities in the country – residents of the periphery, Arabs, ultra-Orthodox, Mizrahis, Ethiopians, Russians, poor people, and others – so that they do not engage in joint struggle against those who exploit them economically. The propaganda around military service also defers public debate on fundamental questions such as the role of the military in Israeli society, or what the government is doing to settle the conflict and diminish the need for a military.

Government support for higher education is a badge of honor for a state, and reform is necessary to reach an equitable policy. The government must create truly equitable criteria for higher religious education for members of various faiths – with scholarships for students or institutions – for Jews, Muslims, Christians, Druze, and Bahais. Similar criteria should be applied to universities, conservatories, and other institutions of education and training, while ensuring admission is not restricted to one ethnic, geographic or economic group but is instead open to a diverse set of students. Most of the undersigned are not ultra-Orthodox in our daily way of life, but some of our relatives belong to various Haredi communities, as do some of our neighbors, coworkers, and allies. We may often raise questions about the Haredi ethos, for example from the masorti, or tradition-committed, point of view that some of us share, or from the Jewish-feminist worldview some of us hold. Some of us participated in the struggle against the separation of Mizrahi girls in Emmanuel, since we are partners in feminist and Mizrahi struggles as well as in struggles in other segments of Israeli society. We have critiques of all the different segments of Israeli society – they all require positive change. But we believe that we must offer our hand in solidarity in the ultra-Orthodox community's struggle. Haredim are fighting government attempts to oppress their community through militarism, hatred and the



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silencing of an alternative economic/political agenda than that of the government. We feel that Haredi resistance to conscription, as well as the community's prioritizing the value of learning, is not foreign to the traditional Jewish stance with a long-standing history.

We express our support for the struggle of the Haredi community against conscription and demand of the government a *real* equal share of the burdenn:

The burden of poverty;

The burden on the periphery, and the burden of unequal distribution of land among development towns, Arab cities, and regional councils;

The burden of limited and limiting educational and economic opportunities;

And the burden of racism, of hatred of the other, and of stereotypes.

**מכתב תמיכה בחברה החרדית ובמאבקה בגיוס כפוי לצבא**

אנו, אזרחים ואזרחיות, פעילים ופעילות – דתיים, מסורתיים וחילונים – מביעים בזאת את תמיכתנו במאבקה של החברה החרדית כנגד גיוסה בכפייה לצבא.

יש לשים קץ לדיבורי ההבל של ממשלת ישראל והמפלגות החברות בה על "שוויון בנטל" שמתעתעים בציבור. דיבורים אשר נועדו להסית את תשומת הלב הציבורית מאי-השוויון האמיתי במדינת ישראל: במעמד הכלכלי של קבוצות שונות (לרבות הקבוצה החרדית, שחבריה סובלים מעוני קשה;); באופציות החינוך והתעסוקה בחברה הישראלית; בפזור של קבוצות מסוימות אל הפריפריה לעומת ריכוזן של אחרות במרכז הגיאוגרפי שהוא גם המרכז הכלכלי-תרבותי בישראל; בתקצוב התרבות המערבית בתל-אביב, לעומת תת-התקצוב של התרבות הערבית, המזרחית והאתיופית, ותת-התקצוב של תרבות בכלל מחוץ לתל-אביב.

בשיעור העודף של גברים-יהודים-אשכנזים-חילונים בממשלה, באקדמיה, בבתי המשפט ובעשירון העליון, ובשיעור העודף של מזרחים, ערבים, אתיופים ורוסים בפנימיות לנוער בסיכון, בבתי-כלא, במקומות עבודה המעסיקים אותם כעובדי קבלן ובמעמדות הנמוכים.

נדמה כי כל תחום שנבחן נגוע באי-שוויון הזועק לשמיים.

מיקודו של הדיון בנושא השוויון בסוגיית השירות בצבא הוא בבחינת הגחכה של המילה שוויון, ותהליך זה הוא כמסך עשן אשר מסתיר את האמת של אי-שוויון חריף בכלכלה, בחינוך, בבריאות, בתעסוקה, בתקצוב תרבות ועוד, שממנו דווקא לא סובלים חברי הכנסת שהובילו את נושא "השוויון בנטל".

ברור לנו שגיוס כפוי לצבא של החרדים בישראל יפגע אנושות ביכולתם לשמור על ערכי עולמם הדתי, ובה בעת יכפה עליהם לאומיות ציונית מיליטריסטית שהם מתנגדים לה. עצוב שהמקום היחיד שבו דיון בנושא שוויון הופך פופולרי הוא בהקשר לאומני-מיליטריסטי, תוך ניסיון לכפות על קהילה מתבדלת השתלבות בסדר זה.

קשה שלא לחוש שמי שמבקש להוביל לגיוס חרדים לצבא מונע במידה רבה מהשתלשלות של אותה תשוקה אנטישמית באירופה "לתקן" את היהודי, לבטל את שונותו המרתיעה ו"לנצרו". כאן רצון זה חוזר תוך ביטוי עמוק של שנאה ופחד כלפי החרדים ושונותם, המזכירים לרבים יהודים מן הקריקטורות האנטישמיות, והם מבקשים לתקנם באמצעות הפיכתם לישראלים חדשים, לחלק מן הלאום המוגדר בישראל על ידי הצבא.

אבל, כפי שטען רבי סעדיה גאון, "אין אומתנו אומה אלא בתורותיה", תורה שבכתב ותורה שבעל-פה. יש לזכור כי הגדרות הלאומיות היהודית-ציונית, המושתתות על רעיונות לאומיות חילוניים-אירופיים מן הדורות האחרונים, זרות לחלק גדול מן המסורת היהודית ולעולם התורה.

גיוס כפוי של החרדים לצבא יהיה שבר רוחני עמוק (שמד בלשונם) ממש בדיוק כפי שגיוס של פלסטינים אזרחי ישראל (כפי שעלה לאחרונה בהצעת חוק לגייס נוצרים אזרחי ישראל) יהיה שבר רב מימדים של זהותם הלאומית והעמדתם מול אחיהם כאוייבים בנשק, דבר שכבר מתרחש מזה עשורים רבים עם גיוס

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הבדווים והדרוזים, גיוס שהוכיח שעצם השילוב בצבא לא מועיל לקבלתם כאזרחים שווים בישראל, למיתון הגזענות כלפיהם, להכרה בכפריהם הבלתי-מוכרים של הבדווים או בתת-התקצוב של היישובים הדרוזיים והיעדר אופציות מגוונות בחינוך ותעסוקה.

יש להזכיר שגם גיוס מזרחים היה משבר עמוק, בהצבתם בתפקידים בעלי סטטוס נמוך המחזקים את הסללתם למעמד הנמוך עם צאתם לאזרחות, ובהעמדתם כבשר תותחים במלחמות האחרונות. על פי מחקרים על נתוני השנים האחרונות מתברר שעיקר ההרוגים בצבא באים מן הפריפריה החברתית, הכלכלית והגיאוגרפית של המדינה.

במובן זה יש תחושה שהחיבור בין התפיסה הניאו-ליברלית של מפלגת "יש עתיד" לבין הרעיון של גיוס חרדים כ"שיבת הציונות", נועד על מנת להסליל את החרדים שיתגייסו לאחר השחרור מהצבא לאותם מקומות בשוק התעסוקה שאליהם הוסללו חלק גדול מהמזרחים: כעובדי קבלן ועובדים בשכר מינימום, שעבודתם מותירה אותם מתחת לקו העוני.

יש לומר זאת באופן ברור: צריך לשחרר את החרדים משירות בצבא, ודווקא זה יאפשר למי שרוצה לעבוד, לעבוד, ולא כפי שהיה המצב עד כה, שדחיית הגיוס של חרדים מהצבא הותירה אותם בוואקום שבין הישיבה לעבודה הלא-חוקית, ולא הותר להם לעבוד באופן רשמי.

כמו כן, יש להזכיר לכל התועמלנים והפוליטיקאים של "יש עתיד" שרבים מן החרדים עובדים, רבים מהם בעבודות דחק בשכר עוני. מי שלא רואה אותם עובדים כנראה שלא חי בשכנות להם, אלא נוסע בג'יפ בין רמת אביב לבין קריית הממשלה בירושלים. ברור לעין כי ההתנכלות הנוכחית לחרדים, ההסתה לגביהם והשנאתם מהוות חלק מפעולות של הפרד ומשול בין קהילות שונות במדינה, תושבי הפריפריה, ערבים, חרדים, מזרחים, אתיופים, עניים ועוד, כדי שלא יאבקו יחד במי שמנצל אותם כלכלית. תעמולה זאת, על שירות צבאי, גם משמשת דחייה של דיון בשאלות ייסוד כגון: מה מקומו של הצבא כיום בחברה הישראלית, ומה עושה המדינה כדי להגיע להסדר ולצמצם את הצורך בצבא.

תמיכת המדינה בלימודים גבוהים היא אות כבוד למדינה, ויש להסדירה כך שתעשה באופן שיוויוני: יש ליצור קריטריונים שיוויוניים באמת של לימודים דתיים גבוהים לבני דתות שונות תחת מלגה למוסדות או ללומדים, ליהודים, מוסלמים, נוצרים, דרוזים ובהאיים, וגם להפעיל קריטריונים דומים לגבי לימודים אוניברסיטאיים, לימודים גבוהים למוזיקה ועוד – כאשר דואגים לכך שלימודים אלו לא יוגבלו לקבוצה אתנית, גיאוגרפית או כלכלית אחת, אלא יתאפשרו לבני מגוון קבוצות ומיקומים חברתיים שונים.

רובנו, החותמים על מכתב זה, לא חרדים באורחות חיינו היומיומיים, אם כי חלק מבני משפחותינו הם מקהילות חרדיות שונות, וכן גם חלק משכנינו ומשותפינו לעבודה ובני השיח שלנו. אנחנו יכולים פעמים רבות להעלות שאלות ותהיות לגבי האתוס החרדי, למשל מהכיוון המסורתי של חלקנו, וכן מתוך תפיסת עולם פמניסטית-יהודית של חלקנו, וכך היו כאלו מאתנו שהשתתפו במאבק נגד הפרדת הבנות המזרחיות בעמנואל, כפי שאנחנו שותפים למאבקים פמניסטיים ומזרחיים ואחרים בחלקיה האחרים של החברה הישראלית, וכפי שיש לנו ביקורת לגבי כל החלקים השונים בחברה הישראלית, הדורשים תיקון רב. אבל אנחנו מאמינים שיש להושיט יד סולידרית בעת הזאת במאבקה של החברה החרדית כנגד הניסיונות לדכא אותה מתוך גישה מיליטריסטית, שנאה וניסיון להשתיק סדר יום כלכלי-מעמדי או מדיני אלטרנטיבי לזה

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של הממשלה. אנו חשים כי התנגדות החברה החרדית לגיוס כפוי לצבא, והעמדתה במרכז את אידיאל הלימוד, אינם זרים לעמדה יהודית מסורתית ארוכת שנים והיסטוריה.

**הננו מביעים בזאת את תמיכתנו במאבקה של החברה החרדית כנגד גיוס כפוי לצבא ודורשים**

**מממשלת ישראל שוויון אמיתי בנטל:**

בנטל העוני,

בנטל הפריפריה וחלוקת הקרקעות הלא-שווה בין עיירות פיתוח, ערים ערביות ומועצות אזוריות,

בנטל אפשרויות החינוך והתעסוקה המוגבלים והמגבילים,

ובנטל החיים תחת גזענות וסטריאוטיפים.

## Open Call: An Eastern Joint Initiative – "Mizrahi Palestinian Partnership"

Translation: Zach Smith

In the face of a reality of fear, discrimination, separation, and incitement, we have joined together to forge alliances, to create partnerships, to cross group, ethnic, gender and national barriers, and to awaken hope. The partnership that we search for is not a simple or easy solution to the ills of our time. It requires commitment, and a willingness to take responsibility for the long journey, together.

We do offer all the oppressed groups in Israeli society to join hands and walk together: Palestinians, Mizrahim, Ethiopians, Russian-speakers, the people who are living in conditions of poverty, everyone that is pushed to the periphery and the social margins, and anyone that strives to fundamentally change the existing situation and fight oppression. These groups frequently deal with similar issues, although not necessarily in the same ways, and we believe that with the power of ongoing, respectful partnership, we can overcome those who seek to divide and incite.

“Being *Mizrahi* is not an ethnicity, it’s a form of consciousness,” said **Eli Hamo** (of blessed memory), a founding social activist. His implication was that this is a matter of choice; we consider this choice the basis for the alliance to which we aspire. The three monotheistic religions were formed on the Mediterranean coast, Hebrew was born in the east, and despite efforts to obscure this plain fact, Israel is in the Middle East. Thus, we see in the Mizrahi option an opening of hope for making the Israeli society a truly civil and inclusive one. We do believe that Mizrahi pluralistic identity, joint responsibility, and partnership in the struggle to end wrongs and oppression can be a foundation for collective life and a source of inspiration and reform for all residents of this land. We therefore declare ourselves *Mizrahim* whether we were born to families that originated in the Middle East and North Africa or not, whether we were forced into the Israeli melting pot or chose to embrace it, whether we felt the manifold forms of oppression in this society or not – from the upper classes or from the lower classes – residents of Israel or refugees and asylum seekers and etc.

We all have struggled for many years to change Israeli society, and yet we do not have a natural political home. Often, we have had to choose between voting for parties that purport to strengthen the Left without meaningful Palestinian-Jewish partnership, without representing Mizrahim, and without engaging with the Mizrahi

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struggle, or a Mizrahi vote which often meant contenting ourselves with symbolic representation and support for the oppression of Palestinians. This choice has often led us to vote in solidarity with Palestinian parties, even if they, too, seldom engage with the Mizrahi struggle.

In the founding of the Joint List we have perceived a historic opportunity to establish a partnership that is not a matter of tactically joining forces for lack of alternative but a meaningful choice that can bring new messages.

The establishment of the Joint List is an open invitation to imagine, together, a vision of an open and inclusive Middle Eastern home based on striving together for justice. From the heart of a dispiriting reality, within a state of siege, war, racism, and oppression, we call for the creation of an alliance between all who seek to combat the neoliberal social order and the anti-democratic forces.

This alliance rests on the assumption that oppression and its effects are not experienced in the same way nor does they leave the same traces on different groups of people; at the same time, every ranking of inequality, suffering, and injustice creates additional suffering and injustice. The creation of a hierarchy of forms of oppression serves the intransigence of Israeli governments seeking to reorder violently the space.

As natives of the region, we reject the idea of a colonialist withdrawal entrenchment within an imagined “White villa in the dark jungle”. We must work find the courage to dismantle together the human food chain that has taken root here since 1948, which designates some of us superior and others inferior, while setting us upon each other. To oppose this division is our moral obligation as *Mizrahim*, as Jews, and as those who come from this region.

But beyond that, it is also in our interest, and of each group, that though the struggle against inequality and injustice that groups in Israel experience on the basis of gender, nationality, and ethnicity would demand some of us to relinquish privileges, it will also contribute to creating a safer and richer life for all, not one under the shadow of checkpoints and barriers that endanger each and all. Fascism seeps into every relationships in every shared space – Urban, peripheral, into neighborhoods and intimate spaces, and oftentimes into our familial relationships, and its main victims are women and children.

Throughout the years of forging a state for the Jews, Zionism created a hierarchical social order based on dispossession and expulsion, denying people’s rights and

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granting privileges. As Zionism has oppressed us as *Mizrahim* – politically, economically and culturally, but at the same time granted us privileges as Jews at the expense of the Palestinians.

We are deeply aware that during the last 68 years, although Zionism has levied injustices on *Mizrahim* in Israel, the *Mizrahi* public was incorporated in the Zionist project and has largely become an active partner in it. Thus, we cannot face our Palestinian brothers and sisters in clear conscience and claim that we had no part in the injustices propagated by Zionism. We recognize, therefore, that repairing these injustices is inextricably connected with the right of return of the Palestinian refugees without creating new displaced persons, on the basis on the principle that one cannot correct an unjust situation by causing further injustice.

The documentary filmmaker, Simone Bitton, claimed in 1996, following the first *Mizrahi* feminist conference: “We recognize oppression in all its aspects, in all its diversity... therefore, we shall begin to really fight oppression on the day in which we shall fight both the oppression to which we have been victims and the oppression from which we have benefitted... That would be the most progressive or revolutionary platform in this country.” We do not struggle to save children from discrimination in the Israeli school system just to ensure their future as outstanding occupiers; we cannot declare that we shall no longer be oppressed, until committing ourselves not to oppress others. It’s clear to us, now more than ever, that no society can endure in the long run on the basis of systematic oppression, denial of rights, exploitation, and discrimination.

Past initiatives for a *Mizrahi*-Palestinian partnership were frequently rejected by many on both sides and dismissed as unrealistic and inauthentic. The life of Muslims and Jews in the Middle East and North Africa knew difficult moments of separation and humiliation, but also gave birth to a long and rich tradition of partnership and dialogue that relied on the call for peace and justice for all humans enshrined in all the holy books. We are not blind to the fact that at the present moment, the Torah has been made a mockery and religious language has become a significant obstacle to the creation of a *Mizrahi*-Palestinian connection, but we do not seek to build this partnership by opposing world of religion, upon which different societies in our region were founded. Those who recognize the traditional close affinity between Judaism and Islam can make a unique contribution for forging a common path and shaping a critical perspective.

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We do not forget the Jewish affinity to this country and to the fact that love and longing for Zion have always been a central part of Jewish Identity. However, we refuse to anchor the Jewish bond with this land in a regime based on a system of privileges granted to an ethno-national-religious group at the expense of the indigenous people of this country. We wish, therefore, to permit Jewish religious language to shake off the burden of Zionist Secular thought and undermine the concept of exclusive rigid national sovereignty. On the basis of this tradition, we wish to live in this country not as landlords, but as sons and daughters of a shared home. The dire political and social reality invites us, *Mizrahim* and Palestinians, to forge a joint, shared agenda. There are many immediate and concrete issues we can point to: expanding of the areas of jurisdiction of “development towns” and Arab settlements; the struggle against over-imprisonment of both *Mizrahim* and Palestinians; the struggle against the discriminatory education system; the struggle against the erasure of our cultures and our histories; against police violence and racism; our partnership in the Arabic language and in Arab culture; the expansion of opportunities to express our identity; Creating shared feminist ideas in order to oppose the state discrimination against single mothers, everyday violence against women in general, and more forcefully against women belonging to discriminated and marginalized groups, and for allocating resources for this purpose. We can think about a joint struggle against neo-liberal planning policies, which, on the one hand, promote the processes of dispossession and displacement of Palestinian residents of cities, and on the other, displaces poor *Mizrahim* (as well as other groups) out of their neighborhoods under the banner of “urban renewal.”

Without crossing the barrier that Zionism has erected between us it would remain impossible to struggle together for a joint agenda. Crossing these barriers does not mean erasing our identity or ignoring the many layers of history of our respective groups, but rather harnessing them toward the realization of life in common, joint action and civic solidarity.

We see ourselves walking in the footsteps of previous groups and individuals who tried, at different moments, to form a Mizrahi-Palestinian alliance – one deeply rooted and nourished by the long history of contact and mutual borrowing, enrichment and learning between Jews and Muslims and between Jews and Arabs; in the words of the Jewish-Moroccan poet Rabbi David Buzaglo (of blessed memory) in his Mimouna hymn “You are from the West”: **“There were Jews and Arabs sitting together / and**



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**enriching their hearts with instruments and music / and the Hebrew woman dressed as the Arab woman / and the Hebrew man could not be told from his Arab brother / whether urban or rural, the spirit of everyone was ready / there the boundaries were blurred between Israel and the nations / had it not been for the people of blood that control the state.”** We believe that the time is ripe to return to the shared place in which “everyone’s spirit was ready” to build an alliance capable of healing the bleeding wounds of the inhabitants of this country.

We call for the creation of a broad social and civic alliance to fight the anti-democratic foundations of Israel’s regime and political economy. This civic camp would bring about a redistribution of resources after decades of dispossession, and an end to the occupation and to oppression. In this way it will be possible to free Mizrahi and Palestinian cultures from the imposed narrow confines and restrictions which prevent *Mizrahim* and Palestinians from engaging in a free dialogue with the peoples of the region. We believe that the Mizrahi community could promote establishing a Jewish-Palestinian alliance which does not rest on self-victimization but rather draws enormous strength from the fellowship of men and women of this place, on the basis of equality and of justice.

Against the fourth Netanyahu government, a government of political, economic, social, and human disaster, we strive to begin a real process of reconciliation between the different national, collectivities, Palestinians and Jews, in order to build here a shared home. Together we will recognize the deep wounds of every victim of bloodshed, economic exploitation and gender-based violence. In the spirit of the poet Mahmoud Darwish, who wrote in the opening of his book *State of Siege*, “We will sow hope,” we must sow hope in order to offer it to the whole society, to our children, and to coming generations.

מול מציאות של פחד, אפליה, הפרדה והסתה התחברנו על מנת לכרות בריתות, ליצור שותפויות, לחצות גבולות קבוצתיים, אתניים, מגדריים ותודעתיים ולהעיר את התקווה. השותפות שאנו מחפשים איננה פתרון פשוט וקל לתחלואי העת הזו. היא דורשת מחויבות ונשיאה ארוכה במשא שהמפגש מחייב. אנו מציעות ומציעים הליכה משותפת לכל הקבוצות המדוכאות בחברה הישראלית: פלסטינים, מזרחים, אתיופים, דוברי רוסית, בני ובנות העשירונים התחתונים, כל מי שנדחקו לפריפריה ולשוליים החברתיים וכל מי ששואף לשנות מעיקרו את המצב הקיים ולהיאבק בדיכוי. קבוצות אלו אשר עסוקות פעמים רבות בסוגיות דומות אם כי לא תמיד באותם אופנים, ואנו מאמינות כי בכוחה של שותפות מכבדת ומתמסכת לגבור על המבקשים לפצל ולהסית.

"מזרחיות זו לא עדה, זו תודעה" אמר אלי חמו ז"ל, פעיל חברתי וממקימי "תנועת האוהלים". מדבריו משתמע כי זהו עניין של בחירה, ואנחנו מניחים בחירה זו כתשתית לברית שאליה אנחנו חותרים. שלוש הדתות המונותאיסטיות התהוו על חופי הים התיכון, העברית נולדה במרחבי קדם ולמרות הניסיון להשכיח זאת מהציבור, מדינת ישראל ממוקמת במזרח-התיכון. לפיכך, אנו רואות במזרחיות פתח של תקווה לאזרוחה של החברה הישראלית. אנו מאמינים כי זהות מזרחית פלורליסטית, אחריות משותפת ושותפות במאבק לסיום העוולות והדיכוי יכולות להיות משימת חיים קולקטיבית ומקור השראה ותיקון לכל יושבות ויושבי הארץ הזאת. על בסיס האמונה הזו אנו מצהירות על עצמנו כמזרחיות וכמזרחים: בין אם נולדנו למשפחות שמוצאן במזרח התיכון וצפון אפריקה ובין אם לא; בין אם נצרבנו בכור ההיתוך הישראלי ובין אם בחרנו להיאבק בדיכוי.

כולנו נאבקות ונאבקים זה שנים ארוכות לשינוי החברה הישראלית ואין לנו בהכרח בית מפלגתי מובהק. פעמים רבות היה עלינו לבחור בין הצבעה למפלגות המתימרות להחזיק באידאולוגיה שמאלית ללא שותפות פלסטינית-יהודית משמעותית, ללא ייצוג מזרחי וללא עיסוק במאבק המזרחי, לבין הצבעה מזרחית שמשמעותה הסתפקות בייצוג סימבולי ותמיכה בדיכוי הפלסטינים. ברירה זו הובילה אותנו פעמים רבות להצבעה סולידרית למפלגות פלסטיניות, גם כאשר הן לא עסקו במאבק המזרחי. אנו מזהים הזדמנות היסטורית בהקמת הרשימה המשותפת לכינון שותפות שאיננה ברירת מחדל אלא בחירה משמעותית שניתן לצקת אליה תכנים חדשים.

הקמת הרשימה המשותפת מהווה הזמנה פתוחה לדמיין יחד את חזון הבית המזרחי-תיכוני הפתוח והמכליל המבוסס על שאיפה לצדק. מלב המציאות המייאשת, בתוך מצב המצור, המלחמה, הגזענות והדיכוי, אנו קוראים ליצירתה של ברית בין כל המבקשות להיאבק בסדר החברתי הניאו-ליברלי ובכוחות האנטי-דמוקרטיים הקמים עלינו לכלותינו.

ברית זו נשענת על ההנחה כי חוויות הדיכוי ותוצאותיו אינן נחווות או מותרות חותם באופן זהה על בני כל הקבוצות, אך בד בבד כל דירוג ערכי של אי שוויון, סבל ועוולות מייצר סבל ועוול נוסף. יצירת היררכיה של דיכויים משרתת את הנדסת המרחב בכוח הזרוע ואת המיליטנטיות של כל ממשלות ישראל.

## קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו – Take This Poem And Copy It

כילידי המרחב אנו דוחים את רעיון ההסתגרות הקולוניאליסטית בתוך אותה וילה מדומיינת בג'ונגל. עלינו לאזור יחד את האומץ לפעול לפירוק מן היסוד של שרשרת המזון האנושית שהתבססה כאן מ-48', שמדרגת בהירארכיה איומה את בנות ובני הארץ הזאת כעליונים וכתחתונים, ומשסה אותם אלה באלה. התנגדות לכך היא הצו המוסרי והמחויבות הפוליטית שלנו כמזרחים/ות, כיהודים/ות, וכבנות וכבני המרחב.

אבל מעבר לכך, זהו גם האינטרס שלנו, ושל כל קבוצה, כי המאבק נגד אי-השוויון והעוולות שחוות קבוצות בישראל על בסיס מגדרי, לאומי ואתני אמנם ידרוש מחלקנו לוותר על פריבילגיות, אך גם בה בעת יתרום ליצירת חיים בטוחים ועשירים שאינם רוויים במחסומים המסכנים כל אחת ואחד מאיתנו. הפשיזם מחלחל אל היחסים במרחב המשותף, העירוני, הפריפריאלי, השכונתי והאינטימי, ופעמים רבות אל תוך היחסים המשפחתיים ונפגעו העיקריים הם קודם כל נשים וילדים. לאורך שנות עיצובה של מדינת הלאום היהודית גיבשה הציונות מבנה היררכי חברתי המבוסס על נישול וגירוש, מחיקת זכויות והענקת פריבילגיות. לצד הדיכוי הפוליטי, התרבותי והכלכלי של המזרחים על-ידי ההגמוניה האשכנזית, היא גם העניקה לנו זכויות יתר כחלק מהקולקטיב היהודי, על חשבון תושבות הארץ הפלסטיניות. אנו מודעים לעובדה כי במהלך 68 השנים האחרונות, למרות העוולות שהשיתה הציונות על המזרחים בישראל, הציבור המזרחי שולב בפרויקט הציוני והפך בחלקו הגדול לשותף פעיל בו. על כן אין אנו יכולות לעמוד היום מול אחיותינו ואחינו הפלסטינים ולטעון "ידנו לא הייתה במעל". אנו מכירות בכך שתיוקן עוולות אלה קשור לזכות השיבה של הפליטות והפליטים בנות ובני העם הפלסטיני והכרה באחריות הישראלית לגירוש הפליטים, וזאת מבלי לייצר עקורים חדשים, בהתאם לתפיסה לפיה אין לתקן עוול בעוול נוסף.

סימון ביטון, במאית קולנוע דוקומנטרי, טענה בשנת 1996 בעקבות הכנס הפמיניסטי המזרחי הראשון: "אנחנו מכירות את הדיכוי מכל הכיוונים, על כל גווניו... לכן, ביום שנתחיל באמת להילחם בדיכוי, גם בזה שאנחנו קרבנותיו וגם בזה שאנו נהנות ממנו לא תהיה במה מתקדמת ומהפכנית יותר בארץ הזאת". אין אנו יכולים להציל ילדים מהסללה רק כדי להבטיח להם עתיד של כובשים מצטיינים, אין אנו יכולים להצהיר שאותנו יותר לא ידכאו, עד שנבטיח בעצמנו שאנחנו לא נדכא אחרים. ברור לנו יותר מתמיד כי אף חברה לא יכולה להתקיים לאורך זמן על בסיס של דיכוי, שלילת זכויות, ניצול ואפליה. ההצעות לשותפות מזרחית-פלסטינית נדחו פעמים רבות על ידי גורמים רבים משני צדדיה והוגדרו כלא-ריאליות או כבלתי אותנטיות. חיי השכנות של יהודים ומוסלמים במזרח התיכון ומחוצה לו ידעו רגעים קשים של הפרדה והשפלה הדדיים, אך גם הולידו מסורת עמוקה ורחבה של שותפות ודיאלוג שנשענה על הקריאה לשלום ולצדק בין כל בני האדם המצויה בכל ספרי הקודש. איננו עיוורים לעובדה שבשעה זו תורה כבר נעשתה פלסטר והשפה הדתית הפכה לגורם הנדמה דווקא כמכשול בפני יצירתו של חיבור מזרחי-פלסטיני, ועם זאת אין אנו מבקשים לבנות שותפות זו על שלילת העולם הדתי, העומד בתשתיתן של החברות השונות של אזורנו. בכוחם של המכירים בזיקה הדתית המסורתית ההדוקה בין יהדות ואסלאם, להעניק בסיס נוסף לדרך המשותפת ולסייע בגיבוש עמדה ביקורתית כלפי המצב הקיים. איננו מתנערים מן הזיקה היהודית לאדמה הזו ומן העובדה כי "אהבת ציון" הייתה תמיד חלק מהותי מן הזהות

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היהודית. אולם אנו מסרבים לעגן את זיקתנו לארץ במשטר המבוסס בהגדרה על מערכת פריבילגיות הניתנות לקבוצה אתנית-לאומית-דתית אחת על חשבון תושביה הילידים של הארץ. אנו מבקשות לפיכך להתיר מעל השפה הדתית את המטענים שהעמיסה עליה המחשבה הציונית ולהדגיש את חתירתה תחת תפיסת הריבונות הלאומית הבלעדית על האדמה. מתוך מסורת זו אנו נקראים לחיות בארץ הזאת לא כבעלי הבית, אלא כבנות ובני הבית.

המציאות הפוליטית והחברתית מזמנת לנו המזרחיות והפלסטיניות סדר יום משותף. לדוגמה: הרחבת גבולות השיפוט של עיירות הפיתוח והערבים הערביות, מאבק בכליאת היתר של מזרחים ופלסטינים, מאבק במערכת החינוך המסלילה והמפלה, מאבק במחיקת התרבות וההיסטוריה שלנו, מאבק באלימות המשטרה ובגזענות, השותפות בלשון הערבית ובתרבות הערבית, הרחבת האפשרויות לכיטוי זהות, והתנגדות לדיכוי של אימהות חד הוריות ולאלימות יומיומית כלפי נשים בכלל ונשים מקבוצות מוחלשות בפרט, ומאבק בהיעדר המשאבים שמופנים למלחמה באלימות זו. מאבק משותף לנוכח מדיניות תכנון ניא-ליברלית שמצד אחד מאפשרת לשמר ולקדם את תהליכי הדיכוי ועקירה של תושבים פלסטיניים בערים ומצד שני מתעלת את דחיקתם החוצה של התושבים המזרחים (כמו גם קבוצות אחרות) בשכונות המוחלשות תחת הכותרת של "התחדשות עירונית". מבלי לחצות את המחסומים בינינו לא נוכל להיאבק יחד על סדר היום המשותף. חציית מחסומים אין משמעה מחיקת הזהות ורבדיה ההיסטוריים של כל אחת מן הקבוצות, אלא רתימתם לחיים ופעולה משותפים המבטאים סולידריות אזרחית.

אנו רואים עצמנו ממשיכי דרכם של קבוצות ויחידים שבקשו ברגעים שונים ליצור ולמסד שותפות מזרחית-פלסטינית. שותפות ששורשיה עמוקים וניזונים מההיסטוריה הארוכה של מגעים ושאיילה, העשרה ולמידה הדדית בין יהודים ומוסלמים ובין יהודים וערבים, כפי שכתב הפייטן יליד מרוקו ר' דוד בוזגלו בפיוטו "אתם יוצאי מערב" לכבוד המימונה: **שְׁמָה עֲבָרִים וְעֲרָבִים, יַחְדָּו כְּלָם מְסֻבִּים / וְאַתְּ לְכָם מְטִיבִים. עִם פְּלִי שִׁיר וְנִגִּינָה / וְלִבְשָׁה הָעֲבָרִיָּה. תִּלְבַּשְׁתְּ עֲרָבִיָּה... וְלֹא נִפְרָה הָעֲבָרִי. לְפָנַי אֶחָיו הַהֶגְרִי / אִם עִירוֹנִי אוֹ פְּרִי. רוּחַ כְּלָם נְכוֹנָה / שֶׁם טִשְׁטְשׂוּ הַתְּחוּמִּים בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעַמִּים / אֶלְמָלָא אֲנִישֵׁי דְעַמִּים. אֲשֶׁר עַל הַמְדִינָה.** "אנו מאמינות ומאמינים כי השעה כשרה והרגע הזה נכון לחזור אלא המקום המשותף שבו "רוח כולם נכונה" עד לכינונה של שותפות שיהיה בכוחה לחבוש את פצעייהם המדממים של יושבי הארץ הזו.

