



CCAR and HUC-JIR
Joint Commission for Sustaining Rabbinic Education



Sefirah Study

Portraits of the Holy Land: Antiquity to the Present
April 25 – June 13, 2005

Week 2 – Intro Fulfillment and Healing in Zionist Poetry Dr. Stanley Nash

Study Materials:

A. Introduction

B. Primary Sources:

Please select 1-3 of the following poems to study this week. You may want to select one from each of the four poets, or, focus in on one of the longer ones more deeply. It is up to you.

1. Shaul Tchernichovsky's "I Believe"
2. Rachel Bluvstein's "Rachel"
3. Rachel Bluvstein's "Only of Myself Have I Known How to Tell"
4. Rachel Bluvstein's "To My Land"
5. Rachel Bluvstein's "A Plaintive Song"
6. Rachel Bluvstein's "Kinneret"
7. Rachel Bluvstein's "And perhaps did these things never happen"
8. Rachel Bluvstein – Biographical notes
9. Isaac Lamdan's "Masada"
10. Uri Zev Greenberg's "Miriam's Well"

For additional biographies of the above poets, please see the course website.

C. Bibliography:

1. Sholom J. Kahn, "The Poetry of Rachel," *Ariel: A Quarterly Review of Arts and Letters in Israel*, No. 38, 1975, pp. 5-30.
2. *The Ploughwoman: Memoirs of the Pioneer Women of Palestine: Memoirs of the Pioneer Women of Palestine*, edited by Rachel Katznelson Shazar (2nd ed. 1975; newer edition also available). Read particularly the chapter entitled "Among Writers," p. 216-225.
3. Reuven Kritz, *Shirei Rachel, Shirat Rachel, Rachel*

A. Introduction:

The themes of fulfillment and healing have suffused Zionist poetry at least from the Middle Ages when Yehudah Halevi proclaimed "My heart is in the east/ and I am in the far reaches of the west" ("libbi ba-mizrah va-ani be-sof ma'arav"). The physical exile of the Diaspora occasionally led to the Jew's feeling himself in an existential exile from his true self and potential. For the intellectuals of the Haskalah, return to the Bible and return to Zion—at least as a utopian vision and ideal—frequently dovetailed as a corrective to the narrowness of ghetto life and Talmudic rigidity. Then in the late 19th century there was a young Hebrew poet and artist, M.Z. Mane, ill with tuberculosis and ostracized by his fundamentalist family for daring to paint human images, who wrote a moving poem entitled "Healing for My Life" ("Marpe le-Nafshi"). Together with the Land of Israel springing back to vibrant, healthy national life, Mane envisioned an equally miraculous healing and rejuvenation for himself.

The first text we will examine is Tchernichovsky's poem beginning with the famous words "Sachaki Sachaki" "Laugh, laugh at my dreams," well known for its lilting melodic rendition as a Hebrew folk song and in Gates of Prayer. In its melodramatic effusiveness it reminds us of Emma Lazarus's "The Great Colossus." Like that poem from the Statue of Liberty, Tchernichovsky's poem, often translated as "Credo" or "I Believe" lavishly encapsulates the ideals of a new era, a new dawn for the combined hopes of mankind and its "chosen" national exemplar. Note how Tchernichovsky's poem sets forth an agenda of revolutionary libertarian possibilities while simultaneously prophesying the emergence of a new "Hebraic" man and ideal, "dor ba-Aretz omnan chai," a generation with its feet solidly both "on the earth" and "in the Land"—terrestrial, not ethereal, nationally focused not dispersed and deracinated (uprooted and/or rootless).

Then moving to Rachel Bluvstein we shall see an even more personalized envisioning of Israel's personally redemptive, healing and "purifying" potential. The image of this ailing and lonely woman bathing in the Kinneret and emerging "purified," as she writes in her famous song "ve-ulai," has resonances on the personal and national level. Rachel's generation and cohort (the Second Aliyah, 1905-1914) were in the thrall of A. D. Gordon's "Religion of Labor." The return to the soil and to physical labor was seen a curative personal and national regimen of almost mystical dimensions, a kind of "group therapy" for the Jew, who in A.D. Gordon's view, was alienated from himself.

