

Nasso

June 3, 2017

יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה וַיְשַׁמְרֶךָ . יֵאָר יְהוָה פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ וַיַּחַנְךָ . יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם .

Numbers 6:24 *May Adonai bless you and protect you. May Adonai deal kindly and graciously with you. May Adonai bestow Divine favor upon you and grant you peace.*



The priestly benediction originates in this week's Torah portion as the blessing Moses and Aaron were instructed to recite to the Israelite people. The intricacies of the text, still used today as a blessing, are unique and remarkable for this ancient Biblical text. Though this is not considered an actual poem found in the Torah - the classic ones being *Song of the Sea*, *Song at the Spring*, and *Moses Final Song*¹ - the shape of this blessing points to the fact that indeed it is poetry at its best. The phrases

build one upon the other from 3 words in the first line, to 5 in the second and finally 7 in the third. The number of letters go from 15 to 20 to 25. Furthermore, parallelism, so frequently found throughout other Biblical poetry, is present from line to line, each intentionally expanding on the previous verse. Clearly, this is not ordinary narrative or prose, rather it is an intentionally crafted set of verses. To date, archaeologists and historians consider it to be the oldest pre-exilic text to be found within Israel (from around 6th C BCE). The verse has been found on amulets that would have been worn by or buried with early Israelites. These amulets can be viewed today at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

What role does poetry play in Israel today? Hebrew University Professor Ruth Kartun-Blum asserts that contemporary Israeli poets have tried to distance themselves from Biblical traditions. She calls their efforts a form of subversive *midrash*. Whereas rabbinic sages would write *midrash* to substantiate and endorse Biblical text, Kartun-Blum says, "The modern Hebrew poet uses a new *midrashic* method that seeks to neutralize the Bible's sway over modern Israeli life."

In spite of Kartun-Blum's assertions, the art of contemporary Israeli poets is rich and varied. In no particular order, the names Shaul Tchernichovsky, Yehudah Amichai, Aharon Applefeld, David Avidan, Zelda, Dan Pagis, Esther Raab, Abba Kovner, Rachel Bluwstein, Chaim Guri, Yona Wallach, and Dahlia Ravikovitch may be familiar to people who have merely scratched the surface of poetry emerging from Zionism and Israel over the past 100 years.

¹ *Song of the Sea* 15:1-19:21 (Ex 15:1-19:21); *Song at the Spring* (Num 21:17); *Moses Final Song* (Deut 32:1-43)

There are certainly poets who reference the Bible, but it reflects the complex relationship Israelis have with their religious heritage, substantiating Kartun-Blum's claims. Poets struggle with their Biblical and liturgical roots, cultural traditions, as well as the often contested land on which they live. Israeli poets toy with language, helping Hebrew grow from its ancient roots to the modern, spoken language of today.

From the earliest days of statehood, Israeli poetry has reflected an inner world that is often emblematic of the turmoil of the outer world navigated by the authors and artists. We offer three examples of Israeli poetry for study and discussion. For information on each of the poets, and recent articles see 'Additional References.'

An Ode to Comradeship - Chaim Guri

Translation: Roni Eshel

The eve of autumn descends on the Negev
and lights the stars inaudibly
while the wind crosses the threshold
clouds hover above the road

For almost a year we hardly noticed
how times lingered through our fields
already one year passed, only a few of us are left
so many are not amongst us any longer

But we shall reminisce about them all
their rugged handsomeness and tussled forelocks
because such comradeship will never
let our hearts forget
as love sanctified by blood
you will return to us, and once again flourish

We carried you, comradeship without a word
grey, determined and silent
from the gory looming nights
friendship remains bright and lit

Comradeship filled by your youthful adherents
will smile again and move forward
because those who fell, swords in their hands,
left us with your vigor to be remembered

But we shall reminisce about them all

שנת כתיבה: 1948 - חיים גורי

עַל הַנֶּגֶב יוֹרֵד לַיִל הַסֶּתֶר
וּמִצִּיַּת כּוֹכָבִים חָרַשׁ חָרַשׁ
עֵת הָרוּחַ עוֹבֵר עַל הַסֶּף
עֲנָנִים מְהַלְכִים עַל הַדֶּרֶךְ.