אנו קוראות וקוראים ליצירת שותפות חברתית-אזרחית רחבה שתיאבק ביסודות האנטי-דמוקרטיים של המשטר והכלכלה הפוליטית בישראל. מחנה אזרחי זה יביא לחלוקה מחודשת של המשאבים אחרי עשרות שנים של נישול והתעשרות לצד סיום הדיכוי והכיבוש. רק כך יתאפשר שחרור התרבויות המזרחית והפלסטינית מתוך הגבולות הצרים והמגבילים המונעים מהם דיאלוג חופשי עם האזור. אנו מאמינים כי לקהילה המזרחית יש הפוטנציאל לקדם ברית יהודית-פלסטינית שאיננה נשענת על עמדת הקרבן אלא יונקת מכוחה האדיר של אחוות בנות ובני המקום, על בסיס של שוויון ושל צדק.

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מול ממשלת נתניהו הרביעית, ממשלת התהום המדיני, הכלכלי, החברתי והאנושי נשאף להתחיל את תהליך האמת והפיוס בין הקולקטיבים הלאומיים וההטרונגניים, הפלסטיני והיהודי, במטרה לבנות כאן בית משותף. יחד נכיר בפצעים העמוקים של כל קרבנות שפיכות הדמים, האלימות הכלכלית והמגדרית. ברוח הקריאה של המשורר מחמוד דרוויש שכתב בפתח ספרו "מצב מצור" ("حالة حصار"): "تُرَبِّي الأمل", ("נַגְדֵל את התקווה", תרגום: מוחמד חמזה ע'נאים), עלינו לגדל את התקווה כדי שנוכל להציע אותה לחברה כולה, לילדינו ולדורות הבאים.

## What is Mizrahiness? Seeking answers through questions

What is Mizrahiness? What does it mean to be Mizrahi in Israel of 2013? Does it have to do with shared origins and identities of Jews who from “eastern” countries? (One of those countries, Morocco, bears the Arabic name *Al-Magreb*, which means “west”) Or is Mizrahiness the product of the economic and cultural oppression of Eastern Jews in Israel and a product of the Zionist melting pot that has melted them together?

Is being Mizrahi a manifestation of a cultural and communal essence, in a way that a Mizrahi Jew is someone who holds on to this essence, created either in Israel or back in the eastern countries of origin, or is it someone from whom this essence has been robbed? Or is Mizrahiness an ideology, a worldview and a struggle in which those who aren't ethnically Mizrahi can also take part?

And what is the context in which Israeli Mizrahiness should be read? Is it the opposite of Ashkenaziness or is it the negative of Israeliness with its negation of the Diaspora and Judaism with it, and its imagined ideal of the native “sabra?”

Is Mizrahiness the contrast to that Israeliness which has left no room in it for Mizrahiness, and – even though it was created by privileged Ashkenazim – hasn't left much room for Ashkenaziness either? (No room for the Yiddish language or for the stories of those Ashkenazi Jews who were latecomers to the Zionist project, for example, survivors of the Holocaust who immigrated here).

Or is Mizrahiness actually the opposite of Persian, Djerban, Sephardic, Kurdish or Moroccan uniqueness? Or maybe it means a synthesis of all of those cultures (though not necessarily an equal mix), reflecting their mixing together after coming to Israel and a shared experiences and interests?

Is Mizrahiness the opposite of Westernness in its' Eurocentric and Orientalist Israeli context? Can it partner with third world countries and share their experience of colonialism? Or is it a product of a multiculturalism that was born in the West? Is Mizrahiness an expression of regional identity that Mizrahi people share with others in the Arab and Muslim worlds? Or is it really an identity that separates Jews from that world while trying to eliminate the Arab roots of many Mizrahi people?

Was Mizrahiness created by Mizrahim themselves, as in the religious context of Sephardic law? Or was it projected on them as a slur of sorts, as an attempt to place them outside of the Israeli collective identity and to brand them as non-Ashkenazi,

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abnormal Israelis? And once a person adopts the slur thrown at his face by those negating him and makes it his self-definition, what then? By doing so is he rebelling against the oppressor or submitting to them? Did adopting Mizrahiness as a self-identity succeed in making Mizrahiness a positive term? Has it empowered communities? Or maybe it was a process of giving up the multitude of Eastern (Jewish) cultures, of giving up the synagogue and the Arab language? Perhaps it was a process that has left the Mizrahi community with an empty title that only expresses defiance and opposition but is devoid of positive content?

And what about a Mizrahi political agenda? Does it have to be particular ("ethnic"), or could it carry meaning for those who are not from that same ethnicity? Can it produce a partnership with other communities? Is a universal viewpoint even possible? Or in reality, do political views always emphasize a unique feature of some human group or another, be it a nationality, gender, ethnicity, religion, class, age or something else – because this is the only way any group can express its political agenda?

Is there political advantage to be gained by the radicalization of Mizrahi identity within a small and dedicated group of intellectuals? For example, by re-establishing a Jewish-Arab identity and bluntly pointing out the repression of both Mizrahi and Palestinians by Zionism? Or maybe a moderation of Mizrahiness by focusing on its Jewish origins, or by focusing on the economic and class aspect of this discussion while ignoring the state of the Palestinians, or could the cultural question have a greater potential for inducing change by triggering a Mizrahi mass movement based on the Shas<sup>[1]</sup> model?

And at the end, isn't emphasizing the Jewish aspect of Mizrahiness more radical in its critique of Zionism than a leftist agenda inspired by Western academic circles? Is it even possible to change the cultural-economic-political situation in Israel through any other means than a political party? Or maybe it is the other way around – it's impossible to establish a Mizrahi political party without blurring the definition and giving up the core of the Mizrahi agenda?

Would the creation of a multicultural society be enough of a solution for the repression of the Mizrahim as a group and of their culture? Or would that – without economic corrections – only mean weakening social solidarity and compliance with a capitalist agenda?

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And is the preferable inclusive option for Mizrahi culture in Israel integration with existing culture, or after long years of cultural repression is it essential to separate, and go back to Arabic music rather than create a combined Eastern-Western pop music?

What can Mizrahiness mean when so many Mizrahi people are actually of mixed identity – if not the product of a mixed-marriage then a product of the Israeli education system – identifying themselves with Zionist and Eurocentric points of view that make them ambivalent about themselves and their culture? Is it at all possible to renew Mizrahi culture, history and community after they have already been broken and dissolved? And isn't one of the reasons for this feeling of irreparable breach the romantic belief that in the past there existed an unbroken continuity?

Is it possible to even talk about a next generation of Mizrahi culture when schools and youth movements all teach its' negation? When our shared social ideals are TV, the computer and the shopping mall? But on the other hand, can we really talk about the disappearance of Mizrahi culture when the use of Mizrahim stereotypes gets ever stronger and widespread, and while conflict with the Palestinians continues to bring out racist attitudes towards Arab culture and the East?

Is it still possible to talk about Mizrahiness when the correlation between ethnicity, socio-economic status and geography – that still exists in Israel today – has been made more complicated with the arrival of Russian and Ethiopian immigrants and later with migrant workers[2]? When essential aspects of Mizrahi culture are still in focus in our synagogues, in religious rule, in music and language?

What is the outcome when the media raises a mirror of “authenticity” to Mizrahiness? It is a manipulation through which, for example, most members of Kedem[3] are reflected in the media as unauthentic, because in the views of the Israel leftist and academia, became the opposite of being Mizrahi, whereas the Ashkenazi Yehuda Barkan and Tzvika Hadar[4] easily manage to create “authentic” Mizrahi characters by using few stereotypes and making Mizrahiness merely comical? Where does that leave us?

And, after all, maybe the time for Mizrahiness has already passed; hasn't the subject gotten old and beaten after being discussed for so long? Or perhaps the real discussion has yet to start?

Do we need to wish for a third, fourth and fifth generation and for a continuity of Mizrahi culture inside Israel? Do we need to wish for it because of the relevance and



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beauty of Mizrahi cultural content, out of loyalty to our parents' heritage and our resistance to erasing this heritage? Or because of its inherent potential for a connection to the Arab world? Or simply because it is a part of us that we have no reason to give up on?

On the other hand, perhaps the fact that there are still more generations of Mizrahim is evident of an unhealed wound, of a void that we shouldn't wish to pass on to them?

Maybe we should settle for a change in Israeliness so that it becomes a compromise between Mizrahi, Ashkenazi, Palestinians, Russians, Ethiopians, etc?

And why is it that Mizrahiness is better expressed in questions than in answers? Why is it more a dialogue than a monologue? Is this good or bad?

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[1] Shas – Israeli Mizrahi Political Party. It is always led by Mizrahi Orthodox (or Ultra-orthodox) and Rabbis but its voters are often more traditional Mizrahi than strictly religious.

[2] Meaning that, with recent immigrations and their respective hardships, it has become more difficult to uphold the Ashkenazi-Mizrahi dichotomy, and that recent comers like Russians, Ethiopians and migrant workers don't fit into those two categories.

[3] The Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow. A social movement for social justice and for revival of Mizrahi culture, led by Mizrahi intellectuals and activists.

[4] Two Israeli comedians who, both Ashkenazi who got their fame by portraying "Simple" and "Down to Earth" Mizrahi characters.

## **Towards a new understanding of Arab-Jewish culture / Written with Hadas Shabat-Nadir**

In the 1950s, Professor Shlomo Dov Goitein suggested establishing a chair of Arab-Jewish culture at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. But what place does Arabic-Jewish culture have at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem? What does a school for Jewish studies have to do with Arab-Jewish tradition? Or with a course on Arabic literature, classical Arabic from the pre-Islamic period, the Quran and the Caliphate, and the Judeo-Arabic language?

Professor Goitein's suggestion was rejected in line with the spirit of the age and its desire to build a west-facing Hebrew-Jewish-Zionist-Israeli national culture, while in parallel engaging in classical studies of Arabic and Judaism. Neither of these topics gave much standing to Arab-Jewish heritage, either as a language, a culture, or a linguistic-theological dialogue that stretched over many years — and in particular not to the later Arab-Jewish culture that came after the expulsion from Spain.

Like in Goitein's time, the encounter between Jewish and Arab culture today can seem strange, threatening or undesirable. But with a 60-year delay, we are now in the founding year of the Program for Arab-Jewish Cultural Studies as a bachelor's degree, which will begin in October 2017 at Ben-Gurion University in Be'er Sheva and at Tel Aviv University.

We began our studies around 15 years ago in various literature courses. We gradually noticed two things: a lack of academic engagement with Mizrahi literature in Israel, and a fixed discussion that featured Mizrahi representation solely in relation to Israeliness and Zionism, while being disconnected from the writing and tradition of the past. We also felt a lack of connection and continuity between the different creative works of Jews from across the Arab, Muslim and Ottoman worlds — whether between religious and secular, between Jewish languages (e.g. Judeo-Arabic, Ladino, Judeo-Persian etc) and Hebrew, or between Rabbinic and modern Hebrew.

Literary works from entire periods of Eastern Jewish history, such as the lengthy stretch between the Spanish Golden Age and the beginning of the 20th century, have disappeared and are barely taught in literature courses. Even major works such as those of Rabbi Israel ben Moses Najara, Rabbi Shalom Shabazi and Rabbi David

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Buzaglo do not have courses dedicated to them. Twentieth-century writers who chose to pen their works in literary Arabic, such as Samir Naqqash and Isaac Bar-Moshe, have also vanished, appearing neither in courses on Hebrew literature nor on Arabic literature. The history of Jews from Arab countries is parceled out between courses on the Israeli people, which cover (albeit narrowly) Eastern Jewish communities, and sociology courses, which teach about (also narrowly) Mizrahim in Israel — as if there was no connection between these two topics.

### Choosing memory

Our feeling that the culture of Jews from Arab countries has disappeared from university curriculums and is disconnected from the conversation on Mizrahi culture in Israel led us to think about righting the discourse. Mizrahi heritage is taught only inasmuch as it relates to the State of Israel, as if Mizrahim were born in the West and have internalized the Israeli-Zionist worldview. We felt the need to break out of the fixed categories of identity and look at Mizrahiness not just in connection to Israel but also in relation to the Arab-Jewish culture and writing that developed over so many years. We sought to release “the Mizrahi” from the reductive and often negative context in which he is connected to Israel, and to offer up a deeper and broader cultural, historical and linguistic context.

At times it seemed as if our new program of Arab-Jewish cultural studies might be shelved, overcome by resistance as was Goitein’s idea. Even today, the thought of mixing the study of Hebrew literature with that of Arab-Jewish literature arouses intense emotions and often fierce opposition. Ultimately, however, we were able to surmount the opposition and could feel the enthusiasm of those around us who had been anticipating this moment.

Our program combines the study of Arabic literature with classical Judeo-Arabic and the many Arab-Jewish dialects of later periods. The courses will cover Arab-Jewish culture from different aspects: historical, literary and philosophical, with the aim of bringing together poetry, song, Jewish law, Talmudic literature and the philosophy of Jews from the Arab world as well as of Mizrahim in Israel — in Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic and colonial languages. The program will also look at secularism and tradition; affiliations between Judaism, Christianity and Islam; and the ties between different cultures.

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From our point of view, the program seeks to address a profound lack in Israeli and worldwide academia, and to anchor Arab-Jewish cultural studies in the cultural, linguistic and historical ties that are currently missing from most curriculums. Arabic is Judaism's third language, after Hebrew and Aramaic, and we want to bring it into the academic and public spheres, in Israel and the Arab world. In this way, we seek to bring together anew Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic literature, and Arabic and Judeo-Arabic literature.

We see in this program an invitation to generate community, creativity, research, reading, writing; an invitation to an alternative Israeli experience in which there is a place for Arab-Jewish culture; an invitation to Arabic culture whose Arab-Jewish element is remembered. We choose memory, even if it is too late. We choose a renewed contact with Arabic, which was never completely cut off but which became a source of shame. And we choose creation, in which there is lamentation and hope, a past and a future.

## Interviews and reviews

## Faces and Interfaces / Eli Eliahu

Integration - whether of old and new, East and West, or sacred and profane - is the best word for defining the cultural doctrine of prize-winning writer Almog Behar.

A beard, as Behar himself admits, allows a man to have a little fun with his appearance, "like women do with jewelry," - but it is also a cultural statement. "In the army, for instance," he explains, "they make you shave, and then they scrape a phone card on your cheeks to see if you have any whiskers. It's ridiculous. It's all built on some Asheknazi ideals. What's the deal here? Two hours after I shave I already have stubble." Once, Behar recalls, when he joined Arab and Jewish colleagues who were reading poetry at a protest in Sheikh Jarrah, in front of a Palestinian house in which Jews had settled, he suddenly heard someone call his name from the Border Police post nearby. It was a former student of his from the Kedma High School in Jerusalem's Katamonim neighborhood, where he taught history, and Jewish and Arab philosophy. He remembered the student well; they had often had long talks about Jewish, Muslim and Arab cultures. And here he was in a Border Police uniform, tasked with overseeing the eviction of Palestinian families from their homes and keeping settler children and Palestinian youngsters apart.

The two started to talk about the situation in the neighborhood, and about the student's feeling as a Mizrahi person (with roots in Middle Eastern countries ) vis-a-vis the Sheikh Jarrah conflict. Behar found that the military education the student received had led him to identify completely and automatically with his ethnic, Jewish side - with a desire to suppress the story of the other side, and even essentially his own Mizrahi, class-based narrative as well.

"In the end we spoke about something else," relates Behar. "Not Jewish history or Palestinian history, Mizrahi identity or social class, but appearance. The face one shows the world. When he takes off his Border Police uniform and has to go through Jerusalem, past all the police inspections, he has a problem, because he isn't always recognized right away as a Jew: He's taken for an Arab. And when he wants to go out to a club on Friday night he often runs into a similar problem. But he'd found a solution, more or less: He started shaving twice a day, sometimes more. This 'solution' of course saddened me even more. Here the man is, standing on the border, policing

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between settlers and Palestinians, and he's forced to shave off his Mizrahi 'shadow' again and again so he can finally be a Jew without one."

Could one say that the outward appearance preserves the "Mizrahiness"?

Behar: "In a certain sense. The outward appearance survives after the cultural 'erasure.' It's impossible to hide and to erase such things even if you try, and there are many who do. In the end, you look in the mirror and see your grandfather and your Arab neighbor. In Jerusalem, during the time of all the terrorist attacks, I often got stopped for inspections. In this city, mistaken identification can happen easily. The desire to differentiate actually leads to more confusion. There need to be policemen who look like Arabs and speak Arabic."

Behar adds that in Sheikh Jarrah, he especially feels the paradoxical aspects of Mizrahiness: "The demonstrators - leftists who come to defend the Arab residents - curse the Border Policemen who are mostly Mizrahis, Bedouin and Druze. While the policeman are unwittingly defending the Asheknazi billionaire [who owns buildings there]. And I myself on the one hand feel opposition to the injustice being done to the Palestinian families, but I also understand my student who went into the Border Police, like many Mizrahim from the weaker neighborhoods, because this is one of the only options open to him to get ahead and be part of society. I feel a closeness to the worshipers who march to the grave of Shimon Hatzaddik - as a Jewish place where prayers for peace and justice should be offered - but not with the violent police activities that deliberately harm the Palestinians."

Reminiscent of Agnon

Almog Behar, 32, lives in Jerusalem with his wife Maya and their newborn son Ariel. He has just published his first novel, "Rachel and Ezekiel" (Keter Press ), a book that is unusual in terms of both its language and characters. The protagonists, Ezekiel and Rachel, are a young Jerusalem Mizrahi couple, who had an arranged marriage. Other characters include Ovadia and Mazal, a rabbi and his wife. The story takes place in the poor neighborhoods of Jerusalem, in the alleyways of the marketplace, in yeshivas and synagogues. Not the usual settings of stories by young Israeli writers. From time to time, the narrator himself pops up, interrupting the flow of the story to reveal his intentions and motivation.

"The narrator wants to show his face because he doesn't believe in writers who hide like ghosts in their books, and he wishes to come out of his hiding place, even

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knowing that, to the writer's great dismay, his face can never remain completely hidden," writes Behar.

The language of this story comes from the world of liturgy, the midrash and halakha (Jewish law ). To the secular reader, this will almost certainly call to mind the writings of S.Y. Agnon.

"It's a shame that [Agnon] is the only mediator between the writings of Jewish tradition and the secular world," says Behar ruefully. "I don't feel that I drew from him necessarily, but rather more from the writings of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, or the book 'Ben Ish Hai' by Rabbi Yosef Haim of Baghdad."

You look to the writings of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, but you are also a humanist and go out to defend Palestinians. How does this fit together with some of the rabbi's statements?

"I needn't accept everything that he says. The rabbis themselves often disagree. The problem is that public discourse starts off with denouncing everything that has to do with Judaism, and then the apologetics and defensiveness begins. Imagine that everyone who talked about Italian culture had to first of all defend Mussolini. I don't look at [traditional] Judaism as being better than secularism. There are a lot of problems in Judaism. There is a deep rift. But the repair has to be made from the inside and not forced from the outside. Repair without the burden of shame. It's worth remembering that modern secular nationalism brought a lot of wars and economic oppression to this region. The rift didn't start with religion, and there is an option of a religious solution."

But you're not religious.

"I'm traditional in the way I was raised and in my consciousness, and this traditionalism is always viewed from the outside, by secular and religious people, as a compromise, or as a temporary 'mistake' that will eventually lead to a 'real' choice: either secularism or religiosity. But I don't think I'll ever get to one of these extremes, and don't believe they are more genuine. I live my Jewish life via dialogue with the customs, the halakhot, the doubts and certainties about faith, the Jewish texts and heritage - a dialogue that holds within it the possibility of change, of inner repair. "I believe the traditional option can save part of Judaism, that in recent generations it has been reduced only to halakha - to a narrow version of nationalism, or only to land issues. My traditionalism remembers that there is no Jewish life without non-Jews and



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that the state is not the embodiment of the messianic goal, and that one must fight daily against injustice and for justice. And my traditionalism remembers, in the Mizrahi context, how much our Judaism is really Arab, how Jewish our Arabness is, and it can rely on this both in dialogue with non-Arab Jews and with the non-Jewish Arabs." "Rachel and Ezekiel" is the fourth book by Behar, who was awarded the Prime Minister's Prize for his body of work. It was preceded by two books of poetry, "Tzemaon Be'erot" ("Well's Thirst," Am Oved, 2008 ) and "Hut Moshekh Min Halashon" ("The Thread Drawing from the Tongue," Am Oved, 2009 ), which won the Bernstein Prize for Literature, and the anthology "Ana Min al-Yahud" ("I am One of the Jews," Babel, 2008 ), the title story of which won first prize in the 2005 Haaretz short story competition, was translated into Arabic and earned positive reviews in Egypt. Despite all this acclaim, for many people, the cultural world that Behar seeks to portray in his books has a similar effect to his attempts to grow a serious mustache: It stirs strong aversion. Some well-known literary critics, including Prof. Dan Meron and Nissim Calderon, have attacked him with a fury of indeterminate origin, as if he'd threatened to bring down their intellectual and cultural world, a world that from Behar's point of view, at least, is standing on very shaky ground. "There's this poet going around in the role of a new [Yehuda] Amichai. His name is Almog Behar and I've been reading all this excessive critical praise of him. And I say to myself - Dear god, what is happening here?" Meron wrote (Haaretz Magazine Hebrew Edition, July 30 ).

"To be honest, the first time I read Prof. Meron's review I found it quite amusing," says Behar. "It was like a heavyweight boxer had come into the featherweight ring just to give a punch to one of the contenders. But what can he get out of this? If the featherweight boxer is knocked out, it's only natural. And a little embarrassing for the heavyweight to have bothered to come and punch him ... I reassured myself by recalling the harsh reviews that Meron once gave to Leah Goldberg and Ronit Matalon. On the third and last reading, I was actually kind of pleased to get beat up by him."

Pleased?

"Yes. After all, Profs. Dan Meron and Gershon Shaked were the 'shapers' of the Hebrew literary canon over many decades, and as guardians of literature they fought against the invasion of 'foreigners' and 'minorities' that wanted to pollute 'their' literature. Shaked more for reasons of rigid perceptions of what constitutes Zionism,

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and a need to clearly define what is permissible or forbidden; Meron more for Euro-centric reasons. But both took a 'brave' stand against Mizrahi literature for many years, out of a desire to limit it, to catalog it, to keep it outside of Hebrew literature, or only in a small ghetto inside it. In this respect, I was pleased that Meron went to the trouble of defending Hebrew literature from me."

Were you also amused by Calderon's review on Ynet?

"Much less. I find something outrageous in this shopworn argument he made against me, saying that I'm racist, a claim that those who accuse Israeli society of racism love to make against Mizrahim. As if they're giving us a taste of it and at the same time letting us know it is forbidden for us to speak about Mizrahiness, because just talking about it is racist. He goes on to say that I assume guardianship of various Mizrahi artists and he defends them and their uniqueness from me. As if someone were to refer in his book to Shakespeare, Kafka and Bob Dylan, and also to Cervantes and Homer, and that would automatically amount to a superficialization of Western culture, an attempt to assume ownership over it, and racism. He also claims that the denigration of the culture of [Jews] from Arab lands is a thing of the past, but the only example he cites is the popularity of Mizrahi music."

There's a lot of criticism about how Mizrahi music is taking over.

"This wave of criticism is a wave of fear, and a wave of racism in the guise of a discussion about quality. Most of the music these days is unfortunately simplistic, and this is also true about a lot of the non-Mizrahi Israeli music. A lot of quality Mizrahi music has been made over the years too. From Joe Amar to the Sounds of the Oud band, Ahuva Ozeri, Magalit Tza'anani, Avihu Medina and Zohar Argov, Zehava Ben, Amir Benayoun and Dikla.

"But I want to say something else, too: The model that separates popular music from classical music or religious music is a problematic model that needs to be changed. In the communities of the East there were different models. For example, the ensemble Chalari Baghdad had two singers, one who sang the more artistic music - the maqam - and the other who sang the more rhythmic popular music. In Israel, in certain ways the connection between the two forms has been severed. They need to be reintroduced. And within Mizrahi music here, wonderful things are certainly happening, with groups like Hayonah and Shaharit, and the old and new Andalusian. With singers like Esti Kenan-Ofri and Hadass Pal-Yarden, with lyricists like Moshe Habusha, Haim Louk, Yehuda Ovadia Patiya and Roni Ish-Ran, and singers in Arabic

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like Yaakov Nashawi, or singers who integrate Hebrew and Arabic languages like Yair Dalal."

Integration is also the best word to describe Behar's cultural doctrine. An integration of old and new, East and West, sacred and profane, of others' texts with his texts, and of prose and poetry. He acknowledges that his poetry is much closer to spoken language than the prose that he writes.

"Maybe it's because I was always fond of non-realistic prose," he says. "My first influences were adventure books, and writers like Kafka and Borges."

But Kafka and Borges write human allegories that are almost detached from time and space, while you choose heroes whose ethnic origins are very significant in terms of their behavior, as are the time and place in which they live.

"I think Kafka cannot be separated from the time and place in which he wrote. It think that the critics do him an injustice this way. Even the depiction of the family in 'Metamorphosis' is one that in many ways could only fit a Jewish family in Central Europe in a certain time period ... But I definitely always felt a tension between realism and the non-realist possibility. Between the Bible, which seeks to tell a story about a certain people and a certain place, and Kafka. When I got to know the midrashim, I found them to be a kind of solution. A kind of synthesis between the allegory and the narrative."

Although he dreamed of being a writer from a young age, Behar thought he first had to acquire a "real profession" that would enable him to make a decent living.

"I thought of writing as an inferior profession compared to others," he recalls. "The way I saw it at the time, and the way I was brought up to think about it, it was an occupation that was far removed from the practical world and from what really mattered in life, and that it was by and large, so I thought, the domain of women. Everything around it - librarians, literature teachers, readers in the library. They were all women. It wasn't a suitable world for a man who had to support a family."

Feminists won't like hearing this.

"That may be. But that's how I was brought up and that's how I saw things. Today I understand that the time in which I grew up, beyond the Israeli resentment against unprofitable intellectual pursuits, was also a time of revolution in which for the first time in human history most readers and writers were women and not men, but I didn't know that I was living precisely in a time of change."

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Behar couldn't stay away from his true calling for long, however. After eight years of high school and army spent largely dealing with electronics, which "bored him to death," he began studying philosophy and Hebrew literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. One day he came across an announcement for a student poetry evening at the Tmol Shilshom Cafe in town. The first time he went, he listened to other people recite their poetry, but the second time he started reading from his own poems, which he had never shown anyone; he continued doing this once a month for the next four years. The reactions he received boosted his confidence and he began to publish. Meanwhile, he also kept on writing prose. "Rachel and Ezekiel" started out as a short story, he explains; he also read it at one of the Tmol Shilshom evenings. Initially, he felt that something was still unresolved with respect to the male protagonist, Ezekiel. He kept on writing another eight chapters in which the character of the woman, Rachel, became more and more dominant. But that also didn't resolve the conflicts of the story, and he continued writing until the characters of the rabbi and his wife Mazal also developed, and before he knew it he had a novel on his hands.

"So he sits at the computer writing these lines, and he's lonely coming and going, and perhaps this is why he believed that he could really understand his heroes, but who can truly understand another's soul? Is the mere loneliness of both of them enough for that?" writes Behar in another one of the narrator's interjections into the story.

Alongside his prolific writing, which as noted has a clear cultural-political bent, Behar also frequently recites his poems at various political demonstrations, sometimes within the framework of a group called Guerilla Culture, which aims to connect literary artists to political activity. Thus he has demonstrated in Sheikh Jarrah, at a protest against the separation fence in Abu Dis, and against the Oz police unit in Holon to protest the policy of deporting illegal immigrants. He also joined the Black Panther movement, headed by Ayala Sabag.

"The poet has a responsibility not to ignore the society in which he lives and from which he draws his cultural heritage," says Behar.

But what exactly is his cultural heritage? "Secularism is Behar's starting point," poet and critic Eli Hirsch wrote about Behar in Yedioth Ahronoth. "He conducts an internal dialogue, in which he never ceases to assess his religiousness, his yearning for the [Jewish religious] sources, his ability to get closer to them without getting farther away from himself. On the face of it this is a contradictory movement, but it is similar in many ways to that of the Yiddish and Ashkenazi-Hebrew poetry in the late

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19th century and 20th century: One came out of Jewish ground and planted its secularism in it, while the other come out of secular ground and is trying to dig its Jewish 'wells' in it."

How did the boy from Ra'anana, from a traditional but not religious family, get to such a situation? He says it started first of all because of a sense of emptiness.

"You're brought up in a context of emptiness, of nothing. There was no real alternative content to take the place of everything we were asked to forget. My mother immigrated to this country from Iraq when she was five. One day the teacher comes to her house and asks my grandparents to stop speaking Arabic to her. My mother accepted this and started answering them in Hebrew, but they kept on speaking Arabic. The breakdown is in the previous generation, the generation of my grandparents. The generation that chose to keep quiet so that their children would advance. For my mother the whole process of acclimating in Israel was a process of development. They moved from a tent to a shack, from a shack to a housing project, and from a housing project to a home. But her grandfather, who came to Israel 10 years after them, saw it completely differently. He saw it all as a deterioration compared to life in Baghdad; as total ruin. My mother claims to this day that he died of a broken heart when he saw how they were living here."

The death of Behar's grandfather, Yitzhak Behar, was evidently a key moment in shaping his worldview. His grandfather was born in Berlin in 1917 to parents who came from Istanbul. In the late 1930s he fled to Denmark, just before the rest of his family was killed in the Holocaust. In his old age he resumed speaking his mother tongue: Ladino.

"At 79 he suddenly started crying that he was an orphan, that his parents didn't have a grave," says Behar, whose grandfather asked him to write his life story.

"I didn't get it done," says Behar, who was 24 when his grandfather died. "It pained me. I felt that he was the last Mohican, that with his death the language and an entire cultural world disappeared. Only after his death, when I started searching for Ladino, I discovered the vitality that his culture still has, its richness, and the sad possibilities of tying threads to your culture after the death of the grandfathers and grandmothers."

"Death always comes too soon, and by surprise," Behar wrote in an essay published in the Tehudot Zehut ("Echoing Identities" ) anthology (Am Oved ), "and then you realize that all the questions that you waited on, that you never asked a living person - you'll never be able to ask the dead person. And on my journey from Mount Scopus in

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Jerusalem to the cemetery in Kfar Sava, I was filled with dread over how much was now gone and would never be revealed."

Behar's sense of a disconnect between the generations grew stronger when, in the last six months of her life, his Iraqi grandmother forgot her Hebrew and could only speak Arabic. "I couldn't talk to her. I felt this thread breaking," he says.

Those feelings spurred him to study Ladino and Arabic, and to delve into his ancestors' cultural heritage.

Maybe you're fighting to bring back things that are beyond saving at this point?

Vanished languages, forgotten cultures? Isn't this the nature of the world? Things disappear. There were once Aztecs in the world and now there aren't.

"If I were an Aztec, it might bother me."

**Artists Talk: Israel/Palestine. An Interview with Almog Behar /  
Chana Morgenstern**

**Chana Morgenstern:** Can you tell me a little bit about how your experiences organizing with Israelis and Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah [East Jerusalem] informed the writing of this poem?

**Almog Behar:** Well, I think it was everything combined, the fact that Sheikh Jarrah is really close to my house in Jerusalem, but at the same time is a different world--a world that in its conduct, in its rules, in the police and the army that walk around there, and in the eviction of people from their homes—is a place that steals from me my Judaism, both the state and the settlers do it, and it hurts that for the most part this theft is accepted by the majority of the public. Also, as a practicing Jew, the confrontation with the religiosity of the settlers—the experience of protesting in front of a congregation in prayer—produced a difficult estrangement for me. At one point I tried to create an alternative prayer, a combined Jewish and Islamic prayer that would unite the Israeli and Palestinian protesters and shield them from the police, but the Arab-Palestinian community had a hard time with this idea because they associate Jewish prayer with the settlers and the settlements, and I understand that. It was difficult for them to see prayer—which in my eyes and in my world is a major link between Judaism and Islam—as a symbol of connection. At the synagogue I go to, we pray in the same Arabic notes that the Islamic muezzin sings in; historically and in the day to day, the music and symbols of Judaism, especially Mizrahi Judaism, have a relationship with the music and symbols of Islam, and part of my own search is about exploring this connection. Look, it's really troubling that the Israeli-Arab conflict is often conceived of as a Jewish-Muslim conflict, but in some sense I also think that part of the solution to the conflict has to have a Muslim-Jewish component to it. This may be far off because the political reality is opposed to it, but in the end, from my perspective, from the perspective of my faith and my belief, some of the tools for recovery exist within the potential for Jewish-Muslim connection.

**CM:** The idea of bringing Judaism and Islam together as part of a solution to the conflict seems like a very different approach than the approach taken by the Israeli left or the European left, who are traditionally secular.