As we read through the nine poems selected for study, culminating in Isaac Lamdan's masterpiece of the Third Aliyah (roughly 1919-1929) and Uri Zvi Greenberg's post-Holocaust lament, we will highlight dimensions of psychological and psychosocial succor and solace in Zionist poetry and in the Zionist dream.

B. Study Materials:**1. Shaul Tchernichovsky's "I Believe" - אָנִי מֵאֲמִין מֵאֵת שְׁאוּל טְצֵרְנִיחֹבְסְקִי**

Laugh, laugh at the dreams
Of which I the dreamer speak.
Laugh that I believe in man,
For I still believe in you.

For my soul still aspires to freedom,
I have not sold it to a golden calf,
For I still believe both in man,
And in his spirit, a mighty spirit.

His spirit shall throw off the shackles of folly,
It shall elevate him to the highest heights;
The laborer shall not die from hunger,
Freedom--for the soul, a loaf of bread for the poor.

Laugh that I also believe in friendship,
I believe that I will yet find a heart,
A heart--that my hopes are its hopes too,
Feeling happiness, understanding pain.

I will believe in the future as well,
Although that day may be far away,
But come it shall--then will one nation
To another bear greetings of peace and blessing.

Then my nation too flourish once more,
And in the Land a generation will arise,
Whose iron chains will be removed from them,
In utmost immediacy they will see the light.

They will live, love, act, do,
A generation *on the Land* (or: *on the earth*) truly living,
Not in the future, some heavenly future--
A life of spirit (or: ethereal life) for them will not suffice.

Then a new song will one poet sing,
To the beautiful and sublime his heart sensitive;
For him, for that young poet, from upon my grave
They will gather flowers for his laurel wreath.¹

שְׂחָקִי, שְׂחָקִי עַל הַחֲלוּמוֹת,
זוֹ אָנִי הַחֹלֵם שָׁח.
שְׂחָקִי כִּי בְּאָדָם אֲאֲמִין,
כִּי עוֹדֵנִי מֵאֲמִין בָּךְ.

כִּי עוֹד נַפְשִׁי דְרוֹר שׁוֹאֶפֶת,
לֹא מְכַרְתִּיהָ לְעֵגֶל-פֶּזוּ,
כִּי עוֹד אֲאֲמִין גַּם בְּאָדָם,
גַּם בְּרוּחֹ, רוּחַ עֵז.

רוּחוֹ יִשְׁלִיךְ כְּבָלֵי הַבֶּל,
יְרוּמְמֵנוּ בְּמַתִּי-עַל;
לֹא בְרָעַב יָמוּת עוֹבֵד,
דְרוֹר--לְנַפֶּשׁ, פֶּת--לְדָל.

שְׂחָקִי כִּי גַם בְּרַעוּת אֲאֲמִין,
אֲאֲמִין כִּי עוֹד אֶמְצָא לֵב,
לֵב--תְּקוּוֹתֵי גַם תְּקוּוֹתֶיךָ,
יְחוּשׁ אֲשֶׁר, יִבִּין כְּאֵב.

אֲאֲמִינָה גַם בְּעַתִּיד,
אִף אִם יִרְחַק זֶה הַיּוֹם,
אִךְ בּוֹא יְבוֹא--יִשְׂאוּ שְׁלוֹם
אֲזוּ וּבְרַכָּה לְאֵם מְלֵאָם.

יָשׁוּב יִפְרַח אֲזוּ גַם עַמִּי,
וּבְאַרְצֵךְ יִקוּם דּוֹר,
בְּרִזָּל כְּבָלָיו יוֹסֵר מִנּוּ,
עֵין-בְּעֵין יִרְאֶה אוֹר.

יְחִיהֵ, יֶאֱהַב, יַפְעֵל, יַעֲשֵׂה,
דּוֹר בְּאַרְצֵךְ אֶמְנֵם חַי.
לֹא בְּעַתִּיד, בְּשָׁמַיִם--
חַיִּי-רוּחַ לוֹ אֵין דַּי.