כָּבֵר שָׁנָה. לֹא הִרְגָּשְׁנוּ כְּמַעַט
אֵיךְ עָבְרוּ הַזְּמַנִּים בְּשָׂדוֹתֵינוּ.
כָּבֵר שָׁנָה, וְנוֹתַרְנוּ מְעַט
מֵה רַבִּים שְׂאִינָם כָּבֵר בֵּינֵינוּ.

אֶךְ נִזְכֵּר אֶת כְּלָם:
אֶת יְפֵי הַבְּלוּרִית וְהַתְּאֵר –
כִּי רַעוּת שְׂכֹזֵאת לְעוֹלָם
לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת לִבְנוֹ לְשִׁכַּח.
אֶהְיֶה מְקַדְּשֵׁת בְּדָם
אֶת תְּשׁוּבֵי בֵּינֵינוּ לְפָרוֹחַ.

הִרַעוּת נִשְׂאֲנוֹךְ בְּלֵי מְלִים
אֶפְרָה עֵקֶשׁנִית וְשׁוֹתְקָת
מְלִילוֹת הָאֵימָה הַגְּדוֹלִים
אֶת נוֹתַרְתָּ בְּהִירָה וְדוֹלְקָת.

הִרַעוּת, כְּנִעְרִיךְ כְּלָם
שׁוֹב בְּשִׁמְךָ נִחְיֶיךָ וְנִלְכָה
כִּי רַעִים שֶׁנִּפְלוּ עַל חֶרְבְּכֶם
אֶת חֵינְךָ הוֹתִירוּ לְזִכָּר.

וְנִזְכֵּר אֶת כְּלָם...

HEART-TO-HEART PRAYER - David Avidan

Translation: Lisa Katz

Lord our god lord you knew
we didn't know a thing
make us a miracle now so we'll know what you knew
everything you'll know everything you'll think
everything you'll feel

make us a miracle now so we can make miracles
for ourselves and for others and for the lord our god
and don't limit our possibilities lord our god

more than you limited your own possibilities
and give us our own little world
that we'll create in six days and won't rest
on the seventh day more than a seventh of a day
and don't pity us lord our god
have pity on the little ones and the fools
pity on the foolish of nations

and give us the strength to be ourselves
lord our god the one who knew, didn't you
lord our god the one who heard, didn't you
lord our god you are the one, aren't you
and the lord our god is the lord our god
so give us the strength not to give up

and not to arouse pity unless needed
and even if needed lord because there is no need
lord our god who had no pity, did you
lord our god who won't be pitied, will you
give us a strong heart and an open mind
and don't think about us too much

blessed are you lord creator-of-humankind
you won't rest and you won't sleep my lord of hosts
blessed are you lord ever vigilant
blessed are you lord creator of humankind in his image
blessed are you my lord blessed of the blest
and the blessed mouth will bless and say amen

תפילה מלב אל לב - דוד אבידן

אֲדוֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲדוֹנָי אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ
שְׁאַנְחָנוּ לֹא יוֹדְעִים דְּבָר וַחֲצִי דְבָר
עֲשֵׂה לָנוּ גַם עַכְשָׁו שְׂגִדַּע כָּל מָה שְׂיָדַעְתָּ
כָּל מָה שְׂתִדַּע כָּל מָה שְׂתַחֲשָׁב
כָּל מָה שְׂתִרְגֵּשׁ

עֲשֵׂה לָנוּ גַם עַכְשָׁו שְׂנוּכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת נְסִים
לְמַעַן עֲצַמְנוּ וּלְמַעַן זוּלָתָנוּ וּלְמַעַן אֲדוֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וְאֵל תִּגְבִּיל אֲדוֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶת אִפְשָׁרוּיֹתֵינוּ
יֹתֵר מֵאֲשֶׁר הִגְבַּלְתָּ אֶת אִפְשָׁרוּיֹתֶיךָ