**AB:** Yes, definitely, But look, I think that in this sense there is a difference between the general Israeli left and the Jerusalem left. The old left or the Tel-Avivy left, at least stereotypically, is far from this perspective because it's far from its own religion, it identifies its Judaism with someone else: the ultra-orthodox or settlers, them and the state. In other words what's left is the state as a representation of Judaism, which I think is a total theft of Judaism. Judaism is something much more complicated, with many more layers. The Judaism that comes after the second temple, after Christianity, after Islam, is in dialogue with Christian and Islamic practices and customs, and this means that it can be a vehicle for dialogue with other communities instead of a vehicle for exclusion. Traditionally, In Iraq, where my mother's family is from, these communities were much more intertwined. Even—for example—in order for the Jewish communities in Baghdad to celebrate Passover they had to have a Muslim to sell their bread to. You couldn't celebrate your holidays without members of other religions. This was also true for holidays like the Moroccan Mimuna to which all religious groups were invited—other groups were part of the holiday and the holiday atmosphere in the Middle East my grandparents grew up in. But here, in the Israeli imagination, the holidays—ours and theirs—are justifications for curfew. When do you hear about Muslim holidays on the Israeli news? When there is a curfew on the territories because of Eid al- 'Ad'ha and Eid El-Fiter and Ramadan. And in this sense we are moving farther and farther away from understanding the connections between our cultures and traditions. Take for example the tradition of joint liturgical poetry: the 16th century (tzefat) poet Rabbi Israel Najara's work was in dialogue with Sufism; and in 20th century Rabbi David Buzaglo combined Judaism, Islam, Hebrew and Arabic in his work, over Arabic melodies songs with words in Arabic, Aramaic and Hebrew. And some of the liturgical poetry is common to both Muslims and Jews, as prayers that are used by both religions. From my perspective as a Mizrahi Jew I feel that part of the value of Mizrahi culture is that it is part of the tradition of shared cultures in the Middle East. When Mizrahi culture in Israel disconnects itself from Arabic culture and from Islam it is in danger of becoming a caricature of itself. The moment we lock ourselves up in Hebrew and in the phobia of Arabic, we start to resemble an immigrant group that has migrated from the East to the West and is trying to assimilate to that Western culture, when in fact we forget that we are still in the East, we haven't roamed very far. Hebrew and



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Judaism have roots in the East and it is precisely the living connection with the Arabic language and culture and Islam that nurtures us.

**CM:** Do you think that because of their roots in the Arab world, the Mizrahi Jewish community plays a role in the conflict between Israel and the Arab world?

**AB:** In Shimon Ballas's book *The Transit Camp* [1964], his first book in Hebrew, one of the characters says, "We the Arab-Jews, will be a bridge between the Arabs and the Jews." But first of all, a bridge is something that people step on, and they were stepped on. And they, the Arab-Jews, were also a bridge that was forgotten by both sides. It's not just that from the perspective of European Jews in the new Israeli state Mizrahim were these kind of half-strangers that filled roles in the army and the factories and fields, and needed to be re-educated before they could play any kind of national or cultural role. There was also a great deal of denial about Mizrahi Jews' connection to the Arab world. In the beginning, the optimism of people like Shimon Ballas stemmed from the fact that in contrast to the half of the nation that came from Europe and treated the Arabs with elitism the Mizrahi half was born into a joint life, into a more equitable life with the Arabs and the idea was that this would help on some level. But it is clear that as the generations have shifted most of this difference has been erased, and due to the Israeli re-education and the media, most of the Mizrahim have joined the general racism of the majority. Also, because the Mizrahim were relegated to the working class they were pitted against the Palestinians. But it's also important to remember that amnesia and repression existed on the other side as well. A large part of the Arab world chose most of the time to forget the Arab-Jews within the dichotomy of what eventually turned into the Arab-Israeli struggle. They were not forgotten in Morocco, but that's the exception. After more than a thousand years of being part of the history of Arabic culture we have virtually disappeared in the Arab world. It's an understanding on both sides—the Israeli and the Arab—that the Mizrahim were not Arabs and never were part of the Arabic world. And in this sense, instead of being a bridge between the two sides, the Mizrahim have actually succeeded in being disconnected from both sides. Both sides forgot them and suppressed their identities. Paradoxically, one of the last communities in the Arab world to actually remember the Arab-Jewish connection is the Palestinian one, especially the Israeli-Palestinian community, who like the Mizrahim, also find

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themselves caught between the Arab world and Israel. Now the positive aspect of this situation is that I think Mizrahim have nonetheless forced and will continue to force the state of Israel to change culturally. For example, I went to a school that erased my past and my family's past. Now there's no way that I am going to let the same thing happen to my child's education, that I will allow my children and my grandchildren to be sent to a place that erases them. I think the mission of our generation is to change this place from the inside, in terms of the culture, in terms of historical consciousness, and in terms of the definition of what it means to be Israeli and what it means to be Jewish.

**CM:** And what role do you feel like your generation—especially the writers and artists you are involved with—play in this process of transformation, particularly in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Given the conservative state of the culture, do you feel like such a small group can make a difference? Do you feel like the work is meaningful even though it does not reflect mainstream values?

**AB:** In the words of Emile Habiby, translated by Anton Shammass, I am a pessoptimist. But even if you're being pessimistic you can say that someone like Samir Naqqash, who preserved his culture by being an Israeli Jewish author who wrote in Arabic during the 1960s and 70s, carried a torch for the rest of us. He knew he lived in a dark age, that he was living in a generation in which this position and this act would not prevail or even stand out. He knew that this act would be denied, both in Israel and in the Arab world, that it would be swallowed up by all of the darkness around it. But . . . the simple act of holding the torch, illuminates the notion of possibility for future generations. There is a possibility; the possibility of a generation that will change and will be capable of changing society and carrying this torch forward. From a cultural point of view and a historic point of view the Jewish-Arab connection is a living possibility, it can be a real possibility right now in a limited capacity, but its existence also provides a torch for coming generations to actualize the vision more broadly. I think that in the young literature certain things are happening that are optimistic in terms of the Mizrahi-Palestinian-Israeli connection; things are also happening in the realm of music that are very positive and that foreground Arabic culture. So on the one hand, I'm optimistic that a young Israeli-Palestinian literary community is being created, that change is being created

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alongside all of the very difficult aspects of the situation. In terms of the general cultural situation of channel 2 representing our culture and so on, I feel we have not developed very much. It's clear that the dominant cultural options exclude our connection. The dominant cultural situation includes two options: the neutral—in other words Ashkenazi (Jews of European descent)—Israeli option and the American option, or a symbiosis between these two options. Once someone asked me, why are you even wasting your time on the struggle between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi, when in a few years we're all basically going to be Americans? But I feel like as long as we are engaged with these questions of Ashkenazi and Mizrahi and Jewish and Palestinian identity we aren't completely American. Part of our engagement around the definition of our cultures, around the question of how we want to educate our children and live our lives reminds us of the alternatives to the dominant culture. These are part of our foundational questions, not just questions of collective and national identity, but also the question of a solution to the horrors that have occurred here; it is both collective and deeply personal and familial, in the sense that we are asking how we want to live as a family, as a community.

## Devil or ally? / Sasson Somekh

"I was very hesitant when approaching the translation of the story 'Ana min al-yahud' into Arabic. The story is beautiful and interesting, and in my opinion very important because of the possibility inherent in it for understanding contemporary Israeli reality; moreover the story won the prize for the best short story in 2005 from Haaretz, the foremost Israeli publication, a newspaper whose annual prizes are esteemed by the Israeli cultural elite. I hesitated - despite the fact that the writer of the Hebrew story gave it a title in the Arabic language, 'Ana min hayahud' ["I Am From the Jews"], achieved a collective recognition in Israel and he overnight became a star on the cultural front there, and is now one of the outstanding writers published in Haaretz, a newspaper in which many wish to publish, but only talented writers are given the opportunity to do so."

Thus Muhammed Abboud, a researcher of Israel and its culture in Cairo, begins the extensive analysis he devoted to Almog Behar's story in the June issue of the well-known Cairene monthly Al-Hilal ("The Crescent"). Abboud indeed translated the story in full and published it along with an analytical article, and the monthly printed the story and analysis on special yellow paper and devoted the cover of the issue to this subject (the cover shows an ultra-Orthodox yeshiva student reading as he walks). Thus, Almog Behar, a young Jerusalemite poet and storyteller, a student at Hebrew University, has been given an honor the likes of which few Israelis have earned in the past.

The veteran al-Hilal, which has been coming out in Cairo since 1892, is one of the most popular cultural monthlies in Egypt and the Arab world, and many millions in the Middle East have expanded their cultural horizons thanks to its contents. It should be noted that this is not a literary publication, but rather a panoramic one that has tried, since the day it first went to press, to expand the reader's horizons and knowledge, and to endow him with information and criticism about what is happening in the world of culture everywhere, with a certain emphasis on what is happening in Egypt and its neighboring countries. It was founded by an energetic Lebanese immigrant, Jurjy Zeidan, who was a prolific writer and founded, inter alia, a literary monthly that remained in existence for 115 years, while most of the activities of the

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other Lebanese immigrants, who came to Egypt during the last quarter of the 19th century, sank into oblivion (apart from the daily newspaper Al-Ahram, which was also founded by a Lebanese immigrant at about the same time and continues to appear to this day).

Al-Hilal has preserved its original mission - that is, to expand the reader's cultural horizons - throughout the years, even if during the days of Gamal Abdel Nasser's regime, it was nationalized, together with all the rest of the publications, and for quite a few years it had editors forced upon it who had nationalist and "socialist" ideological tendencies. Fundamentally, however, al-Hilal never relinquished a number of its first intentions.

#### Spinoza and Einstein

When I was a high-school student in Baghdad, during the late 1940s, I would run to the newsstand in our neighborhood at a regular time each month to buy the new issue of Al-Hilal. Once I bought it I could not wait until I got home, and from reading the table of contents I would rejoice in the feeling that fascinating hours of reading awaited me. I will admit without embarrassment: Much of my knowledge of our contemporary world came to me from the issues of al-Hilal.

I must note that the issue of June 2006, presents, even in these "crazy" times, a secular cultural world whose existence one has difficulty believing, because of the atmosphere of return to orthodoxy in the Arab world in recent years - signs of which are also very evident in daily newspapers and journals that have no connection with the radical religious stream. In this issue, for example, there are articles on the following subjects: "Spinoza and Einstein: The philosopher and the scientist;" "Secularism in Egypt" (this article is written by prominent philosopher Murad Wahba, a leader of the secular stream in Cairo); "The roots of philosophy in Coptic Egypt;" an article by Butrous Butrous Ghali; and many other subjects 1,000 leagues apart from Islamic religious topics.

The article that Abboud has written about Behar's story is called "An outcry against cultural oppression." The aim of his analysis is to illuminate the theme in the folds of

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the story, which in Abboud's opinion is: I am an Arab Jew and I am oppressed and downtrodden because of the hegemony of the Ashkenazim (Jews of European origin). Abboud's article itself is very deserving of extensive analysis, on the one hand, in order to illustrate the vast knowledge the man has acquired concerning society and culture in Israel and, on the other hand, the mistakes that to a large extent derive from the fact that he has never visited Israel, and from his keenness to prove his own view of the contents of the story. My analysis will, I hope, appear in due course elsewhere.

#### Tenable interpretation

This interpretation of the text of the story is tenable to some extent, and it is possible to quote sentences and paragraphs of the story that will support such an interpretation. However, anyone who read Almog's story noticed that there is not a trace of protest in it against social or political protest by the Ashkenazim of Jews that came from the countries of the East (that is, not oppression or discrimination in the material sense). The plot of the story is "linguistic," } above all. The narrator in the story suddenly loses his ability to speak Israeli Hebrew, and thus policemen and passersby suspect him of being an Arab or an Arab terrorist. Now he speaks with the glottal 'ayyin, the guttural het and the Arab tzadi, which is more in the direction of "s" with the tongue raised at the back than the sound "tz," the way his Iraqi grandfather used to speak. In the end, the protagonist infects his wife, who is not of Iraqi origin, and thus the linguistic "disease" spreads in all directions, and even Ashkenazim come down with it.

This summary of the plot does not, of course, do justice to its experiential contents, but it is clear that the protest is against a different injustice: against the coercion of speech (and perhaps also culture) that Mizrahi Israelis (Jews with origins in the Arab countries) did not want, and in the shaping of which they did not participate.

If the story is a protest story, we are dealing with spiritual oppression whose thrust is an attempt to eradicate the Arab-Mizrahi element in the experience of the Jews of the Middle East, and in any case not to include their universe and their memories in the central cultural norm. Anyone who wants to, can talk about hegemonism or even "racism" in the sense of a scornful attitude toward the other's culture and past, but this topic, as noted, deserves a more thorough discussion.

And indeed, the author of the article in al-Hilal was aware (although not to a sufficient extent, in my opinion) of the dangers of imposing a simplistic, one-way, black-and-white interpretation on a story as complex as Behar's. And this is what Abboud writes, after the paragraphs I translated at the start of this article: "My discomfort increased with respect to the question of whether this story - which deals with the problematics of the identity of the Jews who 'immigrated' to Israel from Arab countries - can enlighten us from the perspective of 'Is he for us or against us?' as the story contains the nuclei of many and varied interpretations. Simplistic superficial logic is liable to turn the Hebrew writer into the Devil's incarnation or, alternatively, a friend and ally to Arab culture, and all this because it deals with the oppression that exists in the State of Israel. These two approaches are far from being correct approaches."

However, despite this self-warning, Abboud adds that he, like many of his fellow scholars of Hebrew in Cairo (and they are many!), relates to the literary works that are written in Israel as raw materials from which it is possible to learn and to draw unambiguous conclusions about the "situation" in Israel and its culture. Relating to the artistic text as an aesthetic exhibit with multiple meanings is absent, in the end, from Abboud's fine article.

The translation of the story into Arabic is generally faithful to the original, and it is definitely readable, while Abboud's discussion, even if it is somewhat programmatic, testifies to impressive familiarity with everyday life and the linguistic aspects of the Israeli reality of today. Translation errors are to be found here and there, particularly in the transliteration and translation of the names of places and streets. The Jerusalemite names "Katamon" and "Talbieh," which apparently were incorrectly transliterated, whereas Yordei Hasira Street (literally, "those who came off the boat," referring to the illegal immigrants who came in by ship) is translated into something like "The Jumpers off the Ship."

And finally: In the cover picture in al-Hilal, as mentioned, there is a yeshiva boy with curly earlocks, who is reading a book as he walks (or stands to pray). It is possible to point to an error in identification, as the narrator in our story is explicitly a person from the Eastern Jewish communities who has Iraqi roots; there is no way he is Ashkenazi (or Yemenite). Although we learn that the protagonist of the story is

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growing a beard, he is definitely not an ultra-Orthodox person with earlocks.

However, this mistaken identity should apparently not be attributed to Abboud, but rather to the designer of the issue who sought a clearly Jewish scene, supposedly, and also a Jerusalem scene in order to exemplify the backdrop of the plot of Behar's story.



## Hebrew Fiction Old-new Hymns / Ketzia Alon

Tchahle Vehezkel (Rachel and Ezekiel), by Almog Behar.

Keter Books (Hebrew), 260 pages, 89 NIS

The latest in a new generation of talented Mizrahi writers, Almog Behar presents in his first novel an ideal of cultural syncretism, portraying a young Jerusalem couple whose seder participants cross borders and religious boundaries .

Over the past decade, we have witnessed the meteoric rise of a second generation of Mizrahi writers, as evidenced by the impressive novels of Ronit Matalon, Sami Bardugo, Dudu Bossi, Shimon Adaf, Sara Shilo and others. With his fourth book and first novel, "Rachel and Ezekiel" (his previous works include two books of poetry and a short-story collection ), Almog Behar joins the ranks of these writers.

Almog Behar. Describes a multicultural city from the inside.

The book's title reveals something about the author's intellectual orientation; the Mizrahi nicknames in the Hebrew title (Tchahle for Rachel and Hezkel for Yehezkel, or Ezekiel ) and the fact that the title characters are married hints at the sort of lives the novel aspires to describe. The book centers on the relationship of the young Jerusalem couple, both of them bereft of living parents, and now expecting their first child.

The couple's unofficial guardians, a rabbi named Ovadia and his wife Mazal, are older mirror images of the novel's protagonists. The climax of the story comes at a Passover seder at Tchahle and Hezkel's home, to which they have invited a Moldavian Jewish neighbor; Hezkel's half brother, Ismael, and mother, Ana'em; and Mazal, Ovadia and Ovadia's mother. The seder is organized as a multicultural event at which Mizrahi and Russian-speaking Jews, as well as Jews and Arabs, and the young and the old, sit together. And it is on this night that Ovadia and Mazal depart this world, not without having left their imprint on the young couple.

Jerusalem figures as one of the novel's heroes, and Behar provides a description of the city "from the inside." This is not an exotic glance at the tourists who frequently roam around the Nahlaot neighborhood, where the couple live; instead it is a detailed, expansive view that includes the city's eastern side, including the neighborhood of

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Beit Safafa, where Ismael lives. For instance, when Hezkel is fired from his job, there is a colorful description of his journey to Saladin Street in search of work in the printing trade. As an aside, the narrative discloses that this is Hezkel's first visit to this central East Jerusalem thoroughfare: "He had heard the name, 'Saladin,' but he had never come to this place." In this way, Behar reveals much about the way residents from Jerusalem's western and eastern (that is, Jewish and Arab ) sides are cut off from one another, about the way they orient themselves in the urban space, and about how life in the city becomes organized in symbolic enclaves.

This book aims to bust open these enclaves, but its political passages are founded on reality, rather than ideology. Here is the continuation of the passage about Hezkel's wanderings in East Jerusalem: "And nobody could offer any form of work to his long outstretched arms. In one place they said we are about to go out of business, they don't let us distribute our newspaper in Ramallah or Nablus; in another, that we are cutting back on staff, we couldn't get a license to bring our journal to Hebron, and anyway, who has time today to read; and in a third that we are being shut down due to an order relayed by the military governor or the army judge or army minister, as we have written things that you're not allowed to write, or our journalists are not allowed to leave Jerusalem - neither to the east or west, north or south, and who's going to buy a newspaper whose news items relate exclusively to Jerusalem?" The author's critical vision hides behind the coolly factual survey.

#### Variations of identity

Behar uses the title characters, especially Hezkel, to reinforce various attitudes and positions upheld in the book, and they embody variations of Mizrahi Jewish identity in the Israel of 2011, giving readers vibrant, colorful slices of contemporary reality. Hezkel's outlook represents the political viewpoint (championed by the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow Coalition ) that decries the inequality between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews; religious traditionalism is exemplified by the pious Ovadia, whose name is a clear allusion to Shas' spiritual leader Rabbi Ovadia Yosef. Ismael is the representative of a political ideology that stresses similarities between Mizrahi-Jewish identity and Arab identity; that issue is also brought to the fore when Tchahle and Hezkel attend an event dedicated to Iraqi song (she is troubled to discover that he doesn't understand the song's lyrics in Arabic, and "is angrier with him at that moment than in all the other times when she was angry with him" ).

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Both Hezkel and Tchahle find themselves trying to balance a desire for full intellectual autonomy with a readiness to be influenced. Their intellectual outlooks develop during the course of the novel. The harmony within multiplicity that Behar proposes is expressed on various levels; in one of the novel's most powerful moments, Hezkel prays as a Jew in a Beit Safafa mosque, as though he is beseeching the heavens for theological unity.

The book sometimes seems to place a greater focus on political ideology than on the literary aspects of the plot or the characters. Some symbols of its literary commitment are manifest, though. For instance, during the course of the novel, Hezkel turns into a poet. He starts out having connections to a circle of poets who hang out at the Tmol Shilshom cafe in downtown Jerusalem. He reads poems by Erez Biton, a well-known Algerian-born Israeli poet, before he starts writing his own verse. Hezkel's rise as a bona fide artist is clinched when his first work is published. The poem opens with the line "With my dead brother, I have traveled on a long road," and this infuriates Hezkel's half brother, who is very much alive.

When he is starting out, Hezkel wonders to himself: "Perhaps if I add lines that I heard during prayers, and religious verse that I remember, and spice them up with some of my own words, I will be able to write words in the form of a poem, and call them my own." With these simple words, Hezkel identifies the DNA of Mizrahi poetics, and alludes to the type of writing exemplified by this book, writing that draws upon traditional Jewish liturgical poetry and religious sources.

The medley of secular and traditional prose characterizes Behar's own work. His writing career began with texts that featured a long string of poetic quotations; and this novel too is influenced by the author's interest in poetry.

Hezkel offers an alternative to the "reams of secular poetry," lyrics that are attuned to synagogue melodies. He proposes poetic metier that adheres to its own, different set of rules. "I ask that you write a new piyut [liturgical poem] for the synagogue, for Passover," Rabbi Ovadia says to Hezkel, when he learns that he has begun writing. "Rachel and Ezekiel" is a rich cornucopia of images, ideas and echoes, and there is not enough space in this review to do justice to everything it offers. But I would like to note another characteristic of Mizrahi literature that unfolds richly in the novel, and that is the book's status as an object. Almog Behar's novel provides its own distinctive way of relating to printed matter that is called a "book"; this perspective views a book as being more like a sacred text than a secularized batch of printed pages. Hezkel

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deliberates about this perspective, as in a passage that describes his ruminations on a book written by the great Iraqi-born scholar of Arabic literature Sasson Somekh, to whom Behar has dedicated this book: "In the end he decided that the book by Somekh had a holy quality, and he placed it on top of a book that discusses Jewish law."

**Bilingual collection of poems and prose joins young Arabic, Hebrew writers / Samuel Thrope**

A first-of-its-kind bilingual anthology of Hebrew and Arabic prose and poetry has recently been released in Israel, offering an example of the potential for collaboration despite heightened tensions between Arabs and Jews.

Unlike previous translations between the languages, it is published by one of Israel's leading publishers and focuses on daily life and love as much as on politics.

Called "Two," the collection is published by Keter Publishing House, and aims to launch a dialogue between young, contemporary writers in both languages. The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict is unavoidably present in the anthology, but it is not the dominant theme. The best poems and stories approach political questions obliquely, framing them in unexpected ways.

"Love is no less political than politics," says Rajaa Natour, a poet who has contributed two love poems to the volume. As a Palestinian with Israeli citizenship, she is part of the country's 20 percent Arab minority whose experiences are often unfamiliar to the Jewish majority.

"Through the translation, my voice as a Palestinian woman will reach Jewish women who are not in, and do not know, my day-to-day life and reveal my emotional world. If I wasn't translated to Hebrew, I would never reach them."

The project, begun in 2008, originally included Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip as well. But failed peace initiatives and three Israel-Gaza conflicts eventually led all of them to withdraw. However, the inclusion of Palestinians living within Israel still marks a significant accomplishment, especially given the heightened tensions during last summer's Gaza war.

While Arabic literature has been translated into Hebrew before, and vice versa, those translations have focused on established authors. "Two" aims to bring together a younger generation of poets and fiction writers who are unfamiliar to readers of the other language. The 70+ poems and short stories included in the collection all appear twice, in the original and in Hebrew or Arabic translation. Hebrew and Arabic share common linguistic roots and a long history of literary interaction, but in Israel today Hebrew and Arabic readers are largely unfamiliar with each other's language and literature.

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"The community of writers in Hebrew and writers in Arabic live in parallel and publish in parallel, and they hardly meet," says Almog Behar, an Israeli novelist and poet and one of the book's editors, along with Tamer Massalha and Tamar Weiss-Gabbay.

Given the difficult state of Israeli-Palestinian relations currently, Dr. Behar claims for the anthology a modest, if hopeful goal.

"We don't have any utopian idea that we're creating a shared literary community," he said. Rather, the collection can be "a kind of introduction that can generate further influences and connections."

## Israel's sidelined Mizrahi musicians and artists reclaim centre stage / Peter Beaumont

On a small stage in the basement of a Jerusalem bar, singer Inbal Djamchid pauses during her performance to describe the inspiration for the next song to be played by her group, Ecoute.

She explains that it describes a lyricist's unrequited love for one of Egypt's most famous singers, Umm Kulthum, revered in the Arab world.

When the music starts, the song is haunting and unfamiliar, but while Djamchid's voice echoes the melodies of Algerian, Moroccan and Egyptian music, the lyrics are sung in Hebrew.

Djamchid and her husband Gilad Vaknin, who plays electric guitar in the group, are third-generation Mizrahi Jews, whose families came to Israel not from Europe but from the Middle East and north Africa.

The music they seek to reinterpret is what their parents and grandparents once listened to in cities across the Middle East, from Cairo to Baghdad; a style that slipped out of mainstream Israeli Jewish cultural life amid the long years of discrimination – economic, cultural and political – against the Mizrahi by institutions long dominated by Ashkenazi Jews of European origin.

As a result the music has echoed the wider story of the Mizrahi, who came to Israel after independence in 1948 – either expelled from Arab countries or choosing to immigrate to Israel – and arrived to confront both racism and marginalisation, problems that have not disappeared despite Jews of Arab descent constituting roughly half of the total Israeli population.

Now, amid a newfound political confidence, this musical and artistic culture once pushed to the sidelines is quietly reasserting itself.

A few days after Ecoute's performance, the couple are in a coffee shop in central Jerusalem to discuss another project – a school Vaknin has opened this month to teach children eastern styles of music.

“We both trained at the Academy [of Music and Dance] in Jerusalem,” explains Djamchid. “We were trained in the western musical tradition. Eastern music was not available. Later Gilad studied under a master of Moroccan music and slowly it became what we were interested in.”

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“For us it was a process of wanting to connect with a Jewish culture that had come from Arab countries. To say a sense of that connection is present, alive and exists.” In this way, the musicians seek a connection with places where, in many cases, Jews have been rejected and expelled; where a sense of belonging is no longer possible but where a desire for some relationship still exists.

If there is a distinction between musicians like Ecoute and an earlier generation of Mizrahi musicians – who were barely accepted by the dominant Ashkenazi culture – it is foregrounding of the link to an Arabic culture and language often airbrushed out by their predecessors.

Ironically, perhaps, the grassroots emergence of Mizrahi Jewish artists comes at a time when encouraging Mizrahi culture has become an issue in Israel’s rightwing politics – not least because of the identification of often working-class Mizrahi voters with prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud party.

In particular, the issue has been pushed by the culture minister, Miri Regev, as a counter to the perceived left-leaning tendencies of an Ashkenazi cultural elite.

One man collaborating with Ecoute is the novelist and poet Almog Behar, who has blamed a “cultural amnesia” on both the part of Israel and the Arab world for severing a connection to a group the novelist Shimon Ballas has called the “Arab-Jews”.

Behar has been in the vanguard of artists attempting to forge a new connection with both the Arabic his grandparents spoke and the culture from which they came – in his case from Iraq.

“[There is] an understanding on both sides – the Israeli and the Arab – that the Mizrahim were not Arabs and never were part of the Arabic world,” he explained in an interview several years ago. “And in this sense, instead of being a bridge between the two sides, the Mizrahim have actually succeeded in being disconnected from both sides.”

Speaking to the Guardian, Behar, whose grandmother came to Israel from Baghdad, explains that it was his grandparents’ death that prompted his realisation that a personal cultural connection was in danger of being severed.

“When my grandmother died I became aware of an absence. For the last six months of her life my grandmother suffered from dementia and she went back to speaking in Arabic. I was 17 at the time and Arabic was spoken in the house but from childhood it was clear that we were supposed to speak Hebrew. Arabic was not good.”



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In his poem, *My Arabic is Mute*, Behar addresses the taboo, and writes:

*My Arabic is mute/ Strangled in the throat/ Cursing itself/ Without uttering a word/  
Sleeping in the suffocating air/ Of the shelters of my soul/ Hiding/ From family  
members/ Behind the shutters of the Hebrew.*

Behar says after her death he focused on language as a way to “deal with a sense of something absent from our culture”. Now, he says, a new generation of artists like him “want to take this culture back to the centre from the periphery”.

In a suburb of Tel Aviv, the Firqat Alnoor orchestra is rehearsing. Founded two years ago by Hana Fataya after years of effort, the aim of the ensemble is to recreate the kind of eastern orchestras famous for accompanying the likes of Umm Kulthum, Faredi al-Atrash, and the National Broadcast Arab Orchestra of Israel – once hugely popular but which dissolved decades ago.

Unlike Ecoute, Firqat Alnoor perform the songs of Umm Kulthum in Arabic, as well as Jewish liturgical songs of eastern origin – known as *piyut* – also sung in Arabic.

One challenge of the revival becomes apparent in the rehearsal space. For an upcoming performance several western-trained musicians have been asked to play too. Used to reading from scores and notation, they struggle to mesh with their eastern-trained colleagues versed in the improvisational style of the Arabic *maqam* melodic system.

Fataya says she sees a change in attitudes towards Mizrahi musical culture but one which is long overdue. “It is part of how people in Israel thought of Mizrahi culture – that it was lesser.

“It wasn’t taught and had no place. It was part of these feelings you got that Mizrahis were not good enough. In the last few years there has been a growing awareness of a Mizrahi culture.”

Fataya, too, sees the embrace of the Mizrahi culture’s links with wider Middle Eastern culture as a potential for building bridges amid conflict. “I hope we can show how people can live together by bringing Jews and Arabs together to recognise that there are things we share.”

## Israeli Jewish, Arab authors collaborate on bilingual book / Yuval Avivi

A new anthology of short stories and poetry (and a comic strip, too) is about to challenge Israeli readers, Jewish and Arab alike. The book, titled “Two: A Bilingual Anthology,” collects the writings of young Israeli authors, both Jewish and Arab, presenting each text in both Hebrew and Arabic.

“The very fact that you are holding a book and reading it in Hebrew, with a text in Arabic script on the facing page, or vice versa, is a very powerful experience. Even if you don’t read Arabic, when reading this book you can no longer remain oblivious to the fact that this is a place where people live and create in two languages,” said Anat Niv, editor-in-chief of the Keter Books publishing house, which released the book. The project, which includes a website intended to produce similar collaborations in the future, was coordinated by three editors: Tamer Massalha, Tamar Weiss-Gabbay and Almog Behar. Work on the book began in 2008, and it includes some of the country’s up and coming young authors, such as Anat Einhar, Dror Burstein and Einat Yakir in Hebrew, and Marwan Makhoul and Iyad Barghouti in Arabic.

From the moment it was conceived, this book was never intended to be light reading for the average Israeli, living in a country where poetry collections are hardly best sellers. Besides the unprecedented use of the country’s two official languages, Hebrew and Arabic, on facing pages, the book also challenges its readers with stories of a young Arab woman who misses her beloved after his suicide attack, or of an angry ghost in Haifa, raging about the “crimes of 1948,” while recalling the names of the city’s Arab streets.

Weiss-Gabbay was raised in the national religious sector and grew up in its Bnei Akiva youth movement. As one of the editors, she said, “I also felt uncomfortable reading about a girl longing for her loved one, who committed a suicide attack, but literature was never intended to make people feel comfortable. I want to hear all sorts of voices. I want to listen to them and argue with them.”

During the six years in which the project was developed, Israel underwent three violent campaigns against the Palestinians: Operation Cast Lead (2008-09), Operation

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Pillar of Defense (2012) and Operation Protective Edge (2014). The conflicts made cooperation between the participants all the more difficult.

“The project got stuck frequently, and for all sorts of reasons,” said Weiss-Gabbay. “It was hard to find a publisher who would pick it up, believing that this book has an audience, while the writers themselves also had their own fair share of suspicions and fears. Some authors, particularly Arabic-language writers, decided to pull out in the middle, fearing that the book would leave the impression that they were collaborating with the Israeli establishment. Others were hesitant and only agreed to cooperate after they researched the project and looked into who was behind it. Some refused to participate from the very beginning, while others agreed to participate but withdrew at the last minute.”

One person who had no qualms about participating in the project was the poet Rajaa Natour, who has two poems included in the anthology. “It was a long journey for me, confronting the Hebrew writing,” she said. “For me, it is the language of my enemy, and I was forced to learn it. It took a long time, but I eventually found an aesthetic in Hebrew. I now see Hebrew as a tool, not as an identity. I know exactly who I am. My identity is obvious to me. But at the same time, I want to speak to the Jewish reader, to get angry at him, to curse him, to tell him about what he doesn’t understand and what he doesn’t know. I want to say all that in my own voice, but in his language, because he doesn’t know Arabic. That way I can also present Arab culture to the other side. I can show them that it has a beauty of its own, and that it is not all about the Islamic State and terrorist attacks.”

Once the book’s editors raised some of the money to publish it from various foundations and grants, it was the Keter Publishing House that eventually rose to the challenge. Though it is the only publishing house in Israel that is traded on the stock market, it threw its support behind a book that is not likely to make any best-selling list. “We made sure to obtain external support, so that the financial risk was moderated,” Niv said. “Obviously, the book lacks the potential to become a best seller, but at the same time I think that it appeals to a curious, mixed, literary audience. The decision to publish the book was not based on political considerations. The considerations were cultural and literary. This is the first time that both sectors can read the exact same texts, and that is a beautiful thing, because cultural and political processes are so integrated here.”

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“It was mutual curiosity that guided the project,” Weiss-Gabbay said. “People are unfamiliar with works written in Arabic, which aren’t translated into Hebrew, and so little actually gets translated. The only written works that do get translated are those of veteran, well-known writers. The fact is that I am unfamiliar with an entire literary scene that exists and is active here right beside me. Among people who want to listen to and get to know the other side, there is a lot of curiosity, especially since last summer. They realize that we are two peoples living here together, for better or for worse.”

Natour confirms that the same curiosity exists in Arab society, too. “People in the Arab world don’t know David Grossman or Hanoach Levin. Jews are just soldiers and murderers to them. I have friends in Iraq who are very curious about Israeli society, but at the same time, they are scared and afraid to actually visit Israel, because that would mark those Arab authors as collaborators with the occupation.”

Natour’s poems don’t actually deal with politics, but she said, “Love is also political. I speak out against accepted norms. I want to upset the Palestinian discourse, too, and talk about the role of women and religion. I’m not only interested in the occupation. There is also internal Palestinian oppression, which must be spoken out against as well — and from there we must come out against the greater oppression of the occupation. There is no such thing as ‘only social’ or ‘only political’ or ‘only romantic.’ They are all interconnected.”