אֲזוּ שִׁיר חֲדָשׁ יִשִּׁיר מְשׁוֹרֵר,
לִיפִי וְנִשְׁגָּב לְבוֹ עֵר;
לוֹ לְצַעִיר, מֵעַל קִבְרֵי
פְּרָחִים יִלְקְטוּ לְיוֹר.

¹Tchernichovsky believed he had been born too early, when the parochial arbiters of Jewish culture could not yet espouse the humanistic and universalistic ideals that he believed to be inherent in Judaism. In the last stanza of the poem, it is as if Tchernichovsky, a pantheist poet who expressed belief in reincarnation, foresaw a time when a

Questions and Notes:

1. The poem was written in 1894 and published in 1897. To what degree does it reflect utopian socialist ideals and the ideals of the burgeoning Zionist movement. What is its link to the ideals of the French Revolution?
2. Hillel Barzel, Professor of Hebrew Literature at Bar-Ilan provides an original reading of this poem in his book. Working from the (unproven) hypothesis that Tchernichovsky wrote this poem as a kind of imitation of the famous מאמין אני of Maimonides with its 13 principles of faith, Barzel lists 13 ideological points, the last of which is "the attitude towards the dead" in the last stanza of the poem, which is supposed to be a stark counterpoint to Maimonides' ...משיח. Do you think there is any basis for this juxtaposition? Do you think that the poet's concept of life after death is suggestive of תחיית המתים in the messianic era? If the poet's utopian vision has a messianic ring to it, is this resonance "other-worldly" in any way?
3. Do the stanzas of the poem fall into a natural division into two parts? Explain. What sermon/midrashic application suggests itself in the phrase לא מכרתיה לעגל-פז? Note, too, the memorable rhyme with the word ע. The word דרור has a famous association with the word's appearance in Leviticus in the verse ...בארץ. Explain how a rabbi can easily link this association with American ideals of liberty.
4. The line דרור--לנפש, פת--לדל has the ring of a marching slogan that might appear on a placard. Explain how you might make the Hebrew relevant to your congregants.
5. The phrase כבלי הבל can evoke Biblical associations (Adam's son and the meaning of the word in its context). Explain links to Genesis and Kohelet. What can הבל הבלים הכל הבל suggest. Is Tchernichovsky's worldview reminiscent of the biblical associations, or is it the opposite?
6. The phrase חיי רוח can have multiple associations. רוח can, of course, be positive, but the prophetic usage of רוח רודף קדים is clearly pejorative. Also, does the German and Yiddish term *luftmensch* call anything to mind in this context?
7. The Israeli generation of authors immediately following the 1948 War of Independence referred to itself as דור בארץ. What are the multiple associations of this term for this sabra generation?
8. What is there about Tchernichovsky's מאמין אני (שחקי, שחקי) that led the authors of Reform liturgy to include it in the prayer book? Note that at least one teacher in our movement, who came from a traditional background, said upon hearing "Sahqi Sahqi" sung in our New York sanctuary that Tchernichovsky would "be turning over in his grave" if he knew that his poem was being recited as part of the liturgy? In what way does this extreme reaction reflect a rather

rejuvenated generation of Jews rooted in an "earth-bound" this worldly orientation would begin to acclaim Tchernichovsky's vision. A young poet of that generation would so articulate Tchernichovsky's vision as to virtually be his reincarnation and hence be crowned with a victorious--a virtual "Tchernichovsky Prize" winning--laurel wreath of flowers gathered from the poet's grave.

fixed and inflexible view of the poet? Bear in mind that Tchernichovsky was known variously as the Hebrew poet of Paganism or the Hebrew poet of Hellenism. To understand this one must read his poem "Facing the Statue of Apollo."² This poem depicts the poet bowing down to the statue of the Greek God, but also seeing many aspects of Apollo in the ancient Jewish God of the desert, Shaddai. The poem ends with the notorious line about what the rabbis did to "emasculate" and alter the ancient God of the Israelites *ויאסרהו ברצועות של תפילין* (And they bound him with the straps of (their) phylacteries). In light of the poet's assault on traditional Jewish practice and belief, explain how his views could have been found to be palatable for the Reform liturgists.

