

Alef א

אל
el

ת Tav

א פאָעמע פון שפרה מבית משה וצפרה

a poem by shel raphen

Moss overcomes me
My sequins glisten
Vines wrap over ancient whispers
and offer old greetings

A hand of heather flower on my shoulder
Comforting but firm, the angels grasp

Hay fever comes upon me
My throat of beans ferments
For I am unprepared

Elul is a blanket on a cold morning
 After nights of ceaseless turning
Tishrei, my alarm clock

Elul, my hand as I hit snooze
Tishrei, the birds outside my window
 Holding hostage my dreams

Elul, my eyelids warm and deep
Tishrei, the sun bright red and
 Opening

Like a recording
Like I imagined it exactly
Easy to sit and wait
as though my soul were not returned this morning

Last year I longed for here
And I am not here now

A solid strike
A single note
 Me
I am harmonized

Yirah
 I am am a part of something larger
 I have a heavy weight to carry
But I am an ant
And we are strong

And we are starting
And hineini, I am here

I have carried this melody in all my journeys
Sitting hungry in folding chairs
Watching the sun set completely
Darker, surely over
 And yet
 Still setting

As it returns, I see it all so fast

Ufros aleinu sukkat sh'lomecha

I sang it as I sat hungry in the shower
The drain swirling as I spiralled
I prayed for survival

How far I've come
And now this melody has returned to me

We were shattered many times
All the shards are in our skull
Somewhere
Longing

We share one continuous
 Knotted and twisting
 Strange and divergent
Living brain and body

This divine dialectic
We are many,
 and one
We change,
 we are the same
We are distinct,
 and gestalt

Hineinu, somewhere new
Who will we be?
At our righteous crybaby core
Somehow: "me"

The warm embrace of tallis

Shroud, A canopy of peace

Care comes from unexpected places

And always from the eternally familiar

I have been teruah

I am shevarim

I long to be tekiah

Whole

Practice (k)now
Feel it in your body
What does it feel like

Fruit flies in your knees
Molten feet and earthquake hips

Longing to be there
 Dancing in the crowd
Unrequited love of movement

Let it go

As the book of memories open
That lonely child returns to me

Concerned only with very specific satisfying
sensations

I remember that satisfaction now

I remember how it smelled

I feel it in my arms

However simple and senseless

It means I have become more whole again

I stand in awe before the judge
Source of life, sovereign of the world
The ever-present eternal witness
What case is there to plead
What could be said that is not known

I will accept what I am dealt
All charges, all blessings, all curses,
All vows



Here is my vow
Consider me Ḥannāh

If you heal me
I will dedicate my body to you

If you give me strength
It is yours

I will fight to fix this broken world

So long as you continue
to have one-sided conversations
All of your endeavors will fail.

Listen
They are speaking to you
But you don't know their language yet
What are they saying?
What do they want and why?

G-d did not make us perfect
Like clay, we were formed into pottery
On even a master potter's bowl
You can trace the uneven curves of her fingers

G-d made us in her image
 Flawed, weak, and lonely
Perhaps we are the mug in which she pours hot tea
She holds it to feel warmth,
 for there are no hands like hers to hold

Ein od.

Separation is as sacred as wholeness is holy
Can I be whole when this hole dwells between my ribs?

She separates the waters from the earth
Dig and you may find water

Does this separation allow life to grow from my surface
Daisies from my hair?

Or am I cracked dirt.

Am I longing for rain?

Will I ever be mud?



Is it possible to do tzedakah
When all that is paid in this land is reparations?

Reparations are not charity, surely,
For they are owed

If I may defer my payments for just this year,
I will pay you back with interest

No, it's too late for that, isn't it
It's time this debt went into collections, isn't it

And so Beit Shammai said:

Raze down the palace, all of it.

The presence of those who have transgressed.
Invisible walls of space and air
The queen, on her throne of stars, says: "Rest.
For there are no perfect people there."

And so it is we who declare
By court of the earth and the sky
Together we sing and give prayer
Wherever transgressions may lie

False thrones of empire disagree, say
No crime may be forgiven, ever
Transitive sins will rot you
Quarantine crimes and sickness
Now, do it now, you must, now

We are ignoring them
The true sovereign commands us:
Tzdek Tzedek Tirdof, she says
We have realized now
That this requires another pursuit:
Tzedek Tzedek Neshane
Justice justice, we shall change

Who shall live and who shall die

Perhaps I

Bad will come to me this year

I will fail to be good

I am fragile

Reveal to me

Teach me

What do I do

How do I hit that mark

I feel lost, my shoes sink into the mud

And again I strike a tree.