## The resurgent mizrahi voice / Kamoun Ben-Shimon

One evening during the summer's months of unrest, Almog Behar walks into the protest tent camp in the heart of Jerusalem set up by single mothers. The women greet Behar, a poet, author and teacher, enthusiastically. Pushing a baby stroller with his one-year-old son, Ariel, bundled up well against Jerusalem's summer night's chill, Behar sits down comfortably among the women.

This tent camp is among the least popular of the demonstrations. It is here that the truly needy, the dispossessed and disenfranchised, the unemployed and homeless have pitched their tents in the city center, off King George V street. This tent camp doesn't film as well as the ones set up by the savvy, photogenic, middle-class students.

Behar, 33, a striking figure with his thick black beard and pale skin, is a popular lecturer, who often leads workshops in writing and self-empowerment. But he hasn't come here as an outsider supporter or as a facilitator; it is clear he sees himself, and that the women see him, as an integral part of the group. Behar, 33, married and a new father, has a comfortable home and is gainfully employed writing, editing and teaching, yet he took an active part in the housing demonstrations.

"As a Mizrahi intellectual, this is where I should be, since most of the demonstrators are Mizrahim," he contends, referring to Jews who immigrated to Israel from Muslim countries. "I want to paint Israeli society in other colors and, especially, I want to change the view of the demonstrations. The protest by Tel Avivians, students who took to the tents because the rents in the nicest places in the city were too high, isn't on my radar."

Several months later, Behar meets with The Jerusalem Report in a small, fashionable Jerusalem coffee shop. He continues to believe that he can change Israeli society with ideas rooted in Judaism and not, he says, from the world view of the bourgeoisie. "I want justice for everyone, even those who don't agree with me politically," he adds, acknowledging that most of the people he worked with over the summer did not support his left-wing views regarding the rights of the Palestinians. Although his language is richer than that spoken by the protesters in the tent camps, he not only speaks in the same guttural sounding Hebrew, but he clearly shares the same social ideals. Behar is a prominent spokesman for a new generation of young, Israeli-born intellectuals, who are raising what they refer to as a "Jewish-Mizrahi" voice that merges traditional Jewish themes with social activism.

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Their grandparents came to Israel from Islamic countries and they have finally begun to make it in Israeli society - in academia, in art, in culture. And yet despite - or perhaps because of - their success, they have become activists. They are not the children of the Palmach generation, whose blond, wind blown hair and strong Ashkenazi features made up the stereotype of the founders of the state. Their grandparents and parents were the forgotten, the immigrants who lived in wretched substandard housing projects.

Their families aren't portrayed in the novels of Amos Oz. They came from the East, not from Eastern Europe – from Marrakesh, Tunis and Baghdad, and their hearts still ache for the sounds and cadence of Arabic. They have always been foreigners, these immigrants who thought they were coming home to the land of their forefathers, but instead landed in a harsh, inflexible society that refused to accept their culture. The pain sounds clearly in Behar's texts. Searching for identity, Behar has replaced Zionism with tradition, root-bound Judaism, renewing customs and rituals from "backthere." The revival of the Mizrahi-style piyyut, or traditional Jewish liturgical song, which has become so popular in Israel over the past few years even among non-religious Ashkenazim, is one example of this trend, and Behar has been a leader in this trend, too.

These young Mizrahim are also highly committed to social struggles. Their models are the "Black Panthers," a group of young activists from the slum neighborhoods of Jerusalem, who startled the entire state in the 1970s with their forceful protests demanding social change and an end to the oppression and marginalization of the Mizrahim.

Behar, like many of his colleagues, is also active in renewed dialogue with Arabs. "We want to talk to Arabs and Palestinians based on our mutual interests, because we've all been screwed. Both sides view themselves as the victims of modern secular Zionism, which is colonialist and arrogant. I'm not anti-Zionist, but I want to put the traditional Jewish voice back in the current discourse. I believe that traditional Judaism can provide better solutions to the problems that Israeli society faces, such as poverty, despair, and exclusion, as well as to the problems of our relationships with our Arab neighbors."

Behar was born to parents in a mixed marriage and so, he says, his personal story encompasses all of the ingredients that makeup his ideology. His mother came

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to Israel from Iraq when she was six. His grandfather on his father's side was born in Berlin to parents who had emigrated to Germany from Istanbul. They then fled to Denmark when the Nazis came to power. Although he was fluent in both German and Danish, Behar's grandfather preferred Spaniolit, the language of the Turkish Jews, until his dying day. Behar's father came to Israel from Copenhagen, when he was four. Behar was born in 1978 in Netanya, a coastal city, north of Tel Aviv.

The stories about Baghdad and Berlin, the Holocaust, the immigration to Israel and life in a transit camp all combined to create his cultural environment. "I heard all these languages at home, but I knew as a child, that I shouldn't be speaking these languages on the street," he says. He remembers his mother's story - when she was in sixth grade, her teacher made a home visit to demand that her parents stop speaking to her in Arabic. "Of course, her parents didn't stop speaking Arabic to her, but from that day on, my mother refused to answer them in Arabic. From that day on, she spoke only Hebrew."

Yet one day, when he was 13 and asked to speak and study one language, his parents suggested that he learn, of all the languages- Danish.

But by the time he was 19, he was studying all of the languages spoken at home - and not speaking even one word of them outside of the home. "In a way, I lived in hiding. Towards the end of her life, my maternal grandmother was demented, and she forgot her Hebrew. And so suddenly, we, her grandchildren who had grown up next to her, could no longer speak with her, because she could only remember Arabic, which we didn't speak."

He was troubled, he says, by the distance between grandchildren and grandparents created by languages, "and we reach the absurd situation in which you simply can't even talk to your grandmother anymore!"

As he grew older, he continued to try to understand, often through language, the society into which he had been born. "I realized that English and Hebrew were seen as the important languages of the future, and that Arabic and German were disappearing and, with them, my family background, with both the Holocaust and the Arabism. Everything was disappearing, and there was only a small place of legitimacy left – for some traditional foods and a bit of traditional music from home". Their Jewish traditions were continuing to disappear, too, since Behar and his siblings were sent to secular schools. "We studied the Bible and Bialik, but we didn't learn any

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other important texts, and there was a complete disconnect between the customs we observed at home and in the synagogue and what we studied in school. And even in the Bible as we studied it in school – there wasn't really any God."

After completing his compulsory military service, Behar began to write and publish his first works. He became increasingly concerned about the relationship - or rather, the lack of relationship - between his writings, the "Israeliness" of his school experiences and the cultural background with which he grew up.

"I read Franz Kafka and Gunter Grass and Paul Celan thanks to my German traditions, but when I asked myself, what I had with me from my Iraqi and Sephardic backgrounds, I realized that I had nothing." At age 22, Behar moved to Jerusalem to study at the Hebrew University. He chose to study Spanish as part of his language requirements, because Spanish is the language closest to the Sephardic that his Turkish-German grandfather had spoken - a remnant of the Spanish expulsion of the Jews in 1492.

One summer, he traveled to the town of Bejar in Spain - the town in which his family originated. His grandfather died not long after he returned, and Behar suddenly realized that the renewed dialogue he had been attempting to create with his family had been cut off forever. "My grandparents, and especially my Iraqi and Sephardic grandparents, had given up their place in the evolution of our cultural identity. They believed that the children, who spoke modern Hebrew, were the future, and, with great sorrow, they gave up on their own cultural place so their children and grandchildren could become Sabras."

It was in Jerusalem that Behar began his current path - he began to study traditional Jewish texts, especially the Gemara, which led him to piyyutim and from there to his Mizrahiness. In Jerusalem, he also became politically aware as he came to recognize the link between social class and ethnic background.

Behar chose to study Arabic, recognizing that this is, he says, an expression of his attachment to his cultural roots. Within a few years, he began to teach in the Kedma School, established by a group of Mizrahi intellectuals who were at the forefront of social and cultural protests to redress the wrongs that the state has committed against the immigrants from the Arabic-speaking countries. "Gradually, the relationship between culture and social standing became clearer to me, and I realized why the majority of Mizrahim had been sent to the backwater periphery. I understood



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the paradox: to succeed, I had to hide my Mizrahi culture, while those who didn't succeed, at least didn't have to hide their own roots."

He has also brought the Palestinian-Arab conflict into his understandings. Living in Jerusalem, he says, "It is impossible to ignore the conflict. The connection Between my family's Arabness and the Arabness of the Palestinians, the connection between Mizrahi culture and Arab culture, the possible connections between conflict and oppression - all this has come together in my mind as cultural, economic and political repression, some of it rooted in the racist perception that Israel is a villa in the middle of a jungle, that the Jews came home to a barbaric place that had no culture and we are the representatives of Western enlightenment."

Like many of his friends and colleagues, Mizrahim in their 20s and 30s, he is an active member of "Tikkun" (Repair), an organization founded by Hebrew University philosopher Meir Buzaglo. "We have developed a language based on Jewish tradition, a return to Jewish values -although not the religious values that Limit our lives - reconnecting to the stories from 'back there,' including the stories from the Holocaust of European Jewry. We offer these in contrast to Zionism and Israeliness, and especially the Zionism of the settlers, which has thinned out, almost violently ,the richness of our lives and prevented us from maintaining a dialogue with our surroundings."

Prof. Haviva Padaya, a poet and researcher at Beersheba's Ben-Gurion University, says that Behar's identification with the Mizrahi "side" of his family is not surprising. "The third generation of immigrants is usually the generation that becomes aware and wakes up to the memories. This is happening in all sectors of Israeli society – the kibbutzniks, the Holocaust survivors, and the Mizrahim," she tells The Report in an extended telephone interview.

Focusing on Mizrahi culture, Padaya explains, is no longer considered merely an ethnic component of one's background; rather, it is a political, class, and social statement. "For many of the young people like Behar, there is a deep and immediate relationship between the need to take part in the struggle for the advancement of Mizrahim and the weaker sectors of society and the discovery of their Mizrahi identity," she explains. "The extent of the repression and oppression usually determines the strength of the memories, which become a crucial presence in the individual's identity."

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Over the past two years, Behar has published a collection of short stories, two books of poetry, and one full-length novel. One of his stories, "Ana Min al-Yahud" ("I am from the Jews"), written in Hebrew but with an Arabic title, was awarded first place in the prestigious story competition sponsored by the "Haaretz" daily newspaper in 2006. He has also been awarded the Prime Minister's Prize for young artists. He conducts numerous workshops on piyyutim. And as part of his activism, he participated in an initiative to revive the "Black Panthers" as a party running For municipal elections three years ago; the party did not win any seats. Behar says that he and his friends, who have benefited from education and status, have translated their achievements into social involvement among the weaker classes of society in the poorer neighborhoods and on the periphery. "This is what it means to be a proud Mizrahi," he concludes. "We don't whine and we don't apologize. Our Mizrahiness is filled with our traditions and our heritage, and we promote a social agenda based on justice and equality, in which Arabs are not our enemies but our partners, at least culturally. There is room for all, Ashkenazim, too, although they will no longer wear the mantle of the priesthood of Zionism."

## A never-ending struggle / Michal Levertov

Author, poet and Mizrahi activist Almog Behara says real shift in policy for Mizrahim has never happened. STRUGGLES TO carry out a Mizrahi discourse, as author, poet and Mizrahi activist Almog Behar remarks, and as the Biton Report emphasizes, have never really ceased to exist.

Best known are the violent uprising in Haifa's Wadi Salib in 1959; the radical protest movement of Jerusalem's Black Panthers in 1971-1972; the armed barricading of Rabbi Uzi Meshulam and his followers in Yehud in 1994, demanding to investigate the disappearance of Yemenite babies in Israeli hospitals during the country's early years; and the judicial and public-opinion-based campaign of the social justice organization, The Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow Coalition, led by the late Mizrahi feminist activist Vicky Shiran from the late 1990s and early 2000s.

In most cases, Behar, whose literary work is an in-depth investigation of Arab Lands Jewry's heritage and of his own Jewish-Arabic identity says, the establishment mitigated the protest's impact by co-opting moderate Mizrahi figures into the existing system while branding the more radical protesters as criminals, and by accepting some of the protesters' specific demands to a limited extent, without generating a substantial, extensive change.

Thus, for instance, the Black Panthers' struggle yielded some relevant welfare legislation and a governmental report that admitted there is discrimination in resource allocation. But a real shift in policy has never happened. Neither culturally – where, as the report shows, the Mizrahi voice has remained absent from the country's hegemonic discourse, nor economically, where, as Biton tells The Report, “a schoolchild in Yerocham (a southern development town) is allocated 1/6th of the budget allocated to a child in Israel's central areas.”

Behar also points out that even when the discourse was translated into the particular parliamentary representation that Shas, ultra-Orthodox party established in the early 1980s has formed, the infrastructural economic and cultural incapacitating of Mizrahim in Israel has continued.

“It's a repression to which both the left-wing and the right-wing governments have been responsible,” says Behar. “And Shas's policy” – despite having sat in most governments since its foundation – “was to settle for crumbs.”

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As for the use of the term “ethnic genie,” Behar says, “The particular choice of a term from the realm of fantasies to describe the Mizrahi discourse is language laundering. It implies that the Mizrahi claim is not a matter of facts, but of feelings. The ‘ethnic genie’ is, in this regard, an Ashkenazi demon.”

Behar is supportive of the Biton Report’s conclusions but he’s also aware of Naftali Bennett’s agenda of Jewish exclusivity. “It’s not that Bennett has really become responsive to the notion of multi-narratives, not to mention contradicting ones,” says Behar. “After all, Bennett’s slogan for the Biton endeavor was ‘One People, One Story.’” In the long run, Behar believes, “a mend for Mizrahi Jews will also turn out to be significant for the Arab public in Israel and for our relations with the Palestinians and the wider Arab world.”

## Interview with forward / Jake Marmer

### **To what extent is your poetic practice shaped by your Jewish background?**

ALMOG BEHAR: Judaism takes a central place in my life, thoughts, memory and words, and I cannot think of writing in a disconnected way to Judaism. In this sense, I can't understand the figure of speech "Jewish background," because it's not a background. Judaism writes us, and we write Judaism anew. Maybe this feeling is connected to the two Jewish languages I use: Hebrew and Arabic. The words themselves, and their connotations, are Jewish.

### **Do you have any poetic rituals and/or superstitions?**

A.B.: An interesting question. I write mostly into a notebook and then type it on the computer and then print it, show it to my wife and change it again. I don't show it to anyone else sometimes for years, or at least a few months.

### **Are you celebrating Passover this year? If so, how are your poetic sensibilities incorporated into the celebration?**

A.B.: I am celebrating Passover with my family. Before the holiday, I read the Haggadah in its Iraqi Jewish-Arabic translation, which gives new meaning to many of the parts of the Haggadah. I am also reading the Jewish Iraqi *piyutim* — liturgical poetry — of the holiday, in Hebrew and Arabic. I work at *kehilot sharot* (singing communities), where we learn before the holiday to sing different *piyutim* from different communities. This year, from Morocco. For me, writing poetry is connected very much to the *piyutim*, to the tradition of liturgical poetry and the idea that poetry belongs to a community, and to a singing community.

# Articles

## Umm Kulthum in the men's section

"To ensure that the song and the praise of the Lord, blessed be he, should be the essence of perfection – as it says in Psalms, 'Sing to him with the 10-stringed harp,' in other words, to use every bit of one's strength – I based the composition of most of my songs on the melodies of the Arabs, as they raise up their voices in songs that are more pleasant than those of others. This is indeed true, although I have encountered a handful of learned men who've complained about those who compose poems and praises to the Lord based on melodies that are not those of the Jewish people. But religious law is not on their side; what they say has no substance."

The above statement, written by Menachem de Lanzano in the 16th century, is cited by Rabbi Ovadia Yosef in his book of responsa, "Yechave Da'at" (loosely translated as "Revelation of Knowledge"): "And it is well known, that which was written by our great teacher Maimonides, that the joy of worshiping the Lord, blessed be he, and of loving the performance of his commandments, is a great form of worship ... And on this point, over the generations, the leading rabbis of the Sephardi communities relied on these words to compose songs and tunes with Arabic melodies, to sing to the Lord – at wedding and bar mitzvah and circumcision celebrations, and on Sabbaths and festivals – songs based on Arabic songs. And we hereby recommend it: As its says in the Psalms, 'On the willows within it, we hung our lyres.'" [In Hebrew, "willows" and "Arabs" are the same word: aravim].

This phenomenon, in which "Jewish saints" hear Ishmaelite melodies, has been associated since the 16th century with Rabbi Yisrael Najara, a native of Safed and the greatest cantor of his era. Najara was deeply familiar with both the tradition of Hebrew liturgical poems and the doctrine of the Eastern maqam (a kind of musical mode), and was closely acquainted with musical activity present in the society around him – whether in coffee houses or among the Sufi orders. Najara set his liturgical poems to Arab, Turkish and Spanish melodies, and they became extremely popular in every Jewish community. The combination of new and sacred Hebrew texts with beloved melodies drawn from the local surroundings has been accepted ever since by a majority of the paytanim (liturgical poets) living in the Jewish Orient.

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This trend was rejuvenated in the late 19th century with the invention of the gramophone, when recordings of Arabic music were also made, and in the early 20th century, with the advent of radio. Following the Ottoman era and the struggle against Western colonial rule, Cairo became the cultural center of the Arab world, and a new type of Egyptian music took shape and spread throughout it. Actually, as early as the 19th century, a movement emerged in which popular new Egyptian songs were refashioned into Hebrew liturgical poems – mainly by the paytanim of Aleppo. During the 20th century, a large percentage of that city's Jewish community moved to Jerusalem, where a Sephardi-Jerusalemite tradition emerged. It combined several traditions, mainly that of Aleppo, and included the custom of singing the supplications (the bakashot, a tradition practiced on the Sabbath in the winter, in the early morning, prior to services).

The paytan Moshe Habusha was born 47 years ago in Jerusalem, to a family that immigrated from Baghdad. His grandfather was the noted paytan Gurji Yair, a cantor in both Baghdad and Jerusalem. Thanks to Yair, Habusha absorbed the Iraqi tradition of cantorial chanting and of performing liturgical poems of praise and supplication. But from a young age, Habusha showed a preference for the synagogues where the Sephardi-Jerusalemite tradition dominated – in other words, Aleppo-style supplications and Egyptian music. Although over the years Habusha recorded tapes and discs in the Iraqi liturgical-poetic tradition – always scrupulous about using the proper accent – his reputation was built due to his fine command of the Aleppo tradition, and his recordings of sacred Hebrew versions of songs set to the music of the late great Egyptian performers Mohammed Abdel Wahab and Umm Kulthum.

"It's natural to compare Moshe Habusha with Abdel Wahab, whose songs Habusha has frequently performed," says Roni Ish-Ran, a cantor, composer, music researcher and founder of the Shaharit Ensemble. "But Abdel Wahab was primarily an incredible composer; this was of greater significance in his life than performing. So, one could say that Habusha as a performer is not inferior to Umm Kulthum in terms of his own creativity, level of vocal control or the variety of songs he performs."

Ish-Ran says that the central role played by Habusha in the Sephardi-Jerusalemite liturgical tradition can be attributed to his profound musical consciousness, superior level of performance and vast knowledge of Arabic music, in all its nuances. Habusha was part of the first generation that began to record cassettes in this genre about 25



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years ago, and he and other paytanim who were recording at the same time "became the spokesmen of this tradition to the outside world. They started with relatively easy things, whereas Habusha's later discs, including 'Yismah Moshe' [Moses Rejoiced], are entirely dedicated to the classics. The younger generation consumed this music more during the week, through the cassettes, than in the synagogue, because it was more accessible, and this built up the genre's central role among the public, and its centrality within the tradition. The young guys of today were raised on it. It swept the masses up into this style," Ish-Ran says.

### 'Hijacked' by Aleppo Jews

Moshe Habusha relates that when he was 10, he was "hijacked" by the Aleppo Jews to a synagogue near his home in Jerusalem's Bukharan quarter. In time he was awarded more solos and eventually received an offer to sing at Ades Synagogue in Nahlaot.

Habusha: "I was told that was where the professional singers were ... There was this oud player who heard me from outside [the building], and when he came in he asked which boy it was who had been singing. People pointed at me, and he said: That one is going to be great. I built up a relationship with the old men who were in charge of the singing – Salim Breska, Eliyahu Levi, Shlomo Levi and others. Salim and I became very friendly. When I turned 17, he told me I'd have the last laugh over everyone there. Only a few days later, Salim – who was in charge of [chanting the] bakashot – passed away and I replaced him."

Habusha first got to know the Egyptian songs in Hebrew. "When I was 14, I came home singing and my father said, 'What are you singing? Is that an Abdel Wahab song?' I was amazed that he knew it; he said he'd heard him in the coffee houses of Baghdad. So I went out looking for the cassettes."

Habusha says he learns every song from the Arabic original – not from the versions recorded in Hebrew: "I hear Abdel Wahab and I understand exactly what he wants to say, how he expresses it, where he injects the sadness or the happiness, and where he thrusts his tongue into his jaw to express discomfort."

Today Habusha appears frequently here and abroad, with his oud and violin, filling halls and auditoriums, and also serves as the "house cantor" for Rabbi Ovadia Yosef. "Over the years, I began to go to Rabbi Yosef's house, to perform at his festive occasions. I have now been with the rabbi for 29 years, as cantor on Rosh Hashanah

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and Yom Kippur, when all of the other cantors are flying off to America. It takes me over an hour to walk there."

After 25 years of producing recordings, Habusha has also influenced members of the younger generation. He says that some young Sephardi religious men are interested in his "heavy" music – the Aleppo supplications and the Egyptian songs – even though they study in Ashkenazi yeshivas. But still, he admits, there are Sephardi yeshiva students "who now sing only Hasidic music, and the Ashkenazim are gaining the upper hand. It is their government, their yeshivas. Everywhere they have the upper hand, but I am hoping [the popularity of our music] will grow. It's beginning at the university, where students are becoming interested in paytanut, even those who are not religious. The yeshiva students will learn from them, and we'll return to the good old days."

Habusha: "In my cantorial singing, and as a singer and oud and violin musician, I introduce authentic music of Abdel Wahab and Umm Kulthum and Daoud Hosni, the late Karaite Jew who wrote many songs translated into Hebrew and also composed songs for Umm Kulthum ... Most recently, we have introduced [the work of the late Egyptian singer] Abdel Halim Hafez at the synagogue. No musicians more recent than him are being brought into the prayers. In the synagogue, people love old music – it's easier to listen to."

Habusha prefers Egyptian music to any other kind, and has mastered the principles and history of maqam: "I am a big fan of Abdel Wahab and of [the late Egyptian composer] Zakaria Ahmed. If Ahmed would sing his song 'Al-Amal' 100 times – I would still will want to hear it for the 101st time. I would even want to hear him coughing. I have all his recordings, including those of the nationalist anti-Israel songs that Abdel Wahab sang. For instance, he has one song called 'Falastin,' and I introduce it into the prayers in the most holy places, on Shabbat. Music is one thing and the original lyrics are another, although I have also sung this song in Arabic."

Depending on his audience, he will sing entire songs in Arabic. If there was a demand, he would record the songs, too. "But Arabs no longer listen to these songs. We preserved them because of the synagogue."

Habusha is saddened by the fact that local interest of Arabic music is dwindling: "It's a shame that most of the Jewish audience that came from the Arab states has passed away. The few that remain are telling the young people that it's a shame they don't understand what used to be sung."

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Several months ago, Almasry Alyoum, the most widely distributed independent newspaper in Egypt, devoted an article to Moshe Habusha and his use of Egyptian music in synagogues. In his article, headlined "Israel from Within: The Arab-Jews Base Their prayers on the Melodies of Umm Kulthum, Abdel Wahab and Sheikh Zakaria Ahmed," translator and Hebrew scholar Mohammed Aboud writes that, when hearing Habusha sing, "it's as if he were born in the schools of Arabic music" because of his vocal flexibility and his ability to execute difficult melodies – skills that grant him the title of "the greatest liturgical cantor in Israel."

Aboud describes how dozens of Jews sit in the synagogue in Jerusalem, filled with a profound, almost drunken contentment induced by the music, as they sing Hebrew words to a Zakaria Ahmed melody, or move from one maqam to the next. And how they sing the words of a prayer while practically hearing the voice of "the star of the East," Umm Kulthum, at the same time. Only she is nowhere to be found: In her place Habusha strides in, singing one of her songs in Arabic, emotionally and at length, before shifting to the Hebrew words of the prayer.

According to Aboud, Ovadia Yosef is one of the most ardent proponents of Arabic music in Israel. He not only listens to it, in its religious Hebrew incarnations, but also listens to original works by Umm Kulthum, Farid al-Atrash and Mohammed Abdel Wahab, as he writes religious legal rulings. The rabbi's connection to Egyptian music, according to the scholar, was forged during the period he spent in Egypt between 1947 and 1950.

### **Synagogue coffee house**

On the subject of his own encounter with Egypt's Jews, Moshe Habusha recalls, "I was invited to Brooklyn, to the Egyptian-Jewish Ahava Ve Ahba congregation. When I performed, the audience acted as if they were sitting in coffee houses in Egypt. 'Ya Habusha,' they'd yell. 'Ya salaam!' – using the expressions they'd used for Umm Kulthum, and saying 'Nawart el-balad' ['You've lit up the land']."

Subsequently, Habusha visited Egypt, together with Egyptian-born violinist Felix Mizrahi: "We went to buy an oud and I started playing and singing in the shop, in Arabic, and the salesman couldn't believe I was Jewish. At the synagogue in Cairo, they called me up to recite the liturgical prayers, and as I was singing, all the drivers outside in the street came in. They started asking me questions about the songs of

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Abdel Wahab, testing me. When I started to sing a song that they'd asked me about from start to finish, they were convinced."

Habusha remembers that when he was in Cairo, he also heard a sheikh reciting the Koran, executing such a "wonderful modulation between maqams that I was simply transfixed. There is an order in the maqams, and a way of modulating between them, and nowadays people are no longer careful to maintain it. I live it. On recent nights during Ramadan, I was listening to Koran readings on the radio. I've heard Koran from a lot of sheikhs, and have even myself recorded chapters of it."

Habusha says he also often works with Palestinian-Israeli musicians. "Recently I was in a coffee house in Acre and ordered a nargileh, and an Arab said, 'Inte Habusha' ['You are Habusha']. He said he once appeared with me on the drums at a performance. He called up a few other musicians and told them to come over; they invited me to stay, sleep there and play with them. I don't know what politics is. I know that music connects Jews and Arabs. I have worked with all of the musicians in Nazareth and Acre, with [Palestinian musician] Simon Shaheen. I've performed in synagogues in Brooklyn, and I don't know what hatred is. I don't know what political tension is. I don't hear or believe the news. I know that I can achieve peace through the music.

"If I had a big party at [Syrian President Bashar] Assad's house, and brought in musicians from Aleppo, and we sang in Arabic – we'd make peace within minutes. You don't need [to involve] the whole Ashkenazi state that doesn't know how to speak their language. I want to say one thing to the Arab people: that the government of Israel does not represent us. We Mizrahim can make peace quickly; the government came from Europe. They have another language. We do not have hatred and we can live in peace, and the day will come when that happens. I have a plan to speak with Rabbi Yosef on this subject – about the fact that the Mizrahim can bring peace."

## Istanbul on the Hudson

A few months ago, Haaretz published an interesting article by Orhan Pamuk, who was then only a nominee for the Nobel Prize for Literature. The article – about which audiences Turkish authors are really targeting – had first appeared in The New York Times.

Istanbul is much closer to Jerusalem than New York, but hell would probably freeze over before any self-respecting Israeli newspaper would print an article by Pamuk that appeared "only" in an Istanbul-based newspaper. On the other hand, an article published in New York by Pamuk, or by anyone else for that matter, has excellent prospects of appearing here in Hebrew translation.

It thus seems that much of the dialogue between countries in the world's "periphery" – in this case, Turkey and Israel – which are in geographical and cultural proximity to one another, is conducted through the mediation of a world "center" – such as New York, the modern-day successor to ancient Rome, and Stockholm, capital of the Nobel Prizes.

Pamuk is keenly aware of the paradoxes between the center and the periphery (or, perhaps, a better word would be "diasporas"), specifically between Turkey and the West. He showcases them in his memoirs, "Istanbul." On the one hand, the literary image that has developed of Istanbul is, to a great extent, the work of foreigners – 19th-century French and English authors. From them the Nobel laureate has learned to see his city through the eyes of foreigners, to love the aesthetics of their perspective while rejecting the image they depict. A large part of his literary activity is devoted to rebuilding the literary Istanbul – both through their perspective and in flagrant opposition to it. On the other hand, even the melancholy native authors of Istanbul who preceded Pamuk, whom he admires and hopes to follow (including Yasar Kamal), were trapped between a desire to write (and live) as Westerners, and the need to be authentic and express their own voice, one that would be distinct from that of the French or English. (Had these writers not written in a different style, French and English readers would certainly not have been interested in reading their work.) As a result, nothing is more characteristic of Istanbul, nothing is more "authentic" in a Turkish author than a fixed westward gaze. That is why one finds so moving and so ironic Pamuk's declaration that, whenever he senses an absence of Western eyes, he becomes a Westerner gazing at himself.

Pamuk has frequently said that Turkey is the most Westernized country in the Orient and that Ataturk was the most Westernized of all Turks. That is why the inner clash that the writer experiences and his internal dialogue are invariably between Turkey and the West. And that is also why he will always compare Istanbul to itself and to Western cities, but never to other cities of the Orient. However, the saga of multicultural Istanbul – which in the 20th century surrendered to the pressures of a unifying, uni-cultural, national story that aspired to Westernization – is very similar to the saga of cities like Alexandria, Thessaloniki (Saloniki), Beirut and Jerusalem. Pamuk mourns the loss of his native city's multicultural past and its richly variegated multi-ethnic culture; he remembers, for example, a row of houses abandoned by Greeks, Armenians and Jews. Yet he himself is not an author whose main interests are immigrants and the transition from one language to another. The shift in the Turkish language from Arabic to Latin letters occurred before he was born.

### **'Author of place'**

Orhan Pamuk is an "author of place." Whereas some people migrated to, or were forced to leave, Istanbul, he is the city's "legal" offspring (even if the residents of the slum neighborhoods regarded him as a foreigner when he was growing up). He is a native of Istanbul who grew up in the secular and Westernized upper class. According to him, he and his fellow residents wanted to appear different from what they really were, and essentially did not understand themselves at all. He seized the opportunity to see Istanbul through a foreigner's eyes as a defense mechanism in the face of nationalistic and conformist pressures, but also as a means to experience pleasure. However, despite the foreignness he adopted from time to time, Istanbul remained, when all was said and done, a sort of family. That is why he wrote that the city's residents could not help but love Istanbul, although they had to decide which part of it they loved and to justify that choice.

Pamuk wrote his article on the real audience of Turkish authors for The New York Times, perhaps without knowing that there was a good chance that it would be translated into Hebrew. Who did he imagine would read it? For the most part Americans, of course, although he may have imagined that some of the readers would, like him, be from the "periphery." These are people whose native tongue is not English, but who read what is written in English to stay abreast of events in the

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"center." He turned to the two groups simultaneously, feeling a closeness to both of them. He noted that the fact that the target audience of writers, for the most part, do not include members of their own national group is a source of great concern to the so-called "representatives of non-Western nations," who are suspicious of creative writers whose perspective regarding history and nationalism is not consonant with that of their own nation.

There is a considerable element of truth in Pamuk's irreverent explanation of the suspicious attitude of such representatives; however, a more thorough explanation is needed. There are additional, substantive reasons for their concern. One is the fact that, as their international fame grows, the finest authors from countries in the world's "periphery" – and this is true for both Turkish and Israeli writers – often turn to foreign audiences and their culture, at the price of turning their own culture into something alien and superficial (or, sometimes, exotic and mystical). These authors deliberately target foreign readers. However, they do not address just any foreign reader: Instead, they focus on the "Western eyes" that Paruk has so strongly been drawn to – on the affluent world and on speakers of English, which has become a true lingua franca.

#### **An easier life**

We are rapidly approaching an era when, even in the original version in their native language, Third World authors, seeking success in the affluent world, will try to make life as easy as possible for their future translators and readers. Thus, we are repeatedly being denied the opportunity for an ongoing, internal dialogue between adjacent cultures, which are being shunted to the sidelines – such as Turkey (of both the present and past eras) and Israel.

The English language to which many of the finest of today's writers orient themselves is not universal; it has specific cultural and ideological messages. Nor is English literature universal: It only represents the powerful economic and military forces that are operating in today's world. Holding a discussion in English, even when the language has only symbolic importance, represents a major concession of one's unique historical identity to a language that seeks to swallow up everyone with imperial magnanimity. (It is truly a dreadful situation when an Israeli Jew and a Palestinian from the territories conduct peace talks in English, rather than alternating between Arabic and Hebrew.)

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Pamuk presents the simple fact that the readers of the most successful authors in the world do not reside in those authors' countries and must read their works through the mask of translation. However, this is not an alliance between peripheries, whether adjacent to or distant from one another. Rather, each periphery is seeking shelter under New York's wing or in its bosom.

Pamuk is quite easily accessible to Hebrew readers in Israel. Two of his books – his historical novel, "The White Fortress," and his classic and complex Istanbul-based "The Black Book" – have beautiful, legal Hebrew-language "offspring." Hopefully, now that he has been awarded the Nobel Prize, additional books by Pamuk will be translated into Hebrew.

Those who want to become familiar with the rest of Turkish literature – whether of the newer or older variety – which is so close to Israeli and Jewish culture (Jews occupy a respected place in Turkish literature), can do so only through the filter of other languages. Some comfort can be derived from the fact that Turkish literature translated into Hebrew is not in as dismal a situation as, for example, Afghani literature translated into that language: The only Afghan book with which Israeli readers are familiar is Khaled Hosseini's "The Kite Runner," which he wrote in America and in English.

I ask myself, "For whom am I writing this article?" For Pamuk, perhaps. However, he will have to read it in English, and not in either of our respective languages.



Out of the past, something new

**A REVIEW OF *TIMBISERT: A MOROCCAN BIRD***

Erez Biton ‘inserts the oral tradition of Moroccan Judeo-Arabic literature, transmitted by women and therefore a feminine tradition, and one that did not exist in Hebrew, into the poetry written in Israel’.

The publication of Erez Biton’s fourth book, *Timbisert: A Moroccan bird*, is a very moving event. Biton is not very prolific, and each poem that appeared in recent years in a newspaper or a literary magazine is like a hidden treasure. The new book collects most of his output over the two decades that have passed since his third volume, *Intercontinental bird*. His two first books, *Moroccan offering* (1976) and *The book of mint* (1979), marked a new path, one to which contemporary Hebrew poetry has responded to only partly in the meantime. [Biton’s oeuvre] has the potential to be a major focus for the Hebrew poetry being written now, and that will be written in the future, as well as a focal point for reading the Hebrew poetry of recent times.

Biton may be depicted in a number of ways, some of which are contradictory, and this is no accident. He rebelled against [ . . . ] new Hebrew poetry, and also returned to the tradition against which new Hebrew poetry itself rebelled. He is the founder of a new poetry tradition, as well as a descendant of and one who continues within existing traditions. Biton is the founder of the new Mizrahi\* poetry in Israel, with its unique mix of Hebrew and Arabic, restoring the continuum of memory via stories about his family and the figures of his parents as an alternative to the grand narrative that rejected them.

Biton conducts a dialogue with the oldest tradition in Hebrew poetry, *piyyut* (liturgical poetry), which persisted until the 20th Century, and dedicates one of his poems, ‘To speak at the moment of illumination’ to Rabbi David Buzaglo, the greatest Moroccan liturgical poet of modern times, a *payytan* (poet, composer and performer of *piyyut*). Biton speaks in the language of his family, Moroccan Judeo-Arabic, and in this way rejects the dichotomy between high culture and folklore. He inserts the oral tradition of Moroccan Judeo-Arabic literature, transmitted by women and therefore a feminine tradition, and one that did not exist in Hebrew, into the poetry being written in Israel. And he dialogues with the literature of his ancestral land, in literary Arabic, for example, dedicating the poem ‘A friend who became a brother’ to the memory of the Algerian poet Rabah Belamri.

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Biton is also in dialogue with the new Ashkenazi Hebrew tradition of poetry, that of Chaim Nachman Bialik, which he learned at school, and the personal-existential current, under whose influence he wrote his first poems. Inside this dialogue he has fashioned an alternative, one that does not discount various earlier Hebrew practices stemming from the Mizrahi experience. In this way Biton shaped the loveliest protest poetry within the new Hebrew poetry and in opposition to it. From the encounter of these traditions, a compelling intricacy emerges between the sacred and the profane, between Hebrew and other Jewish languages, between Judaism and Arabness, West and East, and between the periphery and Tel Aviv.

Parents hold center stage in [*Timbisert*] as in Biton's earlier works. They appear for the first time in a story of his childhood, 'My mother, her children did not live':

**MY MOTHER, HER CHILDREN DID NOT LIVE**

My mother,

her children did not live,

my mother.

The first

for her he didn't live, the first,

who was called David,

after her father.

The second

he didn't live for her, the second,

who was called Meir after Rabbi Meir the miracle maker,

and didn't receive the miracle of life.

The third

lived for her, the third

who was called *Yaish*

which means life

and that was me,

and I lived for her.

But

what kind of life did I live for you,

my mother.

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The movement [from the mother to the child-speaker] is especially surprising, as the speaker is the first child to live, and thus emotion is unleashed in the penultimate line, which switches from the third person used in most of the poem, to direct address. In another poem, Biton visits 'The Cemetery in Lod', enumerating those among whom he lived during his childhood in that city, and who now rest in their graves:

*Here is old Rabbi Yitzhak  
and his wife, the blind Aisha  
with whom I used to come to this very cemetery  
to pick figs and carobs... at sunset, when we returned with a full basket  
she generously gave me  
two or three figs  
and I was filled with joy at the day of pure pleasure . . . and here is Haroun Ben  
Hammo  
who fell in the Six Day War,  
and with whom we used to pray  
in the small synagogue  
named for Mother Rachel.  
Haroun  
would stand up on the New Year  
and read the sacrifice of Isaac in tears  
and didn't know  
he was reading his own sacrifice. [ . . . ]*

The poem is a sort of memorial, [ . . . ] Biton's attempt as in all his books is to tell the story of his childhood in Lod before he was blinded, and the story of his mother, the village of her birth and her life before [it was disrupted by the move to Israel].

Now we are confronted by dead of Lod, distant in time, and so it is highly suitable for the poem to end with an image of his parents, and then a glance at the poet himself:

*And here is my parents' cracked grave  
that each year we say we'll fix  
and we don't fix  
and rain falls now and seeps in  
my mother who couldn't bear the cold  
and always wore  
her sweater year round  
and here I'll be buried*

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*I want to be buried here  
among the living  
in the 1950s  
in the city of Lod.*

The Israeli past is filled with longing gone missing, but out of this the son creates something new.

Biton meets Buzaglo: a riff

COME, MOROCCO, TO THE CENTER OF THE ISRAELI STAGE

A sort of paternal relationship is established, in which the son, who has distanced himself from his father, suddenly sees, in a moment of enlightenment, their inevitable resemblance in the mirror.

The Hebrew of Dizengoff Street [in central Tel Aviv]; the Hebrew of the poor suburbs; Moroccan Judeo-Arabic; and the hybrid nature of 'Bach's short masses/ in Moroccan Hebrew', do not exhaust the types of language Erez Biton addresses in order to resolve the conflict in which he finds himself immersed, and there is at least one more type of Hebrew. If the Hebrew in peripheral areas populated by Mizrahi Jews is taken by most of the dominant culture for an inferior Hebrew of the streets, the broken Hebrew of immigrants, well, here comes a fifth kind of Hebrew: it is Mizrahi, [Hebrew for 'eastern', denoting Jews from the Arab world and adjacent, mostly Moslem-majority countries] with a continuous history, and includes the languages of the sages, prayer, midrash, law and *piyyut* [liturgical poetry]. It feels sure of itself.

One of the poems emblematic of this Hebrew is 'To speak at the moment of illumination', appearing in Biton's third book, *Intercontinental bird* in 1990. [ . . . ] It is one of Biton's most optimistic, in which the two great Moroccan Jewish poets of the 20th Century, two blind men, meet in an illuminating moment, in a great light. Biton's path in search of himself, to discover a new poetic identity, Israeli and modern, brought him back to the *paytan* [writer, composer and singer of *piyyut*] Rabbi David Buzaglo, and revealed to him that his own self could be found in Buzaglo: the two of them originating in the same 'honey dipper'. Such peacemaking and restful words are relatively rare for Biton, who mostly expresses the upsets of migration. [ . . . ]

Biton approaches Buzaglo and invites him (twice) to 'the center of the stage'. What stage? The platform of the newspaper's literary supplement? That of Café Roval on Dizengoff Street, recalled in other poems? The *bima* in the Moroccan synagogue? Biton seeks to return Buzaglo to the center of new Hebrew literary awareness while knowing that the invitation is twofold at least. It is not only Buzaglo that he wants to bring out of the corner of the obscure synagogue to the literary supplement. He would

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also like to propel himself from the back page of the literary review toward the lively synagogue stage.

[ . . . ]

What is special about this moment is that Biton does not want to skip the recent past, and consign it to oblivion, in favor of the classic period of Moroccan *piyyut* bathed in splendor. Instead, Biton seeks to conduct a dialogue with [with the recent past now . . .]. He calls attention to the continuity of *piyyut* in the 20th Century in his approach to Rabbi David Buzaglo, who lived most of his life in Morocco, and the final decade in Israel. He conducts a dialogue with the real, live figure of Buzaglo, who has to this day not been recognized as a classical [poet], and [has been associated] with a period that the academic imagination considers inferior.

In the face of the rejection of sacred tradition by the new Hebrew literature, and the rejection of diasporic Mizrahi traditions, in effect the rejection of *piyyut* writers who reached Israel, Biton invites Rabbi Buzaglo, calls attention to him within the new Hebrew literature, while also painting himself in Buzaglo's colors.

[ . . . ]

One of the repeated lines in this poem is 'following myself I reached you'. The search for self, the dominant Romantic ideal of the creative artist is something that the new Hebrew literature adopted from European tradition, and it is exactly what leads Biton to Buzaglo, inevitably. A sort of paternal relationship is established, in which the son, who has distanced himself from his father, suddenly sees, in a moment of enlightenment, their inevitable resemblance in the mirror.

[ . . . ]

Biton here reaches beyond the dichotomy through which Mizrahi art in Israel is often viewed, as between protest [ . . . ] and folklore (the 'documentation' of experience), a dichotomy that provides a meager sustenance for Mizrahi artists, somewhere between politicization and nostalgia, [ . . . ] without any opportunity to bridge the fracture between past and present.

Buzaglo's central position in the poem also allows for the use of a more complex language when discussing Moroccan Jewish or other Mizrahi cultural traditions. It is the tendency of critics to speak of the silencing of first generation immigrants, and to say that their descendants are completely cut off from their heritage, lacking the tools to become acquainted with it (and thus unable to return to the place where they could learn about it). But the figure of Rabbi David Buzaglo reminds us that this isn't

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necessarily so, and that to talk about silencing, without making an attempt to approach the tradition itself, and the way it continued to survive despite its repression, is an additional form of silencing. Buzaglo was not silent in Israel. As soon as he arrived in 1965, he began to travel among the development towns north and south [where Mizrahi immigrants were settled by the government], among various Moroccan communities, at a moment of rupture, in order to strengthen people who were wounded by the immigration process, and felt marginalized geographically and socially in Israel. During the decade that he lived in Israel, Buzaglo was a major factor in the revival of the Moroccan Jewish tradition of supplicatory poetry there. He wrote many poems in Israel. He did not keep silent and he was not silenced, and many of his poems live on in synagogues and communal events.

TO SPEAK AT THE MOMENT OF ILLUMINATION / Erez Biton

*A morning prayer for Rabbi David Buzaglo, a great Moroccan liturgical poet*

*1<sup>st</sup> version*

I'll allow myself to say  
something springs inside me when I hear your name  
I'll allow myself to say  
the nectar of my love overflows your doorstep  
come out of the corner  
to the center of the stage  
Rabbi David Buzaglo  
something inside me springs toward the echo of your notes  
following myself I reached you  
Rabbi David Buzaglo.

*2<sup>nd</sup> version*

Come out of the corner  
to the center of the stage  
Rabbi David Buzaglo  
in my memory of you  
my heart is *a tree planted besides streams of water\**  
following myself I reached you  
then found my face in yours  
and the esteem in all my dreams about you

**Take This Poem And Copy It – קח את השיר הזה והעתק אותו**

you and I out of the honey dipper

you I met at the moment of illumination.



## On Dan-Benaya Seri

Adam Shav el Beito (A Man Returns Home), by Dan-Benaya Seri

Keter Publishing, 233 pages, NIS 89

Dan-Benaya Seri's voice is lucid and unique, so much so that it is possible to say with certainty that, with respect to the combinations he creates in his writing, there is none like it in Hebrew literature today. His language is that of the Sages, nourished by rabbinical writing from the time of the Gemara, in homiletic and legal commentary, up until our own times. He does not, however, try to preserve this language in all its purity, and is not afraid to integrate the language of the present into it, as indeed has always been accepted in the language of the Sages.

This writing is sometimes, but incorrectly, called Agnonian in its style, and there have been critics who have called Seri "the Yemenite Agnon." This is because, for educated secular readers of Hebrew, out of all the deep founts of writing in this type of language -- the longest-lived of all the layers of Hebrew, the most flexible and perhaps the most beautiful -- Agnon is the only one who remains.

The plots of Seri's stories are extreme and often heart-wrenchingly cruel: A child hears stories of loss from his father at bedtime, while his mother is suffering from a serious illness (and this is a relatively tender moment). The tone in which the plots are set forth is moderate and weary with the weariness of generations, of someone who has already witnessed all the wonders of the world and writes about them as though commanded to do so -- as though he is patient, but also as though he has already managed to conceal his own wonder at the events.

Seri was born in Jerusalem in 1935. His first book, "Grandma Sultana's Salted Biscuits" (1980), was greeted warmly and became a significant surprise at the time, with respect to its language and its content. "A Man Return's Home" is Seri's sixth book, but the first to declare itself an autobiography of the writer, in which memories of his childhood are adapted into short stories.

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The stories themselves move without clear boundaries between truth and imagination and visit times and places that have been prominent in his works of fiction -- the Bukharan neighborhood of Jerusalem in the 1940s and 1950s, when the author was growing up. Even before cracking open this latest book, the reader is left to wonder how Seri's literary cruelty, which moves away from literary compassion toward parodic exaggeration, is to adapt to an autobiography in which the center of the work is occupied by his mother and the father who was killed when Seri was a child. What will Seri, who loves to tell about ugly people who suffer for most of their lives from terrible marriages, do when he turns to talking about his own family? What will he do with the grotesque characters and the plots that are unwilling to submit to the laws of cause and effect or morality?

At the beginning of his emotional preface to the volume, Seri writes that the book is a testimony to the neighborhood of his childhood, which stood on the poor margins of the wealthy Bukharan quarter: "In a place where God had not yet divided the waters from the mud... simple wooden doors that were never locked before those who came, like the tent of our Father Abraham." With these words, Seri promises readers that this time there will also be room in the book for beauty, childhood innocence and even nostalgia: "In our shady, ancient neighborhood, there was one wonder above all people. Not just any people and not weekday people, but people of the Sabbath, who even in their terrible poverty kept hidden in their hearts, in an ancient rite, one of the 36 measures of grace that their Creator had sent down into the world -- laughter."

However, readers realize quite quickly that these promises cannot be completely fulfilled, because, if in the book he tries "to rebuild, even if from its ruins, the old and enchanted home of the days of my childhood... to listen, as then, to the Sabbath hymns that Father had concealed in Mother's flesh," it is clear that the home, with its enchantment, is learned from within its ruins.

In Seri's retrospective look at his family, and also when he tries to replicate his naive point of view as a child, the harsh forces of reality take up considerable space, and even love does not prevent him from making scornful and ironic observations. His father is described in the book as "a man of small stature. Modest, submissive, sometimes to the point of being self-deprecating," a description that fits many of

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Seri's characters. And he tells about this "wretched," skinny father, "whom Mother always tried to feed many pitas and orange marmalade ... a sort of lost pair of trousers for which mother was always looking for suspenders, and warning him to walk about the house only in thick socks so that, heaven forefend, the mice would not make the mistake of looking for the cheese between his toes."

For his part, the father tells the child that the verses of "A Woman of Valor" from the Book of Proverbs, which are traditionally recited in praise of the wife before the Sabbath eve meal, constitute "the only hymn that God invented for the consolation of ugly women. He wasn't intending to ridicule Mother. Mother was always a beautiful woman. Maybe a little fat."

Childhood, the realm of enchantment and innocence, is also the moment of rupture. For Seri, that moment came four months before his bar mitzvah. "On the morning of the eve of Passover, 1948, it was as though the Tablets of the Law were broken on me again," he writes. "On that same clear, pure morning, free of any terror, my father, as the times would have it, set out to open his grocery shop and purvey from it the products for the holiday to his customers. However, his kosher path was truncated by the bullet of an Arab sniper, which hit him in the back and slew him on the altar of Elijah the blacksmith's shop."

The boy became a man, but not thanks to the joyous bar mitzvah of which he had dreamt: "If there is a moment in a boy's life in which he is torn from his childhood and becomes a part of the crude world of adults, that was the moment when I brought to my mouth the first slice of bread after that news."

@CROSS:An Ashkenazi's egg

@TEXT:However, even the harsh experience of orphanhood is something to which Seri cannot relate without a bit of humor. For example, during a visit to his aunt and her family, he meets the neighbor's daughter, "a girl who was white, amazingly Ashkenazi," who becomes his first love. He relates that on that night he couldn't sleep and "perhaps for the first time since Father was killed, I did not cry over him. Perhaps in my heart I even rejoiced in his death, because like the Yemenite children, no doubt

the Ashkenazi girls love orphans.”

This girl, whom the narrator plans will be his wife, becomes a model for relations with other Ashkenazim, that are worthy of affection. For the most part, in Seri's stories, Ashkenazi identity, like Bukharan identity, symbolizes wealth and arrogance for the narrator. Thus, of someone who turns her nose up, it is said that “she thinks that God made her from an Ashkenazi's egg,” and in his second book, “Birds of the Shade” (Keter, 1987), when one of the female characters describes pregnant mizrahi woman during the early stages of pregnancy, she says: “That's how they are, lazy. Spoiled, and sometimes, God help us, worse than Ashkenazi women. They just eat.” Hakham Duek, another of Seri's characters considers Ashkenazi women to be not really Jewish. Blond gentiles who come to the neighborhood as tourists to disturb the tranquility there are called Ashkenazim and a son who runs away with an Ashkenazi girl and marries her symbolizes breakage and a fall.

The resentment and fear of Ashkenazim, the glue that unites the various characters, are sometimes replaced by envy, such as when a boy turns over in his mind the possibility that his father was Ashkenazi, or when a family rejoices because the daughter is even more successful at an Ashkenazi school than her Ashkenazi classmates.

In retrospect, Seri discovers that the power to tell stories was bequeathed to him by his father. On the Sabbath, his father would become different, changing his clothes and sitting down to tell his children -- on “the stone steps of the gate to the old house” -- a story for the Sabbath, “always the same story, always the same tale. He never omitted a word, he never added a letter, as though in his hands they were fragments of the Tablets of the Law...the story of an orphaned shepherd boy in Yemen who one day wandered beyond the fields with his sheep, and a pack of wolves came and attacked his flock and devoured him as well.” This death returned every Sabbath until one time the author's elder brother had the audacity to ask their father to have mercy on the shepherd, and the father replied: “Wolves, too, have an appetite of their own.”

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“From the distance of years and tears,” Seri confides to his readers, “I know that it is possible that it was this tale that engendered in me, many years later, the sickly power to put together, like my father, tales and stories from screams and tears.”

Only after his father’s death did Seri discover that he had not fully known him and that his father had written stories in secret and discarded them. His mother collected them in a crate after her husband's death, thinking they were letters. “God, how my mother suspected nothing all those years,” Seri writes. “My father indeed did not write letters. Ever. He wrote only stories. A tortured writer in the tattered trousers of a Yemenite olive seller. Sitting and writing, sitting and writing. That’s how he was always, with despondent eyes, a torn look. Swallowing the letters in his wrath.”

## Identity and Gender in the Poetry of Amira Hess

### I. Preface "As if the umbilical cord of your soul had been severed"

Amira Hess was born in 1943 in Baghdad, and emigrated with her family in 1951 from Iraq to the Yokneam transit camp in Israel. Next, her family moved to Mazmil/Kiryat Yovel, in Jerusalem. She completed her studies at the Seligsberg Vocational School, and worked as a secretary in the Government Press Office of the Foreign Ministry's and for a brief period as a Hebrew teacher in East Jerusalem. Hess began publishing poetry relatively late in life; her first book was published when she was forty-one years old. She currently resides in Jerusalem, in Beit Hakerem. One of the formative experiences of Hess's poetry is immigration, the moment she testifies to in her poem that begins "Now darkness": "**I was stolen, baby in a soft *abaya*, into the jaws of some kind of time**" (*Veyareah*, 14).<sup>2</sup> The move is described in these lines as a theft that takes the poet from the situation of tenderness, in which as a baby she is swathed in Arab garb, to a different time, which is depicted through the frightening image of jaws, a time when "**darkness/digs darkness**" and "**the gardens and houses are locked**" (*ibid.*).

Amira Hess has published six volumes of poetry so far: *Veyareah Notef Shigaon* (And the Moon is Dripping Madness) (1984, Am Oved), *Shnei Susim Al Kav Haor* (Two Horses by the Light Line) (1987, Am Oved); *Bole'a Hainformatzia* (The Information Eater) (1993, Helicon), *Yovel* (Jubilee) (1998, Carmel), *Ayn Isha Mamash Beyisrael* (There is no Real Woman in Israel) (2003, Keter), and *Habulemia Shel haneshama* (The Bulimia of the Soul) (2007, Helicon). Despite the fact that she produced prolific and fascinating writing for almost thirty years, won various awards, and published her books with major publishing houses, no comprehensive academic study has addressed the fundamental issues in the poetry Amira Hess, and she has been mentioned only in references in broad-based studies about others, press interviews, and reviews in the daily press and journals, which appeared mainly with the publication of her books.

Amira Hess was part of the flowering of Israeli women's poetry, which took place in the nineteen eighties and tended toward the ambiguity and enigma prevalent in women's poetry since Yona Wallach. When Hess embarked on her poetic path, Yona Wallach was a central figure in the world of poetry. The circle of Jerusalem women's poets of which Amira Hess was a part in the early nineteen eighties related to Wallach as their primary poetic model. Like Yona Wallach, Amira Hess breaks sentence structure and involves different levels of language in her poetry, but it seems that many more layers of the Hebrew language are accessible to her than had

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<sup>2</sup> Hereinafter, all quotations from Amira Hess's poems will be accompanied by the first word in the title of the book from which they are taken and the page number. Line breaks will be indicated by a single slash, while a double slash will indicate an empty line.

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been to Wallach, in addition to a mixture of high and low language, the insertion of foreign vocabulary, mainly concepts from psychology and mysticism, and the use of slang and "Englishisms." Hess's language is also open to the language of the sages, which does not surrender to the laws of modern syntax, to Aramaic (one of the poems in her second book is written almost entirely in Aramaic), and to Arabic, German, English, and Yiddish words. Psychology and mysticism serve her as reserves of myth, and goddesses such as Astarte, the subconscious as an entity unto itself, Maria (the Virgin and Magdalene) and Jesus, figures of Kabbalistic angels, modern cartoon characters, and even the editor of her poetry book can all appear in her poems.

Amira Hess, like Yona Wallach, is greatly concerned with sexuality, positioning it not as polar, but rather as a range, opening the door to androgyny, movement, and combinations of different degrees of femininity and masculinity, to the extent of dismantling conventional wisdom on femininity and masculinity. This concern is particularly evident in her book *Bole'a Hainformatzia* (The Information Eater), where an abundance of the erotic is integrated with images of violence, but it is also expressed in her other books. Androgynous concepts are also articulated through various mystical concepts, as well as at the linguistic level, where there is a mixture between masculine and feminine forms. In addition, Amira Hess's poetry, like that of Wallach, exhibits a tension between sanity and insanity, with insanity often the preferred pole of the poetry (as we can see in the title of her first book, *Veyareah Notef Shigaon* (And the Moon is Dripping Madness)). Embracing madness could, of course, be connected to Romantic notions of poetry as stemming from insanity, and from the widespread attribution of madness both in the past and in modern psychiatry to femininity, an attribution that Amira Hess tends to embrace and empower rather than reject, as part of the adoption of a range of stereotypes that were considered negative.

The nineteen eighties, in which Amira Hess began to publish her poetry, were the years that followed the emergence of the foundational poetic voice of Erez Bitton, in which the debate on the category of "Mizrahi poetry" developed. At the same time, alongside veteran Mizrahi poets who continued to publish, including Ratzon Halevi, Aharon Almog, Moshe Sartal, Yoav Hayek, and Shlomo Avayou, Ronny Someck and Maya Bejerano were becoming established as major poets. At the beginning of the nineteen eighties, Amnon Shamosh, a veteran story teller, published a book of poetry called *Diwan Sefaradi* (Spanish Diwan), which use the classic Sephardic forms of Hebrew poetry. The collection *Echad Bishvil Shelosha Veshelosha Beshvil Echad* (One for Three and Three for One), which included works by Peretz-Dror Banai, Eli Bachar, and Ronny Someck, was also published at the beginning of the decade. Throughout

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the nineteen eighties, the voices of many new Mizrahi poets were heard alongside Amira Hess, and among them was a large proportion of women and Jerusalemites: Bracha Serri, Shelly Elkayam, Yossi Alfi, Yosef Ozer, Miri Ben-Simhon, Benjamin Shvili, Shimon Shloush, Sami Shalom Chetrit, and Moise (Moshe) Ben-Harosh. In 1983, the Mizrahi literary journal *Apyrion* was established by poet Erez Bitton. Amira Hess published many of her poems in it over the years. Her poems were also published in later journals associated with Mizrahi poetry, including *Dimui*, founded by Hava Pinhas Cohen in Jerusalem in the late eighties (and identified with religious poetry in particular), and *Hakivun Mizrah*, established in 1998 by Itzchak Gormezano-Goren. In addition, her poems were published in two of the most important anthologies of Mizrahi poetry, *Keys to the Garden* by Ammiel Alcalay, published in 1996 in English (including an interview with her),<sup>3</sup> and in *Mea Shanim, Mea Yotzrim* (One Hundred Years, One Hundred Writers), published in Hebrew by Sami Shalom Chetrit 1999.<sup>4</sup> One of her stories was published in the anthology *Mizrah Maarav* (East West), edited by Amnon Shamosh in honor of the occasion of Israel's Jubilee.<sup>5</sup> Several of Hess's poems appeared in the bilingual English and Hebrew anthology of Hebrew feminist poetry, *The Defiant Muse*, edited by Shirley Kaufman, Galit Hasan-Rokem, and Tamar S. Hess.<sup>6</sup>

Her immigration from Iraq to Israel comprised, according to Hess, a fall in status from affluence to poverty, and apparently also involved a transition from a stable family situation to family and generational crisis, manifested in various ways in her attitude toward her parents. Immigration also meant switching between languages. Amira Hess speaks fluent Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic, but did not have time to be significantly educated in Iraq in literary Arabic. She has written all of her poetry in Hebrew, with the exception of one poem in Aramaic and one she wrote in recent years, but has not yet been published, in Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic. Amira Hess talks about Hebrew and her entry into the language in terms of assimilation, devotion, and complete immersion in the language by choice: "When a person immigrates from one culture to another, as I did when I left Iraq in 1951, it's as if the umbilical cord of his soul has been severed," she says, but despite this soul-wrenching experience, she chose total assimilation into Hebrew, and explains: "When I came here, I started to speak and write Hebrew happily, I wanted

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<sup>3</sup> Ammiel Alcalay (Ed.), *Keys to the Garden: New Israeli Writings*. (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1996)

<sup>4</sup> Sami Shalom Chetrit (Ed.), *Mea Shanim, Mea Yotzrim*. (One Hundred Years, One Hundred Writers: A Collection of Hebrew Works in the East in the Twentieth Century) Vol. 3: Poetry (Tel Aviv: Bimat Kedem Lesifrut, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Amnon Shamosh (Ed.), *Mizrah Maarav: Chamishim Sofrim Bochrin Sipur*. (East West: Fifty Authors Chose a Story) (Tel Aviv: Aviv, 1998), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Shirley Kaufman, Galit Hasan-Rokem, and Tamar S. Hess (Eds.), *The Defiant Muse - Hebrew Feminist Poems from Antiquity to the Present: a Bilingual Anthology* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1999).



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to assimilate ... maybe writing in Hebrew was my way of truly entering into a new culture."<sup>7</sup>

Arabic remained in Hess's life as a family place, a language she often speaks with her siblings, a musical place, and she taught Hebrew for a time in an Arab school in Jerusalem.

Hess's position on the Hebrew language is unique: older writers of Iraqi origin, such as Sami Michael and Shimon Ballas, who were from the beginning educated as writers in literary Arabic, continued to write in their own language in Israel and only in the sixties (Balass<sup>8</sup>) and seventies (Michael<sup>9</sup>), in light of the changes in reading habits of Iraqis in Israel and due to the increasing gap between their focus of interest and that of the Palestinians, they moved between the languages in an instrumental manner, and it can still be said, at least in part, that they write "Arabic in Hebrew." Other writers, like Yitzchak Bar-Moshe, Samir Naqqash and Ibrahim Ovadia, wrote in Arabic in Israel until their dying days. Writers younger than Hess, such as Ronny Someck, did not make a choice, because their early education took place in Israel and in Hebrew. Amira Hess's statement regarding her introduction to Hebrew is unique, as is the fact that she has written two poems in languages other than Hebrew: Aramaic and Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic. In the extensive use of Arabic within Hebrew she was preceded by Erez Bitton and Avot Yeshurun.

Hess's total dedication to Hebrew, on the other hand, and, on the other, the difficult feelings of the severing of the "umbilical cord of the soul," coexist in Hess's poetry and in their way prevent her from perceiving herself as a person with a whole identity, both culturally (and as part of a community), and personally—in terms of character. Yet, from the ruins of culture, community, family, and the individual, Hess's poetry engages in a kind of renewed alternative construction, by virtue of her success in writing poetry from the crisis point itself, and as such it is extraordinarily powerful. Although this duality can be explained by the biography of the artist and the history of the immigration of Iraqi Jews to Israel, a duality at once existential/mystical and psychological is also apparent, and this is how Hess often sees herself: "I am a person who is full of absurdities and paradoxes, full of contrasts. Within me are a terrible existential pain and joy and thanksgiving to the universe together."<sup>10</sup>

Amira Hess, who has often objected to being defined as a "feminist poet" or a "Mizrahi poet" has done so, it seems, for two reasons. The first was a reaction to conservative criticism, which over the years had sought to label Mizrahi artists and women in these

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<sup>7</sup> Reuven Snir, *Arviut, Yahadut, Tzionut*. Arabness, Jewishness, Zionism: A Struggle of Identities in the Literature of Iraqi Jews (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2005), 406-7.

<sup>8</sup> His first Hebrew book, *Hamaabara* (The Transit Camp), was published by Am Oved in 1964.

<sup>9</sup> His first Hebrew book, *Shavim Veshavim Yoter* (All Men are Equal but Some are More), was published in 1974 by Bustan.

<sup>10</sup> Nurit Manna, from an interview with Amira Hess on January 30, 1987 in *Hithadshut*, a Journal of Kurdistan Jews in Israel. Vol. 6, 148.

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frameworks in order to reduce them and the options for reading them, and her demand not to be labeled in this way. Thus, for example, in an interview after the release of her second book, when asked about the reception of her first book, she said: "I was afraid then, too, of the label 'Mizrahi poet.' Today I don't carry this label— I'm a poet, period."<sup>11</sup> The fear of the label, and the sense of having escaped—"Today I don't carry this label" is repeated along the path of the publication of Hess's books, since critics often return to the same Mizrahiness that she thought she had escaped. The second, much more radical reason that Hess rejects these definitions has to do with her rejection of any definition of philosophical-mystical reasons that object to splits within reality, such as separation between men/women, East/West, even of the non-recognition of the ability of words to define reality, and the perception that perfection consists of assembling the very things that seem separate. Thus, for example, she stated regarding her definition of herself as a woman that "when you are only male or only female you do not feel whole."<sup>12</sup> This androgenic approach is in line with Amira Hess's refusal to accept many other definitions, such as the unequivocal definition of herself as a Jew, and sometimes with her vision of the definition of herself as lacking. Regarding her definition as Mizrahi, Hess has provided a temporary reason for her transformation since her arrival in Israel, stating in an interview: "I can not describe myself today as only a native of Baghdad alone, or as only Mizrahi. I can not see myself in that way and perhaps I would not want to."<sup>13</sup>

In this context, it is important to notice that the terms "feminine literature/women/feminist" and "Mizrahi literature" are used in two opposite directions. On one hand, they exist within the critical discourse that intends to point out their uniqueness and their years-long exclusion, to see in them an independent productive space, to examine them from within the internal dynasties that they contain, and to draw attention to the challenge they pose to hegemonic literature. In this context, these definitions are perceived as empowering, as they sometimes are established as sustainable over time and sometimes judged to be temporary, as subversive temporary positions against the hegemony that excludes Mizrahi and feminine literature. On the other hand, these definitions are used precisely to exclude and control Mizrahi and feminine literature by pointing to their significant difference, which requires further examination, another language of criticism (which is usually more sociological than literary), and makes them marginal compared to the central "department" of literature, which is just literature, with no secondary definitions. The second use of these concepts is the one that has been more

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ahuva Muallem and Lital Levy, "Eich Ata Shlemut?" (How are you Perfection?) A Conversation with the Poet Amira Hess. *Azut Metzah*. Jerusalem, 1998, 69.

<sup>13</sup> Edna Evron, "Megeirot Halev" (Drawers of the Heart) (An Interview with Amira Hess)" (Hebrew). *Proza 99* (1987), 82-3.

common in recent times, and perhaps is also so at present, and it has created a situation in which Mizrahi artists, both men and women, wish to be excluded from these definitions, which confine them to a kind of marginal ghetto within Israeli Hebrew literature. This creates a situation in which, paradoxically, those who want to "return" the Mizrahi artists to the label of "Mizrahi Literature" imposed on them in the past by conservative criticism are critical writers, who seek to resist this conservative criticism.

## **II. "I am Amira, daughter of Salima, daughter of Haim Yitzchak Yehuda": East and West: Death of the Father and Death of the Mother**

On the back cover of her first book, Amira Hess chose to describe herself as descended from a male and female Jewish literary dynasty: "Amira Hess (Bar-Haim Ainzi-Barazani) is a member of a family of kabbalists and scribes, including poet and scholar Haroun Barazani and the female Hebrew poet Osnat of the seventeenth century."<sup>14</sup> Inside the book, too, she announces that she was born **"in the womb of holy scribes from Barazan"** (Veyareah, 39), an image that creates a gender reversal and gives scribes, usually men, a womb, from which the poet was born. With these words she creates for herself an esteemed literary spiritual lineage and male and female ancestral merit.

This dynasty, whose inclusion here is a statement of cultural strength and continuity,<sup>15</sup> continues inside the book, which is dedicated to "My father of blessed memory and my family, may they be blessed with long life." The father, who is present throughout the book and throughout Hess's poetry, appears at the beginning of the first poem, which opens with a family tree: **"I am Amira / daughter of Salima / daughter of Haim Yitzchak Yehuda / son of Yehezkel, peace be upon him"** (7). This opening reads like a dedication or a sanctification of prophecy, but is unique in its gender reversal in that it sanctifies a woman; prophetesses in the Bible are actually not attributed to their parents: Deborah the Prophetess is called by her husband's name: **"Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel"** (Judges 4:4), and Miriam the prophetess is presented through her brother: **"Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron"** (Exodus 15:20). In her dedication, Amira Hess is named first of all as her

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<sup>14</sup> Bar-Haim is the Hebraized name of Hess's parents. Ainzi is her father's original name, and her mother's family name is Barazani (connecting her to the sage Haroun and the poetess Osnat). "Taking back" all of those names and positioning them alongside her married name, the man's name, in the Israeli context of changing names and deleting them, is a powerful act of ethnic and gender protest. The poet Osnat headed a yeshiva in Kurdistan. In an interview, Hess spoke about the connection with the sage Barazani and Osnat: "My mother's grandfather's grandfather, the sage Aharon Barazani, was a great and well known kabbalist. There are stories about him that say there was simply a halo of light around his head, so holy was he when immersed in Zohar and Kabbalah, and there are stories about him that say he made it rain in a drought year, and there are wonderful stories about Osnat, called 'Osnat the teacher' and 'Osnat the prophetess' (see Edna Evron, "Megeirot Halev," 81-85).

<sup>15</sup> This includes the continuity of the use of the Hebrew language. The main language of the Jews of Iraq was Arabic, and of Kurdish Jews Kurdish and Aramaic.

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mother's daughter, as is common in a religious context, for example when praying for good health. Names are central in Judaism from the Bible to Jewish philosophy and Kabbalah, as well as in traditional everyday life.<sup>16</sup> In this succession of names, Hess creates the sense of a kind of desperate attempt to keep alive those who are not alive, or at least to keep their names alive, and through their names to keep alive the first name mentioned, "Amira." In contrast to the importance of the name here, in a later poem Hess declares: "**I changed my name within my consciousness**" (*Bole'a* 14), but even here, the name is extremely important, because changing it can apparently make a decisive difference in person.

After constructing the family dynasty of names in the opening poem, Hess goes on to mix family figures and fantastic, frightening dream figures:

**What if I grow Samsons' hair / in my sleep Judah? / And I  
arise because my father roared / and shook thresholds and  
dances / the vitality of the virgins / and me Maria / the way a  
group of Jesuits would go? / what if I arise / retarded child /  
his face different / and he spreads the rot of his soul / treading  
gangrene to his head? / perhaps I will arise as a mermaid, /  
daughter of coral, biting water like nails / capering on the  
streams / to their end? ... and I, Astarte, rule... see, see I'm  
Gub-Gub the pig / daughter of Coco the pig, I have not gone  
so far as to go crazy yet ... and no one hears a modest voice  
calling *gevalt* / a pig is calling, Balaam's donkey is me /  
Perhaps a Midianite daughter/ Perhaps a dancing parrot /  
classic hopscotch** (*Veyareah*, 7-9).

This carnival of figures, which contains a combination of humor and horror, weakness and strength (particularly prominent in Samson and his hair and Maria mother of Jesus, both of which are images that combine strength and vulnerability), blurs the image of Amira Hess herself, and the image of her parents, and combines them with images of animals and divine figures until they become mythological figures, "**my mother's owlish visage / weeping over the ruins / my father's face like a cherub – the Lord—grace him not**" (*Veyareah*, 9, trans.

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<sup>16</sup> G-d is called "the Name," his nation is named for him, and when requesting help from G-d people ask, "**G-d, do it for the sake of your name,**" and plead that their name not be erased from the Book of Life, and that it remain after their deaths. Likewise, people mention the names of their ancestors before G-d in times of distress, and ask Him to rely on "the merits of ancestors." They say "**remember, G-d, the love of our ancestors - Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants,**" and often mention the mothers (especially in times of illness), prophets and kings, and the merits of rabbinic authorities, Talmudic sages, and holy men of all generations. Names are inherited, and before people were called by family names, they were called by the names of their fathers. The Bible is full of dynasties, mainly male, and despite its inability to name the dynasties from Adam to the present, the Scriptures try to provide a complete lineage from Adam and his sons to David and his descendants, the kings of Judah.

Ammiel Alcalay).

Amira Hess turns to her father and speaks to him, makes a request of him, and swears to him:

**How I feared your grave, my father, / blocks of Great  
Supplication/ Give me the vitality // Not to be afraid / all that  
is truth / written and signed under oath. // I bow down before  
you Isaac,<sup>17</sup> who will laugh / to tell in your name of blessed  
memory / to whisper unsaid secrets... I will not violate my  
mission / to you – in the saintly heights** (ibid., 8, trans. Ammiel  
Alcalay).

Poetry is a mission "to tell in your name," an oath to express in words the hidden truth. It is bowing itself down before the Father, the fear and request not to be afraid, it is at once vitality and the request for vitality and its originary site is the grave of the poet's father, a father who becomes divine, "sitting on the hillside of the holy."

But very soon it becomes clear that turning to the father is not satisfactory, because poetry can not always fulfill the promises she makes to herself, and Hess apologizes to her readers, "**and I beg the forgiveness of the reader / If my face wore a different portrait / than the sights / I was sent to tell about**" (*Veyareah*, 8). Poetry is a mission, but there can be a gap in it between the sights the poet is sent to tell about and the multiple portraits her face wears in her poetry. More importantly, despite the vow she makes to her father to tell in his name, the poet is aware that readers expect other sights, and feel that she is on a mission on their behalf, and so she moves between betraying them and betraying her father, between loyalty to her father and her readers. Her apology is thus simultaneously ironic, appearing in the framework of prophetic sanctification and self-aggrandizement (although she is also a "retarded child") (*Veyareah*, 7), and mocks the reader, who expects self-deprecation and apology, while it expresses the poet's basic position of fear of betrayal.

Multiple faces become the basic identity position of Amira Hess, and are woven into the poems in her later books: "**And I have 12 faces and more / and no face has been found for me**" (*Bole'a*, 23), "**to paint my face ten times and more**"? (*Yovel*, 25). Hess's request, "and I beg the forgiveness of the reader," is charged in gender terms as a woman's request of a man, in which a woman is apologizing, somewhat ironically, to a man for changing. In masculine poetry, woman has been depicted as constantly changing, always in a basic mode of deceit against man, for example by Yehuda Amichai: "It is morning now and behold, you are Leah. Last night you

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<sup>17</sup> The name Isaac (Yitzchak) in Hebrew means "He will laugh."

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were Rachel. / It was not Laban who deceived me in the dark of night. / It will always be so. This is the way of the world: / Now you are Leah, and last night you were Rachel."<sup>18</sup> In Hess's poem, while she apologizes to the man, she does so from a position of strength, with a mission to tell, as one who is sanctifying herself for the mission.

Alongside attachment to and identification with the family genealogy, the opening of Hess's first poem and the vow to tell in her father's name also emphasizes her painful disengagement from the family: "**No. but my father lost his tongue / only his eye, only his eye was spinning in a painful path** (*Veyareah*, 8)... **There was a time when I would have said: / I won't defile myself with this contemptible East / I'll relegate my ancestral home to oblivion**" (*Veyareah*. 8-9 trans. Ammiel Alcalay). The loss of the father's language, Arabic, becomes, in the poem that begins by his grave, a metonym of his death, the East, the parents home, which has become contemptible, the memory of their house, are positioned together as things that must be given up, perhaps due to the failure of the parents, expressed in the father's muteness.

Opposite the East immediately stands the West, as though they are a couple one part of which cannot be discussed without the other, and Amira Hess declares: "**And I said / the West, for example, has no caress to its spirit/ well-done within, singed to the shrouds. / East and West I'll set out in a strong beat**" (*ibid.*, 9 trans. Ammiel Alcalay). While the West is not contemptible, and has not failed, it is positioned here as negative, since it has no "caress to its spirit," perhaps reflecting the stereotype of the West as cold as opposed to the East as warm. But this characterization can also be understood as stemming from the fact that the East is the poet's family home, a place of caressing spirit, while the West is to blame for her parents' failure. From her vow to disconnect from the East and her home, the poet moves to a dance that takes place under her direction in which the East remains a partner to the West (again, it can not stand alone).

From statements that Amira Hess made in the journal *Hakivun Mizrah* several years ago, we can perhaps understand the uprooting, even if partial, of Amira Hess from her parents and the East. In speaking of the "Baghdadi Girl" that she was, she says: "Girl from the East. Her internal image is darkness and loss and fear and depression and a trail of darkness ... I live as though I have no homeland, although I have no other place."<sup>19</sup> In her first book of poetry *Yareah Noref Shigaon (And the Moon is Dripping Madness)*, Hess explains: "**I am a alone/ without a country / A swallow without a prince**" (10), but this feeling of detachment is resolved by a man walking beside her, and it turns out he is a Jew, "**and he digs toward me at the entrance to an**

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<sup>18</sup> Yehuda Amichai, *Esrin Merubaim Chadashim, Meruba T"U* (Twenty New Quatrains, Quatrain Fifteen) in *Poems 1948-1962*. (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1969), 264.

<sup>19</sup> Amira Hess, "Ei Mi Hidlik Or Tamid Bechalomi" (Who Turned on an Eternal Light in My Dream) *Hakivun Mizrah* 9 (2004), 30-31.

**ancient city / in the alleyways of a dark world / plowing and insisting / my Trafalgar / Soho Square Central**" (ibid., 11). The detachment in the ancient city, which is a dark world of alleyways, and could be Baghdad or Jerusalem, but is now London, is resolved in the sexual relationship, which may have been alluded to already through the digging, and the dimness, and by means of the sexual act the poet's face becomes her mother's face: "**And we make love there into the night ... And I glow – my mother's face- suddenly- whores/ another passion**" (ibid.). Eventually, the tie to the family cannot be loosened, but it creates geographical inversions: "**and I said with the power of love, / the power of the quest for love / A baby calls for a bosom. I am a daughter of Baghdad/ / willing to swear / I was born in London**" (ibid.).

Despite the poet's resemblance to her mother, whose face glows from within her own, there is also a fear of her mother, of the similarity between them, of the knowledge that she will be like her in the future: "**afraid of your face, mother / you outflanked me hip and thigh / and breasts**" (p. 11). Here Hess takes the biblical phrase from the story of Samson, avenger of the Philistines: "**and he struck them hip and thigh with a great blow**" (Judges 15:8), which became a common expression, and revives it by connecting it with breasts and putting it in modern military language, speaking of "outflanking." The reader who goes back to the Bible discovers that the poet has become a Philistine, who suffers from the anger of her mother—Samson. Later in the book, in a poem that opens "I redeemed myself in shekels," the poet says: "**This is the fractured time, / When my eye sees the world pursuit by pursuit - / mother is not shouting now, / because her face is wrinkled / and a woman at the time of wrinkles is frightening**" (Yareah, 17). Here the mother is "not shouting now;" she is immersed in her old age, and now her face frightens the poet with the old age reflected in it. In another poem, the mother seems confused to the daughter who asks her and tries to guide her in opening the poem: "**Oh my mother where to and a garden of people / is not the shadow of a palm**" (ibid., p. 26). Palm trees symbolize Iraq, their homeland, and the daughter corrects the mother, who anticipates finding here "shadows of palm," while the only thing before her is a "garden of people." The poem ends with an image of severe and sexual violence, directed at the mother, "**that when the time comes for the poles to open / beat, beat the drum / the time of the poles will come / the whole height of Ararat will dig into my mother's cunt**" (ibid., p. 27). In her book *Ayn Isha Mamash Beisrael* (There is no Real Woman in Israel), a supposed reconciliation with her mother takes place, which also contains a reconciliation with the East, and the book, published after the death of the poet's mother, is dedicated to her memory. On its cover appears a painting of her mother by Hess, and in one of the poems, which bears the name of the mother, "Salima," Amira Hess writes:

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Now I will not whisper the name Salima quietly with  
hesitation, / as though she was the far East. / Now there is  
communion between us / a whispering internal identity / My  
heart that protected Israel / will now protect mother / our  
faces will not be erased from our existence / which is not the  
dust of passing thoughts / rising for the duration / and even  
then when the roads ran / aground / even then you were my  
empress (No Real Woman, 10).

The daughter is mourning over years of whispering, of quiet hesitation, years in which she was asked to favor the national, "Israel," over the personal, home and the mother, years of distancing herself from the East, the cradle of her origin, until it became the "far East." The promise that the face will not be deleted appears precisely after the death of her mother, precisely in the now that follows her death the communion and inner identity between mother and daughter exist. The daughter feels that the death of the mother is ending ninety years of exile, and hears a foreign woman who says to her "**righteous, righteous, / She sang solo at her death / and at night when her soul found light / she sang softly to the angels**" (p. 13).

Although it is possible to try to see here a seemingly continual process between the first book and the fifth, in terms of a change in the way she relates to her parents and to the East, we can not talk about this process as a linear one. Amira Hess's poetry is essentially "anti-linear." She does not surrender to the "order" that the poem should contain one move, one message, and succeeds from the outset in including all the contradictions within it, all those **other "portrait[s] than the sights I was sent to tell about,"** for which she apologized to her readers and of which she is also proud. The denial of the East and its vitality, a rejection of her parents and a deep connection with them, ideas of merging and feminine power are all found in a kind of inner vortex. According to Amira Hess, the source of the flow of her work is: "a character that isn't made to adapt to this reality. And from this difficulty stems what is sometimes not even clear to my knowledge. I am a person who does not know, trying to be precise about the accuracy or inaccuracy of understanding, within the complexity that sometimes seems horrifyingly very simple." In her poetry and in what she says about it, there is tension between not-knowing and knowing, between a lack of definition and an attempt to define, and these coexist simultaneously, repeatedly giving rise to one another all the time.

The first poem in the first book, which begins "I am Amira, daughter of Salima," ends with a return in a dream both to the father and to Baghdad, the city of birth previously replaced



by another: "there in the dream / If you return walking in the paths of the forbidden garden ... in the garden, in all the yards, / a distant journey to the rooftops in Baghdad. / I also made a trip to the park / where the molten horse stands / its rider galloped to the graves" (Yareah, 13). The journey of return is distant now, perhaps only possible in a dream, and can never succeed in being a full return to the Baghdad before the baby was stolen "into the jaws of some kind of time" (p. 14), Baghdad before the sense of "darkness/digs darkness" and "the gardens and houses are locked" (ibid.).

### III. Afterword

Gershon Shaked, at the end of his book *Wave after Wave in Hebrew Narrative Fiction* (1985), in which he discussed the political implications of Hebrew literature in the nineteen seventies and eighties, stated that most of the works of this period suffered from the disease of nostalgia, which was motivated by a yearning for the "good and beautiful Land of Israel" and the desire to return to Zionist pioneering values. He recognized as standing outside the nostalgic atmosphere the new writing of the "absorption model" in which, according to him, a change had taken place in "writers on both ends of the ethnic spectrum"<sup>20</sup>: "This model is generally perceived as a positive model, until the last few years came along and changed our way of looking at it ... in the past, the experience did not reach consciousness, because those being absorbed did not yet have a 'consciousness;' they were mute and lacked language, and could not give expression to their experiences."<sup>21</sup> There is something very infuriating in Shaked's Hegelian presentation, despite the fact that some of what he said has been said by Mizrahi writers. What is the muteness to which he refers if not Amira Hess's "My father lost his tongue" (Yareah, 8)? What is the lack of expression of immigrant experiences if not the words of Ronit Matalon: "the condition of the immigrant is the suspension of the tongue, a twilight zone between the two languages - old and new. He has a mother tongue, but it is suspended because of the situation of immigration. Someone who has no language cannot tell. He will always need someone, the owner of the language, to tell him for him."<sup>22</sup>

What is infuriating about the way in which Shaked phrases his statement is the absolute connection he makes between what he sees and what exists, and thus also the connection between what he does not see and what is not there. If Shimon Ballas and Sammy Michael wrote in Arabic in the nineteen fifties, this does not constitute an expression of existing consciousness,

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<sup>20</sup> Gershon Shaked 1985, *Wave after Wave in Hebrew Narrative Fiction* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Keter. p.177.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. The two models that Shaked uses to illustrate the new way of relating to the "absorption model" are Sami Michael's *Shavim Veshavim Yoter* (All Men are Equal but Some are More) and Aharon Appelfeld's *Mikvat Haor* (The Scorch of Light).

<sup>22</sup> Ronit Matalon, *Kro Uchtov* (Read and Write) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2001), 47.

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because Arabic is unable to penetrate the consciousness of the Ashkenazi Jewish literary critic of the time. If a "marginal" poet who never approached the canon wrote in Hebrew on Mizrahi experience in the nineteen fifties or sixties, this is not an expression of consciousness because he is not worth reading.<sup>23</sup> The absorption model "was generally viewed positively as a model" by those who did not experience that absorption,<sup>24</sup> and so his way of seeing is what changed.<sup>25</sup> What changed for those who did experience absorption was the ability to bring their words to the hegemonic center, the legitimacy to speak of it in a different way.

I have not checked the influence of this belated legitimacy on writing about Mizrahiness, on the fact that only after it did Amira Hess begin to publish poetry. Did her economic situation and daily troubles not allow it before then? Did she not have a room of her own? Did her father's death have an impact on her turning to poetry as a major factor in her life? Was there no one before this who expressed interest in her poems and asked to publish them? According to Hess, she began to write as a young child, but she links the first publication of her poetry to a creative writing workshop in which she participated: "I wrote for the sake of writing. A book seemed like a fantasy to me, not one of the things I aimed for, not in my wildest dreams. I went to poetry workshops. Asher Reich greatly admired my style and layers of language. I thank God that I met him."<sup>26</sup> According to Hess, after the workshop, Reich encouraged her to submit her poems for publication.

It is also possible to read the late publication of Amira Hess's poetry through the difficulty of writing Mizrahi poetry in the central Hebrew poetic language in recent generations. Haviva Pedaya, in her essay, "The Time Has Come to Say a Different 'I' in Hebrew Poetry," she explores events that took place in the field of poetry in Israel since the breakthrough of Natan Zach, both in his poetry and in his poetic manifestos, and offers a new poetic manifesto. According to her, a Western, but supposedly universal "I," stands at the center of Zach's poetic

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<sup>23</sup> See, for example the lament of Rabbi Shalom Rada'ai, "Fire will burn within me when my heart remembers being in Yemen," based on the ninth of Av lament (attributed by various sources to Avraham Ibn Ezra and Judah Halevi), "Fire will burn within me when my heart remembers leaving Egypt," which was written close to the time of his immigration to Israel, and lamented the state of Yemenite immigrants in transit camps in Israel: "**Every day and night at Torah times when I was in Yemen / only the Torah of the body that is upon me will float coming to Zion**" (Rada'ai, 36), and: "**Schools for teachers of the faith of Moses will teach when I am in Yemen / the children rejoiced that there was no school when I came to Zion**" (37).

<sup>24</sup> Gershon Shaked himself was born Gerhard Mandel. He immigrated to Israel at age ten without his parents, when Austria was annexed by Nazi Germany in 1939, in the framework of the Youth Aliyah, and was educated at the boarding school in Pardess Hannah. His experiences and those of his generation and of his parents as immigrants who were torn from their places and suffered through absorption were expressed in his later book *Mehagrim* (Immigrants) (Hebrew). Was he writing the things he says here regarding the consciousness of those being absorbed as immigrants about himself and his parents and the time it would take him to tell his story? (These words were written before his novel *Immigrants*).

<sup>25</sup> Perhaps it is possible to say that precisely for him, the process through which "experience (finally) reaches consciousness" took place after he had no consciousness.

<sup>26</sup> Naomi Gal, *Hakol Kara Levad: Hameshoreret Amira Hess* (Everything Happened By Itself: The Poet Amira Hess). Hitchadshut: A Journal of Kurdistan Jews in Israel. Vol. 6 (1990), 147.

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approach, which became the hegemonic approach in Hebrew poetry. This "I" is "temporary, passing, trapping itself with fragments of thoughts, associations, and impressions,"<sup>27</sup> an "I" that made the detailed and narrative

presentation of the 'I' unnecessary for anyone who writes within what is taken for granted in writing in the legitimate code. Such a person writes without any special conflicts of social identity and politics. Naturally, a person who does not experience immigration and foreignness or acute suppression is also not obsessively troubled with the stuttering involved in presenting himself.<sup>28</sup>

The dominant poetic position that followed Zach thus rejected, in the name of liberation from the collective and recruited Altermanian voice that preceded it, all the "poetics engaged deeply and intensively with immigration and identity, poetics occupied with religious and symbolic content, and poetics occupied with the deep structures of its culture,"<sup>29</sup> and labeled them "ethnic", "religious," or "peripheral." This cultural situation made possible the acceptance of Mizrahi poets into the center of Hebrew poetry only when they adopted the "legitimate 'I' of Hebrew poetry" as a tormented existential "I" or an ironic, broken down "I," from within which they attested to the fragments of the East inside them. Even Erez Bitton, who marks the fault line of Mizrahi poetry,<sup>30</sup> testified that he initially wanted to write "existential, universal poems by a very enthusiastic young Israeli,"<sup>31</sup> and only later, close to the time he was working on the end of his first book, did he begin to "write poems that touch the conflict, the roots, the experience, the duality ... precisely in the advanced stages of the book, the miracle of writing about Moroccan poems was created."<sup>32</sup>

This situation could possibly explain Amira Hess's marginality in Hebrew poetry to date. Since her poetry is not written according to the style of Zach (although an "I" is present in it, but it is a different "I"), she was not received into the mainstream of poetry (although the Zachian style has become less dominant since then), and because her poetry did not shape itself as Mizrahi protest poetry, and was ambivalent toward Mizrahiness, it was not positioned

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<sup>27</sup> Haviva Pedaya, *Higiya Hazman Lomar "Ani" Acheret Bashira Haivrit* (The Time Has Come to Say a Different 'I' in Hebrew Poetry) Part One (Hebrew). Haaretz Literary Supplement. May 2 2006,14.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> While this is true, his poetry did not, at least immediately, have a clear line of successors that recognized him as a founding father. His successors were Sami Shalom Chetrit, Shelley Elkaim at certain stages, Moise Ben Haroush, Vikki Shiran, Mati Shemoelof, Mizrahi poets who began writing with him or after him took different paths, for example, Ronny Someck, Maya Bejarano, Bracha Serri, and also Amira Hess. But perhaps we can speak of him as someone who enabled certain voices, even if they did not see in him a founding father.

<sup>31</sup> Haviva Pedaya, *Higiya Hazman Lomar "Ani" Acheret Bashira Haivrit*, 212.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

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centrally in Mizrahi poetry (and the same thing may be said about the place of her poetry in relation to feminine poetry and religious poetry). But marginality has an advantage, because it allows for writing that does not succumb to hegemonic structures, and attempts to create alternative structures that defeat the dominant dichotomous gazes. Amira Hess does this on the one hand by excavating the infrastructural mythological models of the culture, and on the other by adopting the existing stereotypes of Israeli culture while changing them. Thanks to Amira Hess's courage in including in her poetry everything, good and bad, from self-love to self-hatred, from the beautiful to the ugly, her poetry is unique in dealing with the heavy baggage of self-hatred, both in the Mizrahi context and in the context of gender and in the way it facilitates the renewed observation of new identities, simultaneously constructing them and them breaking down.

Amira Hess's poetry has been read until now in a way that reduced it to individual properties. For example, Avi Lipsker stated that "this is poetry whose main concern is mystical content".<sup>33</sup> Gabriella Moscati-Steindler related to Hess's poetry as personal and biographical.<sup>34</sup> Edna Evron argued that Hess's poetry was "religious and wild, sexual, and liberated."<sup>35</sup> This kind of reduction is related to the ways in which feminine Mizrahi poetry is read, as personal and minor (and autobiographical) on the one hand, and mystical and path-breaking (and irrational), on the other, as particular and ethnic, and as full of sexuality and madness. Amira Hess was read through the accepted dichotomies between West and East, between tradition and modernity, and thus the following was written about her first book: "Amira Hess is a discovery—a unique discovery in poetry that attempts to form a bridge between the primal world of yesterday, a world of family tradition, and the new world, modern and demanding."<sup>36</sup>

When criticism attempted to pinpoint the quality of Hess's writing, it was mainly in an effort to present it as a universal quality (i.e., Western and male) and a particular one (i.e., Mizrahi or feminine). From this attempt, it became apparent that most reviews were unable not to reiterate time and again its Mizrahiness, with the addition of the explanation that the poetry was constantly moving away from ethnic subjects, and thus the first book "indeed" was Mizrahi, but the second was "already" not Mizrahi in comparison with the first, and so on regarding the third, fourth, and fifth.<sup>37</sup> Thus, Miriam Eitan praises Amira Hess's second book for having: "No

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<sup>33</sup> Nurit Manna, from an interview with Amira Hess on January 30, 1987 in *Hithadshut*, a Journal of Kurdistan Jews in Israel. Vol. 6, p.148.

<sup>34</sup> See Gabriella Moscati-Steindler, "Amira Hess: Hashira Keautobiografia" (Amira Hess: Poetry as Autobiography) *Studies in Hebrew Language and Literature*, Strasbourg Congress. Jerusalem: Brit Ivrit Olamit, 1998), 129-133.

<sup>35</sup> See Edna Evron, "Lehiyot Meshoreret Ze Siyuti (Being a Poetess is Nightmarish) Yediot Achronot, April 2, 1993.

<sup>36</sup> Moshe Ben-Shaul, "Lagaat Baksamim" (Touching the Magic), Maariv. January 11, 1985.

<sup>37</sup> It appears that this kind of attitude is similar to the attitude toward other Mizrahi writers and other women writers whom critics praise for having left "feminine" subjects in favor of "broader" ones.

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more self-pity and feelings of discrimination ... No more hopeless primal rage ... No more moon dripping madness."<sup>38</sup>

When the critics intended to indicate a lack of poetic quality in Hess's poetry, they stressed its Mizrahi side. According to Netta Naaman, Amira Hess's writing is "black writing," realized in "angry poetry ... sometimes the anger is ethnic ... the ethnic threat appears as a popular decoration and not impartial."<sup>39</sup> Amnon Navot compares Hess to "our professional Mizrahi writers,"<sup>40</sup> unlike whom she has "authentic Mizrahiness"<sup>41</sup> that is not sterile and meaningless, claiming "[o]nly time will tell if become Amira Hess will become another grotesque character who turns the delicacies of the East and material on the edge of the ethnic gap into an axe to grind."<sup>42</sup> What Navot points out as Amira Hess's virtue is related to her "authenticity," to her comparison to Mizrahi poets who are below her. The East is for him immediately connected with food, the "delicacies of the East," and strange expressions such as "the material on the edge of the ethnic gap," and, of course, an "axe to grind," not a real present, not a memory of the past, not the desire for a different future.

Amira Hess learned from the Orientalists about the Orient where she was born and raised, and this is part of the reason for her self-hatred, for her view of herself as a "black hole," but she also took control of the images for herself, and reconstructed her own identity and place in the world, after she passed on what she learned through a thousand and one sights. She is a Mizrahi who sees herself through the eyes of the West, but these are eyes that have been dismantled and reassembled, and she will look at the West through the eyes of the East, the East as a Western stereotype and the East of her life. See the words of Orhan Pamuk, the Turkish writer: "Whenever I sense a lack of Western eyes, I become my own Westerner."<sup>43</sup>

The writing of Amira Hess does not surrender to the rationalistic prohibition of ambivalence, and manages to tell things and their opposites, both in good faith, and thus she joins together the worst things about the East, which have really been internalized by the Mizrahi, and the excitement of the moment of explicating the discovery of the oud and the kamanga music of the Baghdadis. This writing does not succumb to liberal politics (which conceal the stereotypes that still exist), is not satisfied with merely protesting (which limits the possibilities of the Mizrahi) or with a mere intellectual glance, even if it is critical and deconstructing (like that of

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<sup>38</sup> Miriam Eitan, "Sus Hanefesh" (Soul Horse) (review of Amira Hess's second book). *Iton* 77, 88-89. (1987),14.

<sup>39</sup> Netta Naaman, *Shira Hamevakeshet Lehiyot Eruma Upshuta* (Poetry that Wants to be Naked and Simple) (review of Amira Hess's first book) (Hebrew). *Iton* 77 64-65 (1985),11.

<sup>40</sup> Amir Navot, *Amira Bat Salima Utikvat Hashir* (Amira Daughter of Salima and the Hope of the Poem) (review of Amira Hess's first book). *Achshav* 50. (1985), 349.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Orhan Pamuk, *Istanbul: Memories and the City*. Trans. Maureen Freely (New York: Knopf, 2005), 288.

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Edward Said), but finds itself engaged in a non-stop excavation of the individual and the collective, the conscious and the mythological, and is eventually able to be liberating. Amira Hess's poetry, in my opinion, allows the reader to advance in the process of "unlearning" that Edward Said mentions at the end of his introduction to *Orientalism*.<sup>44</sup> This is a process of "reversed learning" in which the reader learns to forget the same hegemonic dichotomies embedded in culture, since "real forgetting," like a computer that has been completely deleted, is not possible (even in the world of computers), and ideas, even if forgotten, spawn other ideas, and these spawn still other ideas and connections that cannot be unraveled or found. Thus, the only real option is to confuse, to keep the same words (and not to cause them to be forgotten, to float them on the surface so they cannot be blurred), but to give them new meanings, sometimes inverted, sometimes combined, as Amira Hess does with the concepts of masculinity and femininity and East and West. This is the real process of reversed learning.

Studying Amira Hess's poetry will reveal the possibilities it establishes for women's writing and Mizrahi writing, Mizrahi and feminine voices, which are not frequently heard in the cultural field. It is important that Amira Hess's poetic voice serve as a tree of life and sow new fruits in the realm of poetry, which will comprise a poetic mode in which to express oneself, with which to wrangle, to grow with, to make a parody of, to move toward its opposite, to cast out, to complete. It is also important that her voice and the reversed learning reflected in her poetry be expressed in the critical field of literature and culture, written in theory, placed in historical and sociological contexts, and read into the history of Hebrew literature.

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<sup>44</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage, 1979), 28.

# **BETWEEN EAST AND WEST: DISPUTES OVER MODERNISATIONS OF HEBREW CULTURE IN THE WORKS OF SHAUL ABDALLAH YOSEF AND ARIEL BENSION**

Yuval Evri & Almog Behar

## **Introduction**

### *Jewish modernisation and imperial logic*

A number of new political principles appeared on the international scene at the turn of the twentieth century, the age of “new Imperialism” as Hannah Arendt called it, or the “age of empire,” to use the term coined by Eric Hobsbawm. One of the most notable characteristics of this period was the symbiotic combination of the spread of capital, trade, and people within and between imperial spatial structures, together with accompanying processes of political and cultural modernisation (Fieldhouse 1966; Said 1993; Arendt 2010). This organising principle can also be found in the social transformations that took place during this period throughout the Jewish world, which were moulded to a large degree under imperialist patronage.

Our claim is founded on the hypothesis that there were many routes to Jewish modernisation, which developed within different imperial settings (British, Russian, Habsburg, and Ottoman). This approach allows us, in analysing Jewish modernisation processes, to expand our perspective beyond the accepted focus on specific *spaces* (Europe, Palestine/Land of Israel), and instead to emphasise *movement* (of people, knowledge, goods, and capital) in real or symbolic space as being a key driver for these processes of transformation.<sup>1</sup> Thus for example, the migration of Jewish populations and capital from Europe to Palestine/ Land of Israel, or from the Russian Empire to America, is bound up with cultural and political Jewish transformations, as well as with symbolic movement between centres (Land of Israel/Spain/Europe) and periods (Talmudic/exile/medieval/modern).

The renewal of Hebrew and Jewish culture in the second half of the nineteenth century was not unconnected to the global trends of the time. In the research literature, there is a tendency to tie the Jewish Haskalah and Hebrew renaissance to Europe and Western culture. These studies have mainly described the processes of Europeanisation and Westernisation of Jewish culture as being the focal points of Jewish transformation (Shavit and Reinhartz 2010). The founding assumption is that

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Jewish modernisation began in Europe, and from there it spread via the movement of capital, knowledge, and people. The transformation in the Jewish world is largely measured, in the official historiography, as it relates to a monolithic and homogenous view of modernisation.

We take a different approach, and instead move the spotlight to a number of centres in which modern Jewish and Hebrew culture were created, focusing on different political and cultural contexts, mainly outside Europe.<sup>ii</sup> Looking at cultural and social reformations in different spatial locations allows us to examine different models of Jewish modernisation which are not in thrall to the European prism or to the worldview that informs it. Thus for example, Arabic-speaking parts of the Ottoman Empire were home to processes of Jewish modernisation and revival of Hebrew language and culture which were inspired by the revival of Arabic language and culture (the *Nahda*, the Arab renaissance, النهضة) and by the Ottoman political and cultural reformation (the *Tanzimat*). Arab-Jewish intellectuals active in Palestine/Land of Israel at the turn of the twentieth century were involved in both Arab and Hebrew renaissance movements (*Nahda* and *Haskalah*), and were also involved to varying degrees in the cultural and political Ottomanisation process that spread throughout that period (Levy 2007; 2013).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, a centre of Jewish modernisation developed in Southeast Asia, spurred by the eastward movement of Jews and by a reconnection to Judeo-Arabic language and culture. The foundations for this pathway were laid by the development of Baghdadi-Jewish trade network in ports and trade cities across India, China, and Burma, under the aegis of the British Empire. Although this modernisation process had some connection to the British imperial political and economic interests of the time, it would appear to represent a dramatically different model from the one developing concurrently in Europe. These different modernist projects underway in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Europe were not unrelated to one another, but were formed within a dense array of relations, influences, and conflicts.

Thus we seek to describe a complex matrix of the formation of the Jewish enlightenment and the renaissance of Hebrew culture, which contains multiple pathways and multiple loci, and which is based on the transfer of knowledge and ideas between and among Europe, the Ottoman Empire, North Africa,<sup>iii</sup> and Southeast Asia. We will explore this process within the different imperial contexts that enabled



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these connections, and within the cultural and political logics that shaped the models of Jewish modernisation in different locations.

### *Shaul Abdallah Yosef and Ariel Bension*

In our discussion we will examine the research and literary work of Shaul Abdallah Yosef (1849–1906) and Ariel Bension (1880–1933), which embody different political and cultural options for the modernisation of Jewish and Hebrew culture. Driven by a real and symbolic return to the “East,” these models stand in contrast to the mainstream trends in nineteenth-century Jewish modern discourse, as found in the work of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (science of Judaism) movement, and Hebrew *Haskalah* literature in Europe and in Palestine/Land of Israel.

We will examine the unique place of these intellectuals as upholders of traditions, both protecting them and reinventing them: Shaul Abdallah Yosef in relation to Hebrew liturgical poetry as it developed during the Golden Age in Spain; and Ariel Bension in relation to the Sephardic kabbalist tradition. Both identified their traditions as being endangered, yet in response they proposed not only models of preservation, but also modernist models of cultural renewal based on those traditions.

In the first section we will explore the works of Shaul Abdallah Yosef, against a broader context of the connections between Hebrew poetry in Jewish communities in the Arab world, and the *Haskalah* (Jewish enlightenment) and *Nahda* (Arab renaissance) movements at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Alongside this, we will examine his discussions and disputes—via Hebrew periodicals, and in direct correspondence—with *Wissenschaft des Judentums* scholars, about interpretative authority, and about the importance of the link between Arabic poetry and Hebrew poetry in translating and interpreting medieval Hebrew poetry.

In the second section we will examine the works of Ariel Bension in the broader context of the debate about the essence of Hebrew literature, looking at his ideas that this literature might be entirely cast as Eastern. We will explore his attempts to use his grounding in Midrashic and Kabbalistic literature to create a new, Eastern genre of modern Hebrew literature. In addition, we will examine Bension’s model for Jewish Easternism in a Pan-Asiatic context, via his dialogue with the Indian-Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941).

Both Abdallah Yosef and Bension were poets, writers and researchers, and in each of these fields they sought to create alternatives to the European and Western

“orientation” of the *Haskalah*, the Wissenschaft movement, and the new Hebrew literature—via discourse with these products of the West, and by developing their own alternative expression of the Sephardic tradition, which emphasised its Hebrew-Arabic symbiosis and Judeo-Muslim connections.

## **Chapter 1: Hebrew-Arabic poetry and Jewish modernisation in the project of Shaul Abdallah Yosef**

Neo-classical trends in Arabic literature at the turn of the twentieth century, influenced by the growth of the *Nahda* movement, together with the *Haskalah* and the interest it invoked in Golden Age non-liturgical Hebrew poetry, provide the backdrop to the attempts of Shaul Abdallah Yosef in Hong Kong, and of Dahud Semah in Iraq and Palestine/Land of Israel, to renew the tradition of Sephardic non-liturgical poetry. The interpretative work of Abdallah Yosef, which proposed an alternative to the interpretation of members of the Wissenschaft des Judentums, was formed within the context of imperialist expansion, and subsequently the development of Arab and Hebrew nationalism and the confrontation between them.

The encounter with modernity—and the ensuing physical and cultural dislocation endured—spurred many Jewish intellectuals to attempt to document and preserve Jewish culture, and to present it in new contexts. Indeed, the very moment of communal and cultural crisis is also a moment of compilation and of renewed interpretation, addressing traditions or languages which may be in danger of disappearing. Thus, for example, it seems no coincidence that Abdallah Yosef, having emigrated from Baghdad to Hong Kong, wrote new commentaries on the poems of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi (1075–1141) and Rabbi Moses ibn Ezra (1055–1140). Now in exile, in a new land and with a new language, he worked hard to safeguard his Arab-Jewish heritage and to bequeath it to future Jewish culture.

The works of the Jewish enlightenment movement in Europe also featured a return to medieval Spain/Andalusia, with the cultural legacy of the Jews of Spain offering a rich soil from which to develop the renewal of Jewish culture and identity. The Wissenschaft des Judentums, which sought to reinstate Judaism as a cultural and historical entity by means of research and the scientific approach, constituted one of the main centres for this renewed interest in the Sephardic legacy. Yet one of the movement’s prominent elements was its attempt to justify the affiliation of Jews to European culture and society (Schorsch 1989; Mendes-Flor 2010); at the heart of the

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work of the Wissenschaft intellectuals was the premise that Jewish modernisation processes were ineluctably bound to Western culture and to Europe (Mendes-Flor 2010; Funkenstein 1991; Raz-Karkotzkin 1998; Schorsch 1989; Brann and Sutcliffe 2004).

The interest shown by researchers and intellectuals in Sephardic heritage deepened and spread among the second generation of the Wissenschaft movement, who emphasised the national and Hebrew dimensions of this body of work.<sup>iv</sup> Particular significance was accorded to the Hebrew works of the Jewish poets and philosophers of the period and to the national aspects they contained. Anthologies and new revised editions were published of the Jewish works of medieval Spain—Hebrew poetry and philosophy—and a corpus of scientific and interpretative research built up (Tobi 2000; Sherman 1970).

The compilation and annotation of Jewish writing in Spain became broader and more established towards the end of the nineteenth century, as scientific societies focused on publishing new and annotated medieval Jewish works, as well as on encouraging research and study of the field.<sup>v</sup> These societies were set up by prominent Jewish researchers and intellectuals belonging to the Wissenschaft circles, such as Abraham Berliner (1833–1915), Abraham Harkavy (1835–1919), Shmuel David Luzzatto (1800–1865), and others. Their research largely ignored the influence of Arabic language and culture that was very much a part of the writings of Jews in Spain (Tobi 2000; Drori 1988). While Jewish works (mainly poetry) were emphasised and made prominent, Arabic works (especially in Judeo-Arabic dialects) were shunned and marginalised.<sup>vi</sup> Even the great Jewish works that were originally composed in Judeo-Arabic, such as Yehuda Halevi's "Kuzari" or Maimonides's "Guide for the Perplexed," were interpreted and studied mainly in their Hebrew translations, with almost no attention paid to their Arabic originals (Tobi 2011).

Historians of this period claim that this trend was part of a broader tendency to distance Judaism from the East, one that can be seen in the discourse of the Wissenschaft des Judentums from its very beginning (Mendes-Flor 2010; Anidjar 2007; Schorsch 1989). These researchers sought to move Judaism away from those Oriental elements it contained, including the presence of Arabic language and culture within the Jewish cultural heritage of medieval Spain (Raz-Krakotzkin 1998).

*Shaul ben Abdallah Yosef*

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Abdallah Yosef lived most of his adult life in the Baghdadi-Jewish diaspora that spread across India and China during the nineteenth century, and his life story is bound up with the transitions and transformations, both economic and cultural, that this movement entailed.<sup>vii</sup> At 18, he left his birthplace, Baghdad, and like many young Jews of his generation travelled east in search of economic opportunities within the Baghdadi trade networks that spanned the eastern British Empire. As a relative of the famous Sasson family (Flora, the wife of David Sasson, was his father's sister), he joined the David Sasson & Sons trading house, based in Bombay (Ben-Yaakov 1985), first studying in the firm's school network, and then being employed in its business activities in Chinese ports. After several years he settled with his family in the British colony of Hong Kong, where he established a brokering house at the stock exchange.

His migration eastwards also involved becoming a British citizen, a status which facilitated his movement and activities throughout the British Empire and awarded him legal and economic protection, as well as learning a new language. During his training and his work at David Sasson & Sons, Abdallah Yosef mastered English, adding it to his proficiency in Judeo-Arabic and literary Arabic, the languages used among members of the Baghdadi-Jewish network.

Alongside his business training, Abdallah Yosef was an autodidact who studied Hebrew and Arabic language and literature, in particular the Jewish works of Muslim Spain. He published articles in Hebrew and in Judeo-Arabic in the Hebrew intellectual press and in the Judeo-Arabic weekly, *Perah*.<sup>viii</sup> He also conducted wide-ranging correspondence with Jewish intellectuals all over the world. The two books of commentary that he wrote—a fierce critique of the Brody versions of Yehuda Halevi's poems,<sup>ix</sup> and a commentary on the poems of Moshe ibn Ezra<sup>x</sup>—were published after his death by Prof. Shmuel Kraus (1866–1948) in Vienna. Similarly, a manuscript he had prepared for publication—*The Garden of Parables and Riddles* by Tudros Abulafia—was published after his death by David Yellin (1863–1942).<sup>xi</sup> In addition to these works, Abdallah Yosef wrote poems in the meters and genres of the Hebrew poetry of Spain, but most were only published posthumously.<sup>xii</sup>

Within the Baghdadi-Jewish diaspora Abdallah Yosef was active in intellectual circles, in particular in the Judeo-Arabic newspapers.<sup>xiii</sup> These circles comprised learned Jews from all parts of the Baghdadi diaspora in Southeast Asia, Baghdad, Aleppo, and Basra (Avisur 1992; Hakak 2003). From his location in Hong Kong, Abdallah Yosef was greatly interested in the work of the Hebrew *Haskalah* circles in

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Europe, and was a member of a number of research associations they produced, in particular the *Mekize Nirdamim* association (Yellin 1937).

Abdallah Yosef's profile, in terms of his background and profession, was an unusual one within the *Haskalah* circles of his time, very unlike the typical European Jewish intellectual of the period. He did not belong to a recognised Jewish centre and had no formal advanced education or rabbinical training, and thus lacked the scientific authority that normally gave entry to intellectual society within the Jewish enlightenment.

He also represented different, and sometimes contradictory, worlds. He worked to bring the Baghdadi Jewish intellectual circles of the East closer to the world of European Jewish enlightenment, while at the same time conducting a bitter dispute with the European scholars about the foundations of the Sephardic heritage. More than once he was referred to as the "*Hacham Ha'-Baghdadi*" (Baghdadi Scholar), despite having left Baghdad at a young age and spending most of his life as a trader in the British colonies in India and China. In his writings he emphasised his connection to the East and to Judeo-Arabic culture, but as a trader in Hong Kong he was a British subject who enjoyed the political and economic protection of the Empire. These different strands of his identity, and his movement between locations within the political and cultural spaces of his time, shaped his diffuse and dynamic political position.

### *Debate over the poetic model of Hebrew poetry in Spain*

Across all his forms of work—as a literary critic in the contemporary Hebrew periodicals (*Hatzfira*, *Maggid Mesharim*) and the Judeo-Arabic periodicals (*Perah*), in his books of commentary on the poetry of Yehuda Halevi and Moshe ibn Ezra, and in his wide-ranging correspondence with different scholars—Shaul Abdallah Yosef expressed his strident opposition to the approach taken by European intellectuals in their interpretation of the medieval Hebrew poetry in Spain:

I must point out that, whenever they attempt to interpret anything to do with us in the East, our European brethren have never explored the subject deeply, but instead simply discuss and judge from the comfort of their own perspective.<sup>xiv</sup>

Most of Abdallah Yosef's disputes with scholars of the *Wissenschaft* about the poetry of Spain took place between 1887 and 1902, both in the *Hatzfira* newspaper and via personal correspondence, among others with Nahum Sokolov, Chaim Brody, David Ginsburg, and Abraham Berliner (Evri 2014; Tobi 2013). Thus for example, he

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wrote a fierce critique of Chaim Brody's commentary on the poems of Yehuda Halevi:

Had Rabbi Yehuda Halevi seen the interpretations and the distortions imposed by the new commentators on his poems, he would have cried out bitterly, saying: "Save me from my brother's hand, and from the hand of my loved ones deliver me."<sup>xv</sup>

Or, writing in general about European Jewish commentators on the poetry of Spain (Yellin 1937):

I have done all I can to enlighten our brethren, wise men of Ashkenaz, to the fact that Arab-Jewish poetry is not like European poetry ... While Rabbi Abraham Berliner and Rabbi Eliyahu Harkavy have generally conceded the points I have written to them, they remain incapable of removing their European spectacles from their eyes.

However, Abdallah Yosef's dispute with members of the Wissenschaft des Judentums circles in Europe (Krauss 1923; Yellin 1937; Tobi 2000; Hakak 2003) went beyond the boundaries of literary interpretation, and touched on much broader political and cultural questions.<sup>xvi</sup> At its heart were issues such as the place of Europe in modernisation processes in Jewish culture; the relationship between Arabic language and culture and Hebrew language and culture; and the relationship between cultural heritage and those who inherit it.

Abdallah Yosef considered himself to be at an advantage in interpreting Hebrew poetry of Arab form due to his familiarity with classic Arabic literature itself; without this knowledge, he felt, one could not discuss the Hebrew poetry of Spain. He emphasised the need for studying Arabic rules of literature [Al-Badī'] in order to be able to study and interpret the Hebrew poetry of Spain (Yellin 1937:47):

The new poetry called by Arabs al-Badī' was introduced to the Hebrew language by our great poets in Spain, ... For the poets of those times were immensely zealous for our ancient language, and sought to revitalise it, to expand and broaden it, and to raise it up to the level of the living Arabic language.

His emphasis on the close relation between Hebrew and Arabic, and the need for a good knowledge of Arabic in order to read properly the Hebrew poetry of Spain, echoes the words of Moshe Ibn Ezra (1055-1140) in his work *Shirat Yisrael* ("the poetry of Israel"). For example, Abdallah Yosef writes:

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The two languages are as closely related as sisters. And in truth it would not be an exaggeration to say that there is almost no couplet in all the poems of Halevi and Ibn Ezra which does not have a model in the poetry of the Arabs, or some basis in their commonly recited turns of phrase, or in their histories.<sup>xvii</sup>

In his criticism of members of the Wissenschaft who toiled over the Hebrew but did not know Arabic, Abdallah Yosef pointed out his advantage in having been born in Baghdad, and having Arabic as his mother tongue, which made it easier for him to research the field despite having been an autodidact for most of his life (Hakak 2003, 251):

... and I myself feel that in spite of this disadvantage in learning, I was instead aided by place and by language – the place of my birth, in Babel [Baghdad], and my mother tongue, Arabic.

For Abdallah Yosef, the scholars of the Wissenschaft were failing because no-one can know “the ways of the Easterners, or understand their language and expressions, without having lived among them, and having closely observed their lives and practices” (Ibid., 250).

Abdallah Yosef pointed out the connection between the mistakes and confusions in the research of the Wissenschaft des Judentums scholars into the poetry Spain, and their distance from Arabic culture, belonging instead to European culture:

If we look at the book of annotations in search of a picture of the knowledge and understanding acquired by our Hebrew brethren in Europe regarding this beautiful Hebrew literature, and observe it from our Hebrew-Arabic perspective, we will be forced to admit that the respected author has not succeeded in illuminating anything of what was written.<sup>xviii</sup>

The identification of the Wissenschaft as being part of European culture was a key component in Abdallah Yosef’s critique. It is expressed in the contrast he outlines between interpretations of the poetry of Spain formed by European Jewish research and the Arab-Jewish interpretation that he himself represents. In a letter to David Yellin, Abdallah Yosef describes this candidly:

By my word, this is an attempt by Westerners to interpret the words of an Eastern poet using a Western aesthetic! And from reading it you are given to understand that Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, the Sephardi, actually spoke in an Ashkenazi accent, and used European images and phrases ... And if the

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Germans and the English and the French and the Russians can Germanise and Anglify and Francify and Russify him, then what is left of Yehuda Halevi that makes him unique?<sup>xix</sup>

It is worth noting, again, the importance of the context for Abdallah Yosef's dispute with the Wissenschaft scholars: his passionate arguments over the nature of the poetry of Spain were conducted while he worked as a trader at the Hong Kong stock exchange, and his approach to modernisation was greatly influenced by his experiences as a member of the growing Baghdadi-Jewish diaspora in Southeast Asia.

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## Chapter 2: What is Eastern literature? The project of Ariel Bension

A number of the Arab-Jewish intellectuals and writers who became part of the new Hebrew *Haskalah* circles at the turn of the twentieth century proposed alternatives to the European- and Western-influenced models, putting forward Eastern cultural and poetic models. They believed that modern Hebrew literature should return to the East, and thus to the close relationship with Arabic. In their view, Hebrew was an Eastern language and most of its historical traditions are Eastern; with the symbolic and physical return of Hebrew literature to the Land of Israel, located in the East, Hebrew literature should be “Eastern/Mizrahi.” These views on the Eastern nature of Hebrew literature in its entirety are also connected to different views held by these thinkers regarding Jewish nationalism, the growing division between Jews and Arabs, and the nascent Israeli culture and its affinities between East and West.

In this sense, the concept of “Eastern literature,” or “Mizrahi literature”, that they use, is very different from the meaning it acquired in Israeli culture in the second half of the twentieth century. This later meaning relates mainly to works of Jews from Arab, Muslim, and Ottoman countries, written in Hebrew in Israel; and differentiates these from the works of Ashkenazi Jews in Hebrew, which are referred to by the neutral term “Hebrew literature,” with no ethnic qualifier, Eastern or Western. The concept needs to be understood in its earlier context, used by its creators to convey the idea that the rebirth of Hebrew culture (and Zionism) was in essence a return of the Jewish people to the East, including the Jews of Eastern and Western Europe – the Ashkenazim—who were also to some extent viewed by non-Jewish Europeans as being Eastern or Asian. This alternative stood in opposition to the ruling powers of Hebrew literature, and of Hebrew literature studies, throughout that period, from the



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beginning of the *Haskalah* movement in the nineteenth century to the Zionist movement in the early twentieth century.

The Jerusalemite group<sup>xxi</sup> formed around Avraham Shalom Yahuda (1877–1951) and David Yellin, whose members also included Yosef Meyuchas (1868–1942)<sup>xxii</sup> and Yitzhak Yehezkel Yahuda (1863–1941), which was an active force in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Palestine/Land of Israel, developed an alternative model to the dominant trend in Hebrew revival circles, one based on a return to the Arab-Jewish Andalusian legacy.<sup>xxiii</sup> The group's members saw potential for an Arab-Jewish cultural partnership in the Land of Israel. They pointed out “historical examples of Arab-Jewish cultural collaboration,” and emphasised “Jewish poetry in medieval Arab centres ... poems of Israel in the land of Ishmael” (Berlovitz 1998, 100). Similarly, the group's concept of modernisation was not the dominant one of the new Hebrew literature, centred on European and Western culture.

This program was based on the connection between the Sephardim in Palestine/Land of Israel and the Sephardic heritage of al-Andalus, and featured the first as bearers of the legacy of medieval Spain and as its ideal interpreters.<sup>xxiv</sup> The works of the Jews of Golden Age Spain offered a Hebrew high culture born of an Arab-Jewish bond, which had relevance as a model for modern-day Palestine/Land of Israel, with its own Arab-Jewish character.<sup>xxv</sup> Within the new Hebrew culture, this connection to Arab culture in the present was a unique undertaking of these Jerusalemite Sephardic intellectuals. At this period, towards the end of the Ottoman Empire, some of these Palestine/Land of Israel intellectuals were members of both the Hebrew renaissance movement and the Arabic *Nahda* movement, at a time when the two were not yet seen to be contradictory or incompatible. The connections that the Jerusalemite group proposed continued to serve as a model during the first decades of the twentieth century for other Jewish-Arab intellectuals such as Nissim Malul (1892–1959), Shimon Moyal (1866–1915), Esther Moyal (1873–1946), and Ariel Bension.

### *Ariel Bension*

Ariel Bension Yehuda Levi was born in Jerusalem in 1880. His father was the Kabbalist Rabbi Yehoshua Zion Halevi and his mother was a member of the Yahuda family. Ariel Bension studied in a Sephardi religious school, and at the *Hesed El* and *Tiferet Yerushalayim* seminaries. He was very familiar with the group of Kabbalists at the *Beit El* seminary, of which his father was a member. Later he travelled to Germany where he studied at four universities, and he also attended the University of

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Berne in Switzerland, eventually completing a doctoral thesis on the Samaritans. In 1910 he returned to Palestine/Land of Israel, working as a teacher and a newspaper reporter. He served for a year as the chief rabbi in Monastir in Macedonia in 1913. Bension attended the 11th Zionist Congress in Vienna in 1913, where he convened a special committee of Sephardic delegates which decided to call a world conference of Sephardic Jews. In 1920 he returned once more to Palestine/Land of Israel and was active in the World Zionist Organisation.

At the beginning of the 1920s he began a new chapter of his life, in which he worked as a representative of the United Israel Appeal (*Keren Hayesod*) in many countries, including Iraq, India, Indochina, Egypt, North Africa, Spain, Portugal, and others. Throughout this period—which lasted around a decade up until his early death in Paris in 1933—Bension stood out as a charismatic speaker who motivated Jewish communities to support the Zionist movement and the Jewish *yishuv* in Palestine/Land of Israel. He had a particularly great influence on Arabic-speaking Jewish communities (Iraq and North Africa), and in Sephardic communities in East Asia. Bension was an unusual figure in the United Israel Appeal and in the World Zionist Organisation. He travelled to Jewish communities as a preacher whose ideological-educational sense of mission outweighed his mission as fundraiser (Gaon 1938; Tidhar 1959; Bezalel 2008). In his visits to these communities he presented a different picture of “Zionism,” based on a symbolic and actual return to the East. He took a similar approach in his literary works, in his research, and in his journalism.

He produced two main literary compositions. *Hilula, or the Wedding Canopy of Death*, was written in 1918, published in a German translation in 1920, and printed in Hebrew in 1928. This book, which contained poems among the prose, was intended by the author as a prologue to *The Book of Rafael*, which would relate the life of the last mystic in a dying Sephardic Hasidic sect, at the *Beit El* seminary.<sup>xxvi</sup> Bension’s second book, *Sar Shalom Shar’abi*, was published in 1930. Rabbi Shalom Shar’abi, who lived in the eighteenth century, was the greatest of the *Beit El* Kabbalists (Giller 2008). In this book, too, Bension claimed that “a complete anthology of the legends of Shar’abi will be forthcoming in a special book,” but no such work was ever published. In addition to these two, in 1932 Bension published his study *The Zohar in Muslim and Christian Spain*, in English (Bension 1930, 8).

In many ways Bension, a less well-known contemporary of Yehuda Burla (1886–1969) and Yitzhak Shami (1888–1949), continued the path taken by Avraham Shalom

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Yahuda and David Yellin, for whom all Hebrew literature in Palestine/Land of Israel should be Eastern literature. He even claimed that this change was actually underway in his time. In his 1912 article “To the False Prophets,” Bension contrasted the literature being created in Palestine/Land of Israel with that of Europe (Bension 1912):

A new art form is coming into being in our land—the art of Hebrew musical composition. This is not the Western music of exile, forged in the destruction of our nation’s soul; nor the Western Aryan music with its roots in the drunkenness of Dionysus. This is the natural Hebrew music whose origins lie in that wonderful harmony of the innocent Eastern soul, and which takes its rhythm from the lyre of David.

Bension assumed that the return to Hebrew and to Palestine/Land of Israel necessarily meant a return to the East, for all the Jewish people. His view of the East was romantic: innocent, natural, and connected to the rhythms of the Bible. We will see how he expressed in his own work this attempt to create an Eastern Hebrew literature, with a new form and a new rhythm.

Unlike Bension, and at around the same time, Yehuda Burla claimed—in his 1917 correspondence with his friend David Avisar—that it would be impossible to found their new works on the Golden Age of Spain, now that Spinoza and Kant, Nietzsche and Goethe’s Faust, all “assault our soul” (Bezalel 2008, 360). Writing about his attitude to Eastern and Western music, Burla explained: “We understand and feel all kinds of scales that are close to the Hijazi Arabic scale ... while the notes and chords of Beethoven we cannot comprehend,” although he also expressed hope that a harmonic connection between these two sides might be created.

This discourse of Burla, unlike that of Ariel Bension, is already split along ethnic lines between Sephardim and Ashkenazim in Palestine/Land of Israel. He does not ask how all Modern Hebrew literature should appear, or whether it should be solely Eastern, solely Western, or a synthesis of the two; instead, he asks what works he and other young Sephardic writers should produce—solely Eastern, solely Western, or a synthesis—while his assumption is that Ashkenazi writers only produce Western Hebrew works. Unlike Ariel Bension, for whom the new Hebrew literature was unquestionably Eastern, Yehuda Burla is already wondering how the Eastern writer ought to represent his Eastern community within the new Hebrew literature which is Western by nature. The forms he may use are Western (the novel, the novella, and the

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short story), and within these he can write of the East, using language that mediates between the two worlds—such as that which includes phrases in Arabic and in Judeo-Arabic—but being careful to translate them in footnotes for the convenience of readers unfamiliar with them.<sup>xxvii</sup>

In contrast to this approach, Bension sought ways to produce new forms of literature, and shatter the existing templates. Thus his novels *Hilula* and *Sar Shalom Sharabi* are referred to as experimental books, exploring different forms, and this might be why they are relatively short: for Bension, they were meant to be introductions to more fulsome works that he would write later, *The Book of Rafael* and *The Legends of Sar Shalom*. These were never published, and perhaps never written, or never developed beyond initial drafts, despite Bension's hints that they were completed. In a sense, *Sar Shalom Sharabi* can be seen as a fulfilment of *The Book of Rafael*, dealing as it does with the Kabbalistic *Beit El* seminary.

In it, Bension presents himself as one who is rescuing an earlier way of life from being forgotten by transferring some of it to the written page, and transforming it from its Kabbalistic-mystical context into literature. He juxtaposes the story of the *Beit El* Kabbalists with the Hasidic movement of Eastern Europe, to which thousands were drawn, while also seeming to position his writing, which weaves together stories of the righteous told in rabbinic language, as an Eastern alternative to the Ashkenazi Hasidic literature. After providing historical and research context for the book, he describes the *Beit El* Kabbalists (Bension 1930):

Up we went to the uppermost level, and there seated on benches were elders wrapped in white cloaks, woven from silk from the land of the sun, which flowed over their bodies; or dressed in soft woollen clothes from Kashmir thread, and their heads adorned with Persian woven caps.

In these descriptions of clothing from far-away lands, Bension echoes the romantic Orientalist writings about the East, religion, and mysticism, which he knew very well,<sup>xxviii</sup> and thus he locates the Sephardic Kabbalists of Jerusalem within a larger context of the East that stretched from Palestine/Land of Israel to Iran, India, and Japan.<sup>xxix</sup>

Bension's perception of Easternism (or Mizrahiness) can be related to Ottomanism, to European Orientalism, and to the Arabic *Nahda* and Arab conceptions of the East (the *Mashreq*). But in 1924, in a lecture he gave in Shanghai before the Indian-Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), as part of an event he arranged as the

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United Israel Appeal emissary to the Iraqi-Jewish diaspora,<sup>xxx</sup> he chose to formulate Mizrahiness as being Pan-Asian (*Doar Hayom*, May 25, 1925):

And how happy I am to see gathered here members of all the peoples of Asia, believers in the Bible, the Quran, and the Upanishad-Vedas, Zoroastrians, students of the Tao, creators of the eternal faiths fixed for generations.

Bension makes a connection between Tagore's poems and Jewish heritage (Ibid.):

Reading his poems, one finds oneself in the company of a new Psalmist, playing the same divine music that David plucked from the harp and the lyre. I particularly sensed this similarity, between his poems and the Psalms, when I read Gitanjali in the Hebrew translation by the author David Frishman. I felt that, in this translation from Bengali to Hebrew, from one Eastern language to another, the soul of the original had been preserved.

For Bension, Tagore and his thought and poems were close to Jewish culture, being works of Eastern culture, while European-Western culture was foreign (Ibid.):

Tagore's works reveal to us once more the precious pearls hidden in the literature of the East, and restore to us, the Jews, the thoughts and ideas that were lost to us because of our long connection with an alien culture.

In his lecture, Bension spoke of his relation to Arabic culture, and to the close links between Arabic and Hebrew (Ibid.):

We all stand with wonder and deepest admiration for the culture of the Arabs: their language, their literature, their art, science, and philosophy, the marvellous Quran, which is a most valuable treasure of morality and democracy... The Jewish and Arab people are like an ancient lyre waiting for the strumming of a divine player such as King David, so that its beautiful melodies might once again ring out.

For both Shaul Abdallah Yosef and Ariel Bension, their affinity with Arabic culture was connected to their having grown up in an Arabic-speaking place—Baghdad and Jerusalem—and to living in a Jewish community that spoke Judeo-Arabic.<sup>xxxi</sup> Abdallah Yosef continued this affinity with Arabic culture, connecting to literary Arabic in the context of modernisation in Jewish communities in the Arab world, and to classical Arabic literature in the context of efforts to modernise Hebrew literature. Bension, on the other hand, connected to the Arabic language via mysticism, through the works of ibn 'Arabi, the Muslim-Andalusian mystic of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and the works of ibn Tufail, the Muslim-Andalusian

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philosopher and author of the twelfth century, and through the similarity he discovered between their writings and the Zohar and Spanish-Jewish mysticism—this, in his scholarly book on the Zohar in Muslim Spain (Bension 1932). In this sense, another element common to both Abdallah Yosef and Bension was their idealisation of Muslim Spain-Sepharad-Andalus as a Hebrew-Arabic and Judeo-Muslim cultural model, for the former via the poetry of the Golden Age, and for the latter via Spanish mysticism.<sup>xxxii</sup>

In his books *Hilula, or the Bridal Canopy of Death* and *Sar Shalom Sharabi*, Ariel Bension sought to realise the new form of art he had proposed for Palestine/Land of Israel, one that was fully Eastern, as he described it in his article “To the False Prophets.” In *Hilula* he did so by combining prose and poetry, and using the form of letters sent by Sultana to her nephew Yazid. In *Sar Shalom Sharabi*, he wove together tales of the Sages and the righteous with hagiographic literature, moving in genre between memoir and research of mysticism and Kabbala, and between the devotional poetry of the *Piyyut* and the Zohar. Among all this, his writing was inspired by the aspiration to discover a Hebrew literary form connected to the East, and specifically to Palestine/Land of Israel, while also influenced by German Orientalism and romanticism, and by other attempts in different parts of the world, such as the literary project of Rabindranath Tagore in India, to root new literature in existing traditions rather than those of the West.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

## Conclusion

In this article, we examined the work of Shaul Abdallah Yosef and Ariel Bension, each within his own creative context, but also within broader contexts that gave rise to shared concerns. These included the multi-faceted context of modernist models in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Europe, as well as the various intellectual networks within which the two were active.

We explored the possibilities these figures proposed in response to the tendency of the European centre of Hebrew literature (and later also in Palestine/Land of Israel) to define the new Hebrew literature as a process of Westernisation and Europeanisation, and in response, too, to the approach of the *Wissenschaft* in Europe and later in Palestine/Land of Israel. We also highlighted the position they sometimes found themselves in, as bearers of tradition, rather than innovative researchers and writers.

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The models proposed by these intellectuals were born of a relationship with—and sometimes opposition to—the dominance of Europe and Western culture in the discourse of Jewish intellectuals. By contrast, they proposed a renewal of Hebrew culture through both a real and symbolic movement towards the East, and a reconnection with Arabic language, poetry, and style. These ideas were rooted, among other things, in the physical journeys of these two figures, and in their cultural location on the seam between West and East. Within this context, it is possible to read anew their research and literary activities as being sites that contain moments of dispute and opposition, but also creative and contemplative collaboration at a formative moment in the renewal and re-establishment of modern Hebrew culture and literature. Reviewing their work reveals unfamiliar poetic and analytical models, embodying conceptions regarding the affinity between the Hebrew and Arabic languages, the link between Jewish modernisation and Arab modernisation, and the place of Jewish culture between East and West.

Bension and Abdallah Yosef are not the bearers or preservers of traditions facing collapse and extinction; rather, they are active figures in renewing and reformulating these traditions, both as creators and as scholars. As scholars, they proposed innovative models, Abdallah Yosef regarding Hebrew-Sephardic poetry, and Bension regarding the Sephardic Kabbalistic tradition. As creators, they introduced a series of aesthetic and poetic models: Abdallah Yosef's relate to the place in modern literature of the classic Spanish school of poetry, and the place of translation from Arabic in this context; while Bension proposed an Eastern literary model worthy of a place at the centre of the new Hebrew literature, comprising both poetry and prose, and combining different genres such as Midrash, hagiography, and memoirs.