² Appearing in Eisig Silberschal, *Shaul Tchernichovsky* and Shalom Spiegel, *Hebrew Reborn* (See the chapter entitled "The Bard of Hebrew Paganism," as well as, most importantly, the last chapter of Spiegel's book.)

2. Rachel Bluvstein's "Rachel" - רחל" מאת רחל בלובשטיין

Behold her blood must be flowing in mine,
Her voice is singing inside me--
Rachel the shepherdess of Laban's sheep,
Rachel -- the mother of mother's.

הֵן דָּמָה בְּדָמֵי זֹרָם,
הֵן קוֹלָהּ בִּי כֵן -
רַחֵל הַרוֹעֶה צֹאן לָבָן,
רַחֵל - אִם הָאֵם.

And for that reason,
I (can) hold to my path
With such surefootedness (confidence, stamina, agility)
Because preserved in my legs are memories
From way back then, way back then!

וְעַל כֵּן הַבַּיִת לִי צָר
וְהַעִיר - זָרָה,
כִּי הִזָּה מִתְנוּפָף סוּדָרָה
לְרוּחוֹת הַמְדַבְּרִי;

For that reason, a house is too confining (narrow) for me
The city (life)--(feels) alien,
Because her (Mother Rachel's) scarf used to wave
In the desert winds;

וְעַל כֵּן אֶת דַּרְכֵי אֲחֹז
בְּבִטָּחָה כְּזֹאת,
כִּי שְׂמֹרִים בְּרַגְלֵי זְכָרוֹנוֹת
מִנִּי אָז, מִנִּי אָז!

Questions and notes:

- Note: the Hebrew word הֵן means the same as הִנֵּה; it expresses a sense of wonderment. Note the rhyme scheme A-B-B-A. According to Kritz, this is a subtler rhyme scheme. What does it accomplish? Note the choice of the word כֵּן instead of שָׁר for the sake of the rhyme.
- To what degree do you accept the notion of "reincarnation" (נְשִׁמוֹת) (גִּלְגוּל) in this context?
- What do you make of this as a "political" claim to Jewish possession of the Land?
- How does the poet "prove" her surprising opening statement? (Note the wistful psychic "proof" in the second stanza.)
- In the third stanza what are the two possible meanings of the word דַּרְךְ-דַּרְכֵי that make this image so graphic and poignant?
- The word בְּבִטָּחָה could also have two possible translations or nuances. What are they, and how do both work well within the poem? The use of the archaism מִנִּי instead of מִן accomplishes something here. Explain.

3. R. Bluvstein's "Only about myself" - דק על עצמי מאת רחל בלובשטיין

Only about myself have I known how to tell
 My world is as narrow as the world of an ant
 My load, too, I have heaped on like her
 A load too great and heavy for my meager shoulder.

רק על עצמי לספר ידעתי:
 צר עולמי כעולם נמלה,
 גם משאי עצמתי כמוה
 רב וכבד מכתפי הדלה.

My path, too -- like hers to the tree top --
 Has been path of pain, a path of toil.
 The hand of giants, malicious and sure (sadistic and calculating)
 A hand making sport (of my pain and frustration) has
 thwarted it (my path) and made it futile.

גם את נרפי - בנרפה אל צמרת-
 נרף מכאוב ונרף עצמי,
 יד ענקים זדונה ובוטחת,
 יד מתבדחת שמה לאל.

A hidden (lurking) fear of this hand of giants
 Has made all my routes (in life) crooked and filled with tears.
 Why have you called me, O shores of wonder?
 Why have you lied (to me), O distant lights?

כל ארחותי הליו והדמיע
 פחד טמיר מיד ענקים.
 למה קראתם לי, חופי הפלא?
 למה כזבתם, אורות רחוקים?

Questions and notes:

1. Why would the poet compare herself to an ant? Is it the same analogy to the ant as one finds in Proverbs Chapter 6:7-9?³ Explain the much different analogy in this poem.
2. Rachel chose the path of physical labor as her "religion." This idea is linked to the personality of A. D. Gordon and his "religion of labor" that was to redeem the Jewish psyche from the negative habits developed through the centuries of *galut*. In what way does Rachel's frailty thus have a so much more tragic quality than if she were simply unable, say, to help out with the harvest on a kibbutz? To what degree do you personally subscribe to the ideas of return to nature and to the soil that arose in Russia in the 1870s and were so influential on the development of the Zionist ethos? What is the link to the bible, and what are your own feelings about this ethos and its possible relevance to American Jews?
3. In item number 3 note that the Hebrew *רב וכבד מכתפי הדלה* means the same as the modern Hebrew comparative using the word *yoter*. Also note the sadistic imagery in the second stanza and compare (as Kritz does) to the line from Shakespeare's King Lear: As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods,/ They kill us for their sport.
4. The weight described in the poem is not just physical. The subject of the poem is the burden of unfulfilled aspirations and the psychological weight that this produces. Explain how this plays out in the poem and how the ideas of the poem --one of the most cited of all of Rachel's works - -might be applicable in counseling situations.
5. In the first and second lines of the third stanza in the Hebrew, what is the subject, what is the predicate and what is the object. Rewrite the sentence in a more straightforward fashion in Hebrew.

³Proverbs: "Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise; Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provides her bread in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. How long will you sleep, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?"

4. Rachel Bluvstein's "To My Land" - אֶל אֶרְצִי מֵאֵת רַחֵל בְּלוֹבֶשְׁטֵין

I have not sung to you, O my land,
Nor glorified your repute
With heroic exploits,
With the spoils of battles;
Only a tree have my hands planted
On the quiet shores of the Jordan.
Only a trail have my feet trodden down
Across (the) fields.

Indeed, very meager,
I know this, Mother (Land, Earth),
Very meager, indeed
Is the offering (summarized in song) of your daughter;
Only the voice of shouting for joy
On the day that the light shines brightly,
Only a crying in secret places
(Lamenting) over your downtrodden state (poverty).

לֹא שָׁרְתִי לָךְ, אֶרְצִי,
וְלֹא פָאֲרָתִי שְׂמִיךְ
בְּעֲלִילוֹת גְּבוּרָה,
בְּשָׁלֵל קְרָבוֹת;
רַק עֵץ - יְדֵי נָטְעוּ
חֹפֵי יַרְדֵּן שׁוֹקֵטִים.
רַק שְׁבִיל כְּבִשׁוֹ רַגְלֵי
עַל פְּנֵי שְׂדוֹת.
אֲכֵן נְלָה מְאֹד -
יִדְעָתִי זֹאת, הָאֵם,
אֲכֵן נְלָה מְאֹד
מִנְחַת בַּתְּךָ;
רַק קוֹל תְּרוּעַת הַגִּיל
בְּיוֹם יְגֵה הָאוֹר,
רַק בְּכִי בַּמְסֻתָּרִים
עָלִי עֲנִיךְ.

Questions and Notes:

1. According to Kritz this is Rachel's most popular poem, the epitome of the theme of love of the Land of Israel.
2. The word פָּאֲרָתִי in line 2 should remind you of the words תַּפְאָרַת and the prayer שׁוֹכֵן עַד לְפָאֵר לְרוֹמֵם לְהַדְר לְבָרֵךְ לְעֵלָה וּלְקַלֵּס preceding. Explain connotation.
3. The poet seems to be belittling herself. However, side-by-side with her humility one sense that she is deprecating the male/masculine/macho aspects of warfare. What do you sense more in the poem--inferiority or quiet pride and self-justification? Explain. Bear in mind that the word עֲלִילָה suggest boasting over one's exploits in tales of prowess and glory.
4. Note the poet's personification of the Land as Mother. Those who place much emphasis on Rachel's biography note that Rachel's mother died when she was only 13 and that her relations with her stepmother were very bad. Also, her lack of romantic love could have influenced her somewhat ironic depiction of traditionally male exploits and her favoring of more intimate and gentle relationships. Do you feel that this plays out in the poem?
5. In the last 4 lines of the poem the poet uses very stark and contrasting language (תְּרוּעַת גִּיל - בכִּי; בְּיוֹם יְגֵה הָאוֹר--עֲנִיךְ) to depict the Land and her emotions. Elaborate.

5. Rachel Bluvstein's "A Plaintive Song" - זְמַר נוֹגָה מֵאֵת רַחֵל בְּלוּבְשְׁטֵין

Do you hear my voice, O my distant one,
 Do you hear my voice, wherever you may be--
 A voice calling out with vigor, a voice crying in silence
 And beyond (the limits of mortal) time enjoining a greeting
 (an imperative) (of eternal love)?

הִתְשַׁמַּע קוֹלִי, רְחוֹקִי שְׁלִי,
 הִתְשַׁמַּע קוֹלִי, בְּאֶשֶׁר הֵנָּה -
 קוֹל קוֹרֵא בְּעֵז, קוֹל בּוֹכֵה בְּדָמִי
 וַיַּמְעַל לְזִמֵּן מְצִוָּה בְּרַכָּה?

This world is enormous and its paths numerous.
 They intersect for an instant, they part forever.
 A person can go seeking (after this farewell), but his (or her)
 feet are not up to the task (stumble),
 Never can he (or she) find that which has been lost.

תִּבְלֵ זֶה רַבָּה וַדְרָכִים בָּהּ רַב.
 נִפְגְּשׁוֹת לְדַקָּה, נִפְרָדוֹת לְעַד.
 מִבְּקֵשׁ אָדָם, אֶף כּוֹשְׁלוֹת רַגְלָיו,
 לֹא יוֹכֵל לְמַצֵּא אֶת אֲשֶׁר אָבַד.

The last of my days are already near perhaps,
 Already near is the day of the tears of farewell.
 I will wait for you until my life is extinguished,
 Akin to (Mother) Rachel's waiting for her beloved.

אֶחָרוֹן יְמֵי כְּבֵר קָרוֹב אֵילִי,
 כְּבֵר קָרוֹב הַיּוֹם שֶׁל דְּמָעוֹת פְּרִידָה,
 אֶחָכָה לָךְ עַד יִכְבוּ תַּיִי,
 כְּחַכּוֹת רַחֵל לְדוֹדָהּ.

Questions and Notes

1. Kritz suggests that the second stanza poses a kind of ultimatum to the lover who is either far away or self-distancing--i.e. standoffish and reluctant to make a commitment. What do you think?
2. The poem is dedicated to **ב.מ.** initials that might stand for **בילינסון משה** an Israeli writer or Michael Bernstein, a lover of Rachel whom she knew in Russia and whose letters in Russian to Rachel were discovered only relatively recently. (See short biography below based on the latest findings.)
3. The word **מְצִוָּה** in line 4 does not only mean "command." It means to bequeath, to leave a legacy or deathbed wish/request. Exactly what **מְצוּוה בְּרַכָּה** means is tantalizingly vague, because **בְּרַכָּה** can mean either a blessing or a greeting. The greeting can be casual or it can be highly intimate. The notion of the "haunting" of the beloved may or may not be far-fetched, but the theme of this kind of mystical affinity between souls that can triumph over life circumstances, or avenge life's cruelty, is not alien to Jewish folklore and literature. Note that the word **צְוָאָה** is a will (as in last will and testament) or a bequest. The usage in the poem suggests a psychic projection by the poet that her (unrequited or unfulfilled) love will outlive time and even death.
4. Rachel's tragic biography and persona is inextricably intertwined with the history of the Israeli pioneering experience, and that in itself is a fascinating psychological phenomenon. What are the possible interpretations other poetry's enormous popularity and longevity?
5. The last two lines suggest the opposite of the Biblical story. In fact originally the poem read "as Solveige--the heroine of Ibsen's Peer Gint--waited for her lover." This adaptation of the Bible story is also a fascinating projection of Rachel's life situation back into the Biblical story. What do you make of this? Explain the grammatical form of the word **כְּחַכּוֹת**.

6. Rachel Bluvstein's "Kinneret" - כַּנְרֵת מֵאֵת רַחֵל בְּלוּבֶשְׁטֵין

There are the Golan hills, (just) stretch out your hand and touch them!

With a surely assertive (imperious) quietness they command: halt.
In radiant isolation Grandfather (Mount) Hermon dozes
And a chill blows from the peak of its whiteness.

There along the shore of the (Kinneret) sