

Should You Seek In Your Heart To Know
C. N. Bialik

Should you seek in your heart to know the fount
Whence your slain brethren drew forth
On evil days such strength, supreme spirit,
To go forth with gladness to death, to bare the neck
Before the sharpened knife, the drawn hatchet,
To mount the pyre, to leap into the flame,
And at "One" to die the death of the martyr—

Should you seek in your heart to know the fount
Whence your downtrodden brethren drew forth,
'Twixt hellish cliffs, deep crevasses and scorpions—
God's consolation, courage, strength, patience
And an iron will to bear all burdens,
A shoulder bent to a life of loathing and filth,
To endure to no end, without limit, with no purpose—

Should you wish to see the bosom into which were gathered
All the tears of your people, its heart, its soul, its bitter cry—
The abode into which, like the fierce rush of waters, poured its outcry,
An outcry that troubles the nethermost depths of hell itself,
Groans that bring even Satan's skin to crawl in fear,
Wailing enough to burst rock asunder, but not the hard heart of the enemy
More rigid than rock, harsher than Satan himself—

If you still wish to know the bastion,
The peak to which your ancestors fled with their souls' uplift,
Their Torah, their holy of holies—for safekeeping;
If you seek to discover the hiding place where safely—
Secure in its purity—was preserved your people's prodigious spirit,
Which, even gorged with a lifetime of shame, spit and disgrace,
In hoary old age still shed no disgrace on its youthful appeal—

If you yearn to know that merciful mother,
The aged mother, still loving and faithful,
Who with great pity collected the tears of her wandering son,
Who with great sorrow redirected his steps,
And who, upon his return, wearied and shamed,
Still takes him in and wipes his tears,
Beneath her wings, in her lap, still lulls him to sleep—

Oh! Striving brother! If you know not all these—
Then turn to the schoolhouse, the ancient, old *shul*,

On long, desolate wintry nights,
On burning, blazing summer days,
In the heat of the day, at dawn or eventide,
And should God have left there some remnant, a leftover trace—
Then perhaps even now you will see for yourself
Overshadowed by walls, obscured by the fog,
Huddled in one of its corners, perhaps by its stove
Some leftover stalks, a shade of all that was lost,
Some dark-visaged Jews, with faces withered and pocked,
Jews of the exile, still bearing its brunt,
Dispelling their misery in a worn page of Talmud,
Forgetting their plight in a Midrash of old
Easing their burdens in the singing of Psalms—
(Alas! How disgraceful and appalling must this image appear
To a stranger with no understanding!)—
Then your heart will inform you that your footfall has led you
To the threshold of our soul's dwelling place,
And your eye will behold our life's teeming treasure.

And if God has not taken from you all remnant of holiness
And has yet left some consolation deep in your heart,
And if some true ray of hope for days better than these
Still emerges at times from the tunnels of darkness obscuring His ways—
Then know this and remember, Oh! my tormented brother!
That it is only a leftover spark, a fleeting trace of an ember,
Which by some miracle escaped from the great fire
That your ancestors left burning on their eternal altar.

And who knows if not but that the rivers of their tears
Ferried us over, carried us here,
But that with their prayers they besought our existence;
And that with their death they decreed us our life —
Life to no-end!

(1897)

tr. BDH

מנגד \ רחל המשוררת

קשוב הלב. האזן קשבת:

הבא? היבוא?

בכל צפיה

יש עצב נבו.

זה מול זה -- החופים השונים

של נחל אחד.

צור הגזרה:

רחוקים לעד.

פרש כפים. ראה מנגד

שמה -- אין בא,

איש ונבו לו

על ארץ רבה.

Beyond

By Rachel (Bluwstein)

Translated by BDH

The heart is rapt, intent is the ear:
Is he coming? Will he come?
Within each expectation,
The sadness of Nebo.

This across that—two are the shores
Of one stream.
The harsh decree:
Forever remote.

Hands extended, eyes cast beyond
There—but no one is there,
Each man and his Nebo
Across the wide span of earth

(Winter, 1930)

Barren

Rachel (Bluwstein)
Tr. BDH

A son, if only I had one! A little child,
With black curly hair, and smart.
To grasp his hand and slowly walk
Along paths in the garden.
A boy.
Little.

Uri I'll call him, Uri my child!
Tender and clear the short name.
A fragment of light.
My dark-tanned child,
"Uri!"—
I'll call!

I shall yet pour out my bitterness as Rachel the Mother.
I shall yet pray as Hannah at Shiloh.
I shall yet wait
For him.

(1927)

רחל

הן דמה בדמי זורם
הן קולה בי רן
רחל הרועה צאן לבן
רחל אם האם

ועל כן לי הבית צר
והעיר זרה
כי היה מתנופף סודרה
לרוחות המידבר

ועל כן את דרכי אוחז
בביטחה כזאת
כי שמורים ברגלי זיכרונות
מני אז מני אז!

Rachel

By Rachel (Bluwstein)

Translated by BDH

See, her blood in my blood courses
Hear, her voice within me sings
Rachel, herding the sheep of Laban
Mother of mothers—Rachel

Thus is the house too taut for me
The city so strange
For her shawl would soar
To the desert winds

And thus I grasp my path
With such sureness
For in my feet are kept memories
Of years long since passed!