While Abdallah Yosef's connections were mainly with intellectuals in Europe and in the Baghdadi-Jewish diaspora, and only to a limited extent with Palestine/Land of Israel scholars (such as David Yellin), Bension, who was born in Jerusalem, was in close contact with the Hebrew intellectual movement in Palestine/Land of Israel, encompassing Sephardic scholars and the younger local scholars (such as Itamar Ben Avi), Russian intellectuals, and the Sephardic Kabbalists and religious scholars. Later on, his academic activity in Europe and his Zionist activism brought him into contact with German Orientalists and with Zionist leaders, and he was also in contact with Rabindranath Tagore. While Abdallah Yosef was active mainly in the context of the *Haskalah*, and did not relate in any meaningful way to the Jewish national question,

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Bension was active in Zionist networks, and the question of the return to Palestine/Land of Israel, as well as the place of Sephardim in the Zionist movement, were central to his philosophy and his literary writings.

Abdallah Yosef wrote his literary works in Hebrew, his research and polemics in Hebrew and in Judeo-Arabic, and his business dealings in English, while he also read literary Arabic. Bension wrote his literary works in Hebrew (translated to German), and his research and polemics in Hebrew, German, and English (his book on the Zohar was also translated to Spanish), but his research also addressed mystical works written in literary Arabic. Abdallah Yosef operated outside of the established academic and rabbinical frameworks, while Bension was ordained as a rabbi, and completed his academic studies to doctoral level in Germany and Switzerland.

In their work, Abdallah Yosef and Bension do not present a contradiction between tradition and modernisation. Indeed, Judeo-Arabic was used in the press in which Abdallah Yosef wrote (and in business) as a language of modernisation, while Rabbinic Hebrew and modern Hebrew were not viewed by Bension as contradictory or mutually incompatible. They were both connected to literary Arabic as the language of Arab tradition (for Abdallah Yosef, in the context of Arabic forms of poetics, and for Bension mainly in mystical contexts), and to European languages as the languages of research or business.

This re-examination of the models developed by Abdallah Yosef and Bension enables us to escape the reduction of Hebrew literature to a monolingual project informed by Westernisation and Europeanisation, limited to the context of European Jewry, and also to escape the reduction of Easternism/Mizrahiness to a movement framed only within the modern Jewish national project. Instead, they can be relocated to a landscape of multiple locations, loyalties, and collectives, with broad and complex spatial contexts.

Returning to these options provides an opportunity to reinstate pathways for the study of medieval poetry and Modern Hebrew literature which offer different logics regarding their separation in time (between the Middle Ages and the modern age) and in space (between West and East), and their division between different frameworks of knowledge and discourse (Hebrew literature and Arabic literature; Hebrew literature and Jewish thought on the subject of Kabbalistic writings). At that formative moment for the establishment of Modern Hebrew literature and Jewish literary research—which were based on binary distinctions between Hebrew and Arabic, Jews and



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Arabs, Jewish studies and Oriental studies, tradition and modernity, Europe and the East, and secular and religious literature—the discourse of Abdallah Yosef and Bension embodied alternative paths to a Hebrew culture and literature, based instead on the interactions and connections between those dyads, rather than on the distinctions between them.

Research into the new Mizrahi Hebrew literature has grown in recent years, but very little has been dedicated to exploring its connections with the literary traditions that preceded it in the Jewish communities of the Arab, Muslim, and Ottoman worlds. Thus, paradoxically, the study of the new Mizrahi Hebrew literature has been constrained at times to the national-Zionist period and to the Modern Hebrew language.

We have attempted to challenge these divisions and the assumptions that underlie them, and tried to propose a new perspective on the processes involved in the formation of Modern Hebrew literature and the new Mizrahi literature.

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## Mahmoud Darwish: Poetry's State of Siege

Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish often wrote under siege: He wrote under the military government of the nascent state of Israel, when he was required to appear before government officials to prove that he had not left Haifa and was later imprisoned for leaving Haifa without permission in order to read poems at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He wrote in Beirut, that in 1982 was bombarded and besieged by the IDF; and he wrote during the Israeli incursion in Ramallah in 2002. Besides these real-time sieges, his poetry repeatedly returned to the moment of the arch-siege, to his village Al-Birweh, which was destroyed in 1948 when he was seven years old. He wrote about his family's exile in Lebanon and their return as infiltrators a year later—or as “present absentees”<sup>xxxiv</sup>—to his non-existent village in the Galilee: “I didn't understand why they destroyed this world, and who destroyed it. I was a refugee in Lebanon, and now I am a refugee in my homeland.”<sup>xxxv</sup>

With his multifaceted personal and family story, Darwish represents the “state” of the Palestinian in the second half of the twentieth century—continuously in exile and under siege: exile from the Galilee to Lebanon in 1948, return to his destroyed village in the Galilee and life as a present absentee, life as a Palestinian citizen of Israel under the military government, departure for exile in the Palestinian diaspora, joining the PLO, the siege on Beirut and the exit from it, life in Tunis, the life of the exile in Paris, living in Ramallah after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, and living in Amman. His broad personal experience and its connection to so many of his people's experiences have established him as a national poet.

Perhaps Mahmoud Darwish sought to break the siege with his poetry and believed in poetry's power to stand up to armies and to reality. Yet he admitted, more than once, that poetry was defeated by reality. In a poem addressed to the poet Samih al-Qasim, called “I called you a narcissus entwined around my heart,” he wrote ironically “Would you believe that poems are still stronger than planes?”<sup>xxxvi</sup> Darwish did not simply attempt to defeat planes with poetry, but rather believed that if, as the historically defeated side, he did not tell his story, not only would his villages be erased, but so would the name of each village and its story. His story would be erased not only in the consciousness of the erasers, but also in the world's consciousness, in the consciousness of his people, and finally within his own consciousness. And then the defeat would be absolute.

For the poet, the battle for memory is often no less important than the battle on the ground, because a lack of memory obliterates any reason to fight on the ground. This insight

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is best seen in the title of Darwish's book about the siege of Beirut: *Memory for Forgetfulness*. In our age of forgetting and obliteration, the victors continuously labor to blot out the memory of the vanquished. In recent months, we have even seen attempts to promulgate laws that would forbid the utterance of the word *nakba* (catastrophe) or of Arabic place names in Israel. Facing such determination to erase memory, one must at least allow “memory for forgetfulness.”

Darwish presents the forgetfulness of the defeated in the poem, “The Eternity of the Cactus,” in *Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?* through a father's words to his son during the Palestinian catastrophe of 1948: “You will grow up, / my son, and tell those who inherit their guns / the story of the blood upon the iron...”<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Similarly, Darwish wrote in “Counterpoint: For Edward W. Said,” in *Almond Blossoms and Beyond*: “He was the last hero in that epic, / defending the rights of Troy / [to share the story].”<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Darwish, in describing Said, is in a sense also describing himself: he is struggling in the name of the vanquished, the Trojans, to tell the story that Homer did not tell, in a very non-Homeric reality. In *State of Siege*, Darwish announces to Homer that the fate of Ramallah is different than that which he knew in Greece: “No Homeric echoes for anything... / only a digging up of a comatose state / under the ruins of an encroaching Troy.”<sup>xxxix</sup> Ramallah is the “future Troy,” whose enemies have besieged it in order to destroy it. Nevertheless, the breadth and volume of the Homeric plot cannot be applied to Ramallah, since no *Iliad* or *Odyssey* will be written about it. Precisely because the *Odyssey* cannot be written in Ramallah, Darwish has written fragments of poems. Darwish senses that if the sons of this future Troy do not write their narrative, they will disappear from history and will be only known through the history of the victors: through the Homer appointed by the Israelis. If they do write, Darwish posits, their narrative has a chance of overcoming that of the victors—through its beauty, or perhaps through its ability to convince the readers that they were in the right.

What is poetry in “state of siege” and how does a poet write in a “state of siege”? What are poetry's obligations when under siege and what are its means of escape? *State of Siege* is the title of Darwish's book of poems and the time and location, which appear on the front of the book relate to a specific siege: “January 2002, Ramallah.” In Hebrew, the word “*matzav*” (state or situation), or more precisely, that word preceded by the definite article, “*ha-matzav*” (the situation) has become a code word for Israeli life today and the despair it engenders. At the same time, however, it is also a neutralized code, which refrains from

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assigning blame. The Palestinian state of siege is different: it is not a mere complaint about a situation whose perpetrators are unknown, but rather the confrontation of a situation whose perpetrators are known. The situation's ongoing existence, until it changes from a state of momentary crisis to a permanent state, makes coping with it difficult. The state of siege is firstly depicted as swallowing up all other times and states, the past and the future, wiping away the memory of the possibility of "a normal state," if there ever was such a thing, and also as demanding the submissiveness of poetry, its silence, or its being silenced.

In *Memory for Forgetfulness*, Darwish wrote at great length, in prose rather than poetry, about the inability to write poetry in a state of siege. He explained that being involved in the siege makes it impossible to be engrossed in literature: "I halt my quest for figurative language. I bring my quest for meaning to a complete stop, because the essence of war is to degrade symbols and bring human relations, space, time, and the elements back to a state of nature, making us rejoice over the water gushing on the road from a broken pipe. Water under these conditions comes to us like a miracle."<sup>xi</sup>

In an interview, Darwish discussed the difficulty of writing poetry in Ramallah: "Poetry requires rest. The situation in Ramallah does not allow me that luxury. Being under occupation, under siege, does not provide inspiration for poetry. Nevertheless, I cannot choose the reality I live in, and that is the main problem of Palestinian literature: We cannot free ourselves from historical events."<sup>xii</sup>

*Memory for Forgetfulness* opens with the need for a cup of coffee, juxtaposed against the difficulty that the siege and the unremitting bombardment create for a person who wants to make a cup of coffee on a gas burner near a window exposed to bombers and snipers, when even the water supply cannot be counted on. Darwish declares: "I want the aroma of coffee. I need five minutes. I want a five-minute truce for the sake of coffee."<sup>xiii</sup> During the siege of Ramallah, Darwish will want a truce for reasons that are, perhaps, more serious than coffee:

It's a truce after a truce – to test the teachings:  
are warplanes needed to plow the land?  
We told them: a truce – to test intentions.  
Some particles of peace might sneak into our hearts  
inspiring us to adopt poetic means  
to come to terms for the things we love.  
They answer: 'But don't you realize  
that such a peace with the self



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would fling open the doors of our fortress to *hijazi* and *nahawandi* musical modes?  
We said: “So what? And after that?”<sup>xliii</sup>

Instead of a military confrontation, in which the poet does not stand a chance, he wants a poetry contest between Palestinians and Israelis. This way, he can fulfill his dream as a poet, perhaps of every poet, of transforming poetry into a touchstone of reality.

The Israeli response, which Darwish imagined to his request for a truce, also comes from the realm of poetry, albeit from song, and it is a refusal. This rejection of reconciliation derives from the Israelis' cultural fear of *maqams*, the Arabic musical scales. Darwish depicts the Israelis as living voluntarily inside a fortress with closed gates; they too are besieged, no less than their prisoners, because they too are held within the walls that enclose their prisoners. In this sense Darwish understands both his own siege and the Israelis' fortification, as the result, in part, of the Israeli fear of Arab culture. As such, the siege is an Orientalist act, and in this sense, an Israeli weakness. In *State of Siege*, Darwish devotes a poem to an "Orientalist":

...let's presume I'm stupid:  
I don't play golf, I don't understand new technology;  
I can't fly an airplane –  
Is this justification to rob me of my life and then  
to live on top of it?  
If you were not you and I were not I  
we might be friends,  
even agreeing to our need for a certain stupidity.  
For hath not the stupid one '*heart, bread, and eyes full of tears,*' like the Jew in *The Merchant of Venice*?<sup>xliv</sup>

In one of the first poem fragments in *State of Siege*, Darwish proposes another idea that links the siege to culture: “This siege won't end until we teach our enemies / a few odes from our pre-Islamic days.”<sup>xlv</sup> I must admit that years ago these very words tempted and even commanded me to delve into Darwish's poetry. Initially, their charm lay in their proposal to break the siege by means of culture, in seeing the pre-Islamic tradition of Arabic poetry as an avenue toward reconciliation, if it could be shared by Arabs and Israelis. On second thought, I wondered whether Darwish was not forgetting the place of the Jews in Arabic culture, from the poetry of the Jahaliyya and the Judeo-Arab poet A-Samawal to the twentieth century and

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the Judeo-Iraqi poet Anwar Shaul, who wrote under the name Ibn A-Samawal, as a linking chain of Judeo-Arab poets. Why, I asked myself, does Darwish speak of us as if we were outside Arabic culture? Then I remembered that A-Samawal and Ibn A-Samawal had never entered the Israeli fortress, and that we indeed had to learn anew from Darwish: “a few odes from our pre-Islamic days.”<sup>xlvi</sup> In this sense, the state of siege of Israeli poetry, as Darwish understood, is the refusal to read the poetry of the Jahaliyya.

Unlike most national authors, Darwish did not try to hold his country with its language and its history above a maelstrom of identities: “I am a product of all the civilizations that have passed through the country—Greek, Roman, Persian, Jewish, Ottoman. Each powerful civilization passed through and left something behind. I am the son of all these fathers but belong to one mother. Does that mean my mother is a whore? My mother is this land that absorbed them all, and was both witness and victim.”<sup>xlvii</sup>

He explained that he was “also the son of the Jewish civilization that existed in Palestine,” and accordingly, when there will be reconciliation between the Palestinians and the Jews, “the Jew will not be ashamed to find an Arab element in himself, and the Arab will not be ashamed to declare that he incorporates Jewish elements.”<sup>xlviii</sup> Just as Darwish embraced the Bible (which he knew in its original Hebrew) and the New Testament as dominant sources of modern Arabic poetry, alongside the Quran and the poetry of the Jahaliyya, he proposed that the Hebrew poet turn to the poetry of the Jahaliyya.<sup>xlix</sup> In this sense, in order for the poetry of the Jahaliyya to again become “ours,” and not the property of some foreign other, we must study it anew.

The hope for an end to the siege, which appears in several of Darwish's poems, is fleeting and unfulfilled. Therefore, Darwish labored to describe the siege itself, as it fills the lives of the endlessly besieged. In fragments of lines in *State of Siege*, it is as though Darwish is reminding Homer that he was unable to write an epic in Ramallah: “Under siege, / life is measured between the memory of its beginning / and the oblivion of its end...”<sup>1</sup> It is here that we find the forgetfulness and the confusion about time that the siege generates among the besieged, and which also appear in the subtitle of *Memory for Forgetfulness: [The Time:] August, [The Place:] Beirut*.

Black coffee has a role also in *State of Siege*. Paradoxically, this time the besieged offer coffee to the besiegers, as a symbol of humanity, to remind the besiegers that they too are human beings, just like the besieged: “You, standing at our thresholds, come in, / sip some Arab coffee

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with us! / You may feel you're as human as we are."<sup>li</sup> The poem observes the damage to humanity caused by the besiegers, who are themselves trapped within the siege. Yet it does not end with this hospitable invitation that is generous to the point of absurdity. Rather, the poem ends with a reversal, sending the besiegers far away, reminding us that even the besieged no longer feel like human beings:

You! At the thresholds of our houses,  
Vacate our mornings,  
so we may be *certain*  
we're as human as you are.<sup>lii</sup>

As a result, the siege depletes the humanity of both the besiegers and the besieged, but without creating a false symmetry between them. In face of this hopelessness, *State of Siege* opens with the declaration, "We nurse hope,"<sup>liii</sup> with the understanding that there is no hope under siege unless you raise it, among the unemployed and the imprisoned, among the intentions and in the shadow of ruined orchards.

*Memory for Forgetfulness* was written in Paris after Darwish left Beirut and it describes a single day under siege. Darwish depicts a kind of negotiation with the Israelis about the exit of the Palestinian Liberation Organization from Beirut during the siege: "We said we'd leave. 'By sea?' they asked. 'By sea,' we said... 'But first they must break the siege of the sea. They must clear the last path for the last thread of our blood.'"<sup>liv</sup> Palestinian life in Lebanon after 1948, with nowhere to return to, is paradoxical, as everyone reminds the Palestinian refugees of their double lack of belonging, saying: "*You're not going there, and you don't belong here.* Between these two negations this generation was born..."<sup>lv</sup> Thus, one cannot call 1982 the beginning of the siege but rather its tragic and paradoxical continuation, because after 1948 the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon "were still being born without a reason, growing up for no reason, remembering for no reason, and being put under siege for no reason."<sup>lvi</sup>

In *Memory for Forgetfulness*, Darwish describes how he became a poet seeking the past and how he searched for the moments when he was a child on the beaches of Lebanon after he and his family was exiled from the Galilee, after the beginning of the siege but before he understood that his life was under siege, perhaps in his last moment of innocence: "And I had grown up. I had become a poet searching for the boy that used to be in him, whom he had

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left behind some place and forgotten. The poet had grown older and didn't permit the forgotten boy to grow up.<sup>lvii</sup>

Darwish wrote about his childhood also in *Almond Blossoms and Beyond*:

I always thought the place was identified  
by the mothers and the aroma of sage.

No one said to me,  
this place is called a country,  
around the country are borders,  
and beyond the borders is another place,  
called *diaspora* and *exile* for us.

I did not yet need an identity  
.....  
I did not remember the words to defend the place  
from its removal, from its strange, new name  
hedged with eucalyptus.

The signs say to us,  
You were not here.<sup>lviii</sup>

Lebanon was not foreign to him for years, but had become a search for something that had disappeared. And the political situation he was born into determined his fate as a poet:

From massacre to slaughter have my people been led, and still they bring  
forth offspring in debris-filled stopping places, flash victory signs, and  
prepare the wedding feasts.

Does a bomb have grandchildren? Us.

Does a piece of shrapnel have grandparents? Us.<sup>lix</sup>

In *Memory for Forgetfulness*, Darwish refers to the siege on Beirut, by alluding to the poem "Identity Card," written nearly twenty years earlier in Israel: "I'm Arab!" I said that to a government employee whose son might now be piloting one of these jets. I said it in Hebrew to provoke him. But when I put it in a poem, the Arab public in Nazareth was electrified by a

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secret current that released the genie from the bottle ... This outcry then became my poetic identity...<sup>lx</sup>

In Beirut, Darwish reexamined his famous poem “Identity Card”: “I didn’t realize it was necessary to say it here in Beirut: ‘Put this in your record. I’m Arab!’ Does the Arab have to say this to his fellow Arabs?”<sup>lxi</sup> The Palestinian exile had been doubled, and now Darwish had to prove that he was an Arab, after Beirut rejected the Palestinians and had them deported. The situation of the Palestinians in the 1980s, which Darwish wrote about in his famous poem, “Oh my father, I am Yusuf,” reminded them that the Arab world had betrayed the Palestinians in 1948, and that the Arab world had forgotten the Palestinians who remained in Israel until 1967.

Darwish wrote “Identity Card” in 1964, when he was a member of the Israeli Communist Party. The poem is directed at an Israeli government official, perhaps from the military government, who symbolizes the Jewish-Israeli collective. The Israeli official is the poet’s adversary and interlocutor and the poet raises his Palestinian voice in an attempt to intimidate:

Write down!  
I am an Arab  
And the number of my [identity] card is fifty thousand  
And eight is the number of my children  
And the ninth... will come after the summer!  
Does this make you angry?<sup>lxii</sup>

Darwish provocatively repeats the question, “Does this make you angry?” and the equally provocative demand, “Write down! / I am an Arab,”<sup>lxiii</sup> and as a result focuses the reader on the poet’s demand from his Israeli interlocutor. The poem is one of response and of dialogue, which according to Darwish is a translation of a dialogue that originally took place in Hebrew. The poem concludes with future heroism and a warning to the current victor: “Beware, beware.. of my hunger / And my anger!”<sup>lxiv</sup> In this sense, the poem is representative of Darwish’s early writing, in which the bravery that is not always expressed in reality finds expression in poetry.

Darwish’s comments about the protests in Israel against the First Lebanon War, and his reactions to the protest poetry that appeared in Hebrew are illuminating: “I didn’t rejoice over the demonstrations in Tel Aviv, which continue to rob us of all our roles. From them the

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killer and the victim. From them the pain, and the cry, the sword, and the rose; the victory, and the defeat.”<sup>lxv</sup>

Israel’s total appropriation of history and of world attention, as occupier and as the critic of the occupation, did not even leave Darwish the stance of protest or the narrative of defeat, and thus even Hebrew poetry besieged him and limited his possibilities:<sup>lxvi</sup>

For our sake they shouted, for our sake they cried; ... Is there anything more cruel than this absence: that you should not be the one to celebrate your victory or the one to lament your defeat? That you should stay offstage and not make an entrance except as a subject for others to take up and interpret... Scores of Hebrew poems, but no Arabic poems, address the siege of Beirut and protest the massacre. From them the sin, and from them the forgiveness. From them the killing, and the tears. From them the massacres, and the justice of the courts.<sup>lxvii</sup>

There is very little room left for the Arabic poet, for Darwish himself, whose right to object and tell a story has been besieged, and whose story as the defeated is told by others. This is the total loss protested in his writing when he sought to retain, at the very least, the right to tell the story of defeat.

These words are testimony to the tragic and paradoxical state of poetry in a state of siege, a state of siege that enthralled and continues to enthrall both Palestinian poetry and Israeli poetry, though of course not in a symmetrical manner since Israeli poetry has the privilege of often ignoring this siege. Poetry, which dreams of being an aesthetic or ethical voice, an eternal voice, raised above the present time, returns again and again to the context of political power relations, lacking the ability to abrogate or ignore them, even when it wants to write against history. Darwish’s stance was complex: on occasion he spoke about his desire to be translated into Hebrew and read in Hebrew as exemplified in his comments: “Israelis are not interested in teaching their students that there is a love story between an Arabic poet and this country. I would like them to read me only to enjoy my poetry, and not as a representative of the enemy.”<sup>lxviii</sup> However, it is important to remember that reading, and the dialogue with Darwish and with Arabic poetry in general that might and should develop in Hebrew poetry, does not break the state of siege in which we live, until we forget its beginning, until we forget its end, until we forget everything that preceded it and everything that may happen after it.

## NOTES

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- i This approach—which shifts the focus of research into Jewish modernisation processes at the turn of the twentieth century from specific spaces, towards an examination via spatial movements of people, capital, and knowledge—is the basis for a number of historical research studies published in recent years, including: Alroi (2008), Chomsky (2010), and Stien (2008).
- ii This claim is based, among other things, on the work of Chakrabarty (2000) and Talal Asad (1993), and their critical analysis of universalisation processes in Europe, in which they position these as a static and objective analytical category with which to examine historical and social changes.
- iii On the enlightenment in North Africa, which also involved Judeo-Arabic, see: Tsur (2003; 2011), and Tobi (2000).
- iv The Hebrew enlightenment circles that sprouted throughout the Russian Empire during the nineteenth century took root within local Jewish and imperial contexts. For more on the development of the Hebrew enlightenment in the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century, see Zelkin (2000). On comparisons with the Jewish enlightenment in Germany, see Feiner (1995).
- v The most prominent of these societies was *Mekize Nirdamim*, established in 1862 by Jewish scholars of the Wissenschaft des Judentums, which published primary works of the Jews of medieval Spain. The society focused mainly on publishing and annotating the medieval poetry of Spain, a process that was at the centre of the argument between Shaul Abdallah Yosef and different personalities connected to this society, as we discuss later in the chapter.
- vi On the relation of the Wissenschaft circle to the elements of Arabic language and culture present in the heritage of Spain, see: Funkenstein (1991), Raz-Krakotzkin (1998), Schorsch (1989), Tobi (2000), and Drori (1988).
- vii Abdallah Yosef’s scholarship and personality have not yet been properly researched. In addition to the article about him published by David Yellin in 1936, there are a number of more recent studies analysing his writings and scholarship: Hakak (2009), Tobi (2010), Tobi (2000), Ben-Yaakov (1985), and Gaon (1938).
- viii *Perah* was published as a Jewish-Arabic weekly in Calcutta at the end of the nineteenth century, and distributed throughout Iraqi-Jewish communities in India, China, and Iraq. See: Ben Yaakov (1985); Avisur (1992).
- ix His book *Givat Shaul*, which includes commentary on Yehuda Halevi, was published after his death by Shmuel Krauss, in 1923 in Vienna (Yosef 1923), in response to the *diwan* of Halevi edited by Chaim Brody and published by *Mekize Nirdamim* (Berlin: 1894, 1895, 1901).
- x *Mishbetzet Hatarshish: A Book of Commentary on Sefer Hatarshish* by Rabbi Moshe ibn Ezra, was published after the author’s death by Shmuel Krauss in Vienna in 1926, after Baron David Ginsburg had printed *Sefer Hatarshish* in 1886.
- xi He discovered the *diwan* of Tudros ben Joseph Abulafia, *The Garden of Parables and Riddles*, and wrote a commentary on it. After his death, David Yellin published the *diwan* together with the commentary (Abulafia 1932-1936).
- xii These poems appeared in Ben-Yaakov (1970).
- xiii Mainly in the newspapers *Perah* and *Magid Mesharim*, weeklies published in Judeo-Arabic in Calcutta in the 1880s and 1890s, and mainly distributed throughout the Iraqi-Jewish diaspora in India, China, and Iraq. For more about these, and about the Jewish press in Calcutta at the turn of the twentieth century, see: Ben-Yaakov 1985; Avisur 1992.
- xiv Letter from Shaul Yosef to Israel Iserl ben Moshe Goldblum, January 27, 1896, in Abulafia 1932-1936, part 2, 72 (quoted in Yellin 1937, 28).
- xv “Kol hasirim tahat hasher,” *Hatzfira* 1901, volume 245, in Hakak 2003, 243.
- xvi Shaul Yosef’s dispute with the Wissenschaft circle is analysed at length in Yellin (1937) and Hakak (2003), and more partially in Tobi (2000).
- xvii Yosef, “Letter to Sokolow,” quoted in Yellin (1937, 22).
- xviii Yosef, *Hatzfira*, November 5, 1901: 3.
- xix Yosef, “Letter to David Yellin,” quoted in Yellin 1937: 15.
- xx The activities of Shaul Yosef as a trader in colonies of the British Empire has been ignored in existing studies of his work.
- xxi The description in the research of these writers, researchers, and translators as “the Jerusalemite group,” which became widely accepted, is itself problematic, creating a localisation of a much wider project. Although most of these individuals were indeed native Jerusalemites, and worked contemporaneously in the city for a time, most of them moved on to, and worked in, other places, and formed a broad ideology regarding Jewish nationalism and modern Jewish culture.
- xxii Meyuchas proposed Arabic as a basis for children’s literature and popular literature, which were so lacking in Hebrew. See Bezalel (2008, 356).

- xxiii For more on the group see Berlovitz (1996); Yardeni (1969); Evri (2014); Evri (2016).
- xxiv See the quotations from Abdallah Yosef in the previous chapter. Similar sentiments are expressed by Avraham Shalom Yahuda (1946) and David Yellin (1975).
- xxv The memory of Andalusia also featured in the Arabic *Nahda* renaissance movement, and gained much prestige as a model of a glorious Arab past to be returned to. See for example Evri (2016) on Yahuda's speech in Arabic on Andalusia in Jerusalem.
- xxvi "The Book of Rafael is the name of the book which will describe the life of the last Sephardic mystic hero of the dying *Beit El* Sephardic Hasidic sect in Jerusalem" (Bension 1928).
- xxvii On Yehuda Burla's later attempt to deviate from this pattern in his later novel *The Journeys of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi*, and his writing in the *maqama* style, see Behar (2013).
- xxviii Bension's first book, *Hilula*, was published first in German, and only later in Hebrew. It agreed with romantic trends in Orientalism, and with the Pan-Asian or Pan-Oriental approaches that saw all kinds of religion/spirituality/mysticism in the "East" or in Asia as being essentially one.
- xxix An excellent example of the Pan-Asian approach adopted by Asia itself during this period is the work of the Japanese scholar Okakura Kakuzo (1903), *The Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan*. For Kakuzo, the pan-Asian vision spread from Japan, via China, to India, but did not include the Middle East.
- xxx Bension had undertaken a fundraising mission to the Far East on behalf of the United Israel Appeal.
- xxxi In the Jerusalem of Bension's adolescence there lived Jews who spoke Judeo-Arabic, Ladino, and Yiddish, while Hebrew was in the first stages of the attempts to make it a spoken language among Palestine/Land of Israel Jews.
- xxxii Bension sees the three great works of Judaism as having a particular geographic connection: the Bible as a work of Judea; the Talmud as a work of Babylon; and the Zohar as a work of Spain (Bension 1932, 12).
- xxxiii Bension shared the complex relationship with the West seen in Tagore's own experience as a writer of Bengali-Indian literature: educated in Britain between the ages of 17 and 19, he himself translated some of his works into English at a later time, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, and travelled and lectured widely throughout the world.
- xxxiv "Present absentees," also known as "internally displaced Palestinians," is a term that refers to Palestinians who were displaced during or after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War but remained within the borders that today constitute the Israeli State. For further reference, see: David Grossman, *Sleeping on a Wire: Conversations with Palestinians in Israel*, translated by Haim Watzman, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993).
- xxxv Salman Masalha, epilogue to the Hebrew translation of *Memory for Forgetfulness*, p. 161. The English translation does not include the epilogue.
- [Between two halves of the *tapuz - Ben shnei hatzai ha*, Qasim-Samih alMahmoud Darwish and xxxvi orange], trans. and ed. by Hannah Amit-Kochavi (Tel Aviv: Mifras Publishing House, 1991), 19. The quotation cited here is taken from the Hebrew translation and translated into English by Esther Hecht.
- xxxvii Mahmoud Darwish, "The Eternity of Cactus," in *Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?* trans. Jeffrey Sacks (Beirut: Riad al-Rayyes Ltd, 1995; New York: Archipelago Books, 2006), 28. Citations refer to Archipelago edition.
- xxxviii Mahmoud Darwish, trans. Mohammad Shaheen, "Counterpoint: For Edward W. Said," *Almond Blossoms and Beyond* (Northampton, MA: Interlink Books, 2009), 94. The last line of the poem, "to share the story" appears in the original Arabic but does not appear in the published English translation.
- xxxix Mahmoud Darwish, *State of Siege*, trans. Munir Akash, Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010), p. 17.
- xl Mahmoud Darwish *Memory for Forgetfulness, August, Beirut, 1982*, trans. Ibrahim Muhawi (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), p. 9.
- xli "Mahmoud Darwish: 'Hayiti rotze she-Yisraelim yikrau oti'" [Mahmoud Darwish: 'I wish Israelis read my work'], *ynet.co.il*, by Merav Yudilovich, December 24, 2011, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/1,7340,L-1456849,00.html>.
- xliv Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness*, p. 7.
- xliv Darwish, *State of Siege*, p. 163.
- xliv Ibid., 135.
- xliv Ibid., 7.
- xlvi Ibid.
- xlvii "The exile is so strong within me, perhaps I will bring it home," Mahmoud Darwish, interview by Helith Yeshurun, *Hadarim* 12, 1996, 172-198; see 177 for exact quote.
- xlviii Ibid.



<sup>xlix</sup> The Bible's influence on Darwish was a popular topic in Israel. See: Ofra Bengio, preface to *K-parhe ha-seked o rahok yoter* [*Almond Blossoms and Beyond*] (Tel Aviv: Pitom Publishing with Sifrei Iton 77), 6. [Hebrew]. An Egyptian scholar, Rashad Al-Shami, discussed the influence of Bialik on Darwish's poetry but Darwish's position was that the Hebrew Bible and, to some degree, Hebrew literature belonged to him no less than they belonged to others. See Rashad Al-Shami, "Shā'ir al-Qawmiyyā al-Yahūdiyyā H□ ayyim Naḥman Bialik: Amīr al-Shu'arā' al-'Ibriyyīn fī al-'as□r al-H□ adīth," [The Jewish national poet Hayim Nahman Bialik ] (Cairo: al-Dār al-Thaqāfiyyā li-al-Nashr, 2006).

<sup>l</sup> Darwish, *State of Siege*, 9.

<sup>li</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>lii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>liii</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>liv</sup> Darwish, *Memory of Forgetfulness*, 9.

<sup>lv</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>lvi</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>lvii</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>lviii</sup> Darwish, *Almond Blossoms and Beyond*, 74-75.

<sup>lix</sup> Darwish, *Memory of Forgetfulness.*, 90.

<sup>lx</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>lxi</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>lxii</sup> Mahmoud Darwish, "Bitaqat huwiyya" [Identity Card], in *Leaves of Olives*, (First published, Haifa: 1964). The translation published here is from the Arabic original by Yonatan Mendel.

<sup>lxiii</sup> *Ibid.* The State of Israel has always preferred to talk about "Arabs" rather than "Palestinians." For example, in the dialogue between the heroine of "Bab el-Shams," the wife of Khalil, and the Israeli interrogators who want to know her husband's whereabouts, she complains that the Palestinians are the only Arabs in the world, whereas all the others are described by an additional adjective—Syrians, Egyptians, Lebanese—and thus the Palestinians became, paradoxically, connected to the writing of Palestinian prose throughout the Arab world, the fulfillers of pan-Arabism.

<sup>lxiv</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>lxv</sup> Darwish, *Memory of Forgetfulness*, 109-110.

<sup>lxvi</sup> As he saw it, the Israelis had always been afraid to lose their identity as victims, which was essential to Jews throughout their history, and bemoaned the destruction that they themselves had caused.

<sup>lxvii</sup> Darwish, *Memory of Forgetfulness*, 110.

<sup>lxviii</sup> Darwish, interview by Yudilovitz.