וְתֵן לָנוּ עוֹלָם קָטָן מִשְׁלָנוּ
שְׂנִבְרָא אוֹתוֹ בְּשֵׁשֶׁה יָמִים וְלֹא נִגְוַח
בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יֹתֵר מִשְׂבִּיעֵית הַיּוֹם

וְאֵל תִּרְחַם עָלֵינוּ אֲדוֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ
רַחֵם עַל הַקְּטָנִים וְעַל הַשּׁוֹטִים
רַחֵם עַל הָעַמִּים וְעַל הָאֲרָצוֹת

וְתֵן בָּנוּ כּוֹחַ לְהִיּוֹת אֲנַחְנוּ עֲצַמְנוּ
אֲדוֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ הֲלֵא אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ
אֲדוֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ הֲלֵא אַתָּה שְׂמַעְתָּ
אֲדוֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ הֲלֵא אַתָּה אַתָּה

וְאֲדוֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ הוּא אֲדוֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ
לָכֵן תֵּן בָּנוּ כּוֹחַ לֹא לְיֹתֵר
וְלֹא לְעוֹרֵר רַחֲמִים שְׁלֵא לְצָרְךָ
וְאִפְלוּ לְצָרְךָ כִּי אֵין אֲדוֹנָי צָרְךָ

אֲדוֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ הֲלֵא אַתָּה רַחֲמֵת
אֲדוֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְלֹא אַתָּה תִּרְחַם
תֵּן לָנוּ לֵב חֲזָק וּמוֹחַ פְּתוּחַ
וְאֵל תַּחֲשׁוּב עָלֵינוּ יֹתֵר מִדִּי

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדוֹנָי בּוֹרְאֵדָם
לֹא יָנוּם וְלֹא יֵישָׁן אֲדוֹנָי צְבָאוֹת
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדוֹנָי עַר לְתַמִּיד

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדוֹנָי בּוֹרְא אָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדוֹנָי מְבָרֵךְ מְבָרְכוֹת
וּפִי מְבָרֵךְ יְבָרֵךְ וְנֹאמֵר אָמֵן

All That and Me -Yona Wallach

Translation: Linda Zisquit

The house is standing, surrounded by...
around it are trees.
and I am not home,
I am not inside
(and so many days have passed
accumulated to years
all that and me are
momentarily identified).

Later we sense
as if being led
soon we may enter there
we shall feel pleasant
(how have we done so,
turning ourselves into fetuses?
is it us that wish
to be the ones who seek to reverse?
all that and me
momentarily identified).

We wish to be here
filled with desire to be entwined
we are close to all that
even feeling familial
(after all we have been the masters here
for lengthy periods.
Whatever was then, went by
leaving our hearts – an island – when nonsense dissolved
all that and me
momentarily identified).

כל זה ואני - יונה וולך

הבית עומד ומסביבו יש...
מסביבו יש עצים.
ואני לא בבית,
אני לא בפנים.
(ככה חלפו הרבה ימים
והצטברו לשנים.
כל זה ואני היננו
לרגעים מזוהים).

אחר כך אנחנו מרגישים
כאילו מובלים.
אנחנו עוד נכנס לשם,
יהיה לנו נעים.
(איך נתנו ככה
לעשות מעצמנו עוברים?
ובעצם אנחנו רוצים
להיות אלה ששבים?
כל זה ואני היננו לרגעים מזוהים).

אנחנו רוצים להיות פה,
ממש להיות ארוגים.
אנחנו לכל זה קרובים,
אפילו משפחתיים.
(הרי היינו אדונים פה
לזמנים ארוכים.
איך שלא היה הלך אז
לבנו אי אחרי הבלים.
כל זה ואני היננו
לרגעים מזוהים).

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the central idea of the poem?
2. What is the tone being conveyed by the author? Do you share that sentiment?
3. How does the poet use figurative language (similes, metaphors, personification, metonymy)?
4. What kind of imagery is employed in the poem?

5. Where does the poet reference Israel's history - both ancient and modern?

Additional References:

[Parody in Israeli Prayer Poems](#)

[The Flourishing of Post-Amichai Poetry](#) - Tablet Magazine Jan. 10, 2012

[Chaim Guri](#)

[David Avidan](#)

[Yona Wallach](#)