And so I cried
For the death of Rabbi Akiva
The violence of Rome

This man, this patriarch,
who would surely find me abhorrent,
defective, mutant,
rebellious, heretic

And yet
Knowing or not
He died so I may live

L'dor v'dor
Over many years,
One man comes to have ten thousand offspring
And I, uncountable ancestors
So the blood of Akiva flows through me

We work to heal the world
Our afterlife is still but this world
Healed, in-tact, revived

So Akiva waits for me
Thirty spears in his chest:

“Do the work
so I may be revived.
I died so you may live
So you can continue the work.
What will you do so others may live?”

And so I

Sterile child, mutant child,
disabled, weak, estranged

Hold the weight of all those who died

From Rome to Pogrom

From Shoah to Nakba

From bashing to shooting

And war,

And illness

Tree of life

And so I

Sterile, mutant, toevah

Disabled, weak, estranged

Hold the weight of ensuring the lives of future
generations

So when the world is healed, life is revived

So that there is a world for them

How can I do a thing when I cannot stand

Cannot run from Roman soldiers

Cannot bear children

Cannot dance

But I know I must

“Love your G-d with all your soul

Even should that soul be taken”

The fire of pogroms is in my bones

So like Noah, do we now build an ark?
So like Abraham, do we bargain with fate?
Like Jonah, do we run from our duty?
Like Jonah, do we rally the ninevites?
Like Isaiah, do we describe a better world?
Like Micah, do we denounce the corrupt?

But I know words are not enough
I can barely grip the pen
 Which is surely weaker than a gun

Am I content only to push others to do this work for me?
To say:
 “No, Akiva, it is she who is your child”

O’G-d, give me time
 That precious finite jewel
So I may grow strong and serve you

All that I ask for
Is but one more year
Before you deem me unwilling to work
A year to become capable

Inscribe this for me and on my body it shall be inscribed

I long for comfort from a mother I never had

We are all G-d's children
but is G-d our mother?
It feels wrong to say
Offensive to my real mother
 Offensive to G-d

Could G-d truly fill that role?
It will always be an aching longing
 A scab I pick and pick

O'G-d, heal this scar

If I heal this scar, will I be whole?
Or am I only whole in the whole of me
 Scar and all
Whole in hurt and healing

Hold me, all of me
I will hold this and be held
It is a part of me

Care-seeking, love-seeking, attention-seeking,
family-seeking, G-d-seeking
I just need to stop my guts from leaking
To keep my hands dry as I draw back the string
Tension building, I try to relax as I
Let go
And hope I hit the mark



And then a divine voice came to me

V'amru elohim:

“Shut the fuck up and listen

Your disability is not an excuse

to avoid doing my work

It is only a barrier because you keep

knowingly hurting yourself

Doing things you know you cannot do

Straddling half-assed

tikkun olam and tikkun ha'guf

That is your excuse

to do avoid doing either of what I have commanded

One who is laying on the ground

cannot save the world

First, you must work on standing

So hineini

here I am commanding you:

Do your duty.

Work on your health.

You must.

So okay
I accept your vow
 Or whatever
I give you this year
 Build yourself up
And then I will have you
 As though I did not already
Then you will do tzedakah how others do
For now,
 You must do step one.

And so it is inscribed.”

And for a fleeting moment
When the gates closed
We were all perfect and good

Until soon,
as the fourth star appeared in the sky
We were normal,
It was chill
But back to work

The gates have closed and another year begins
We are already making mistakes
Already apologizing anew

But,
Let us wait a little while
Before we dig in much more

Special Thanks

תודות רבות

*kv
khane
briyah
haven
kiera
rabbi ari lev
rabbi mo
chaverut collective
kol tzedek
ace
tom
nire
hamlet
HKBH
Rabbi Akiva (I guess?)*

Patrons:

*Beatrix
Yatchi
chr
Estelle
Fillertrack
Heather Flowers
Jae
jess from online
Katherine
masklayer
Moritz Heiber
Sam Gregory
strong jess
wxcafe*

תש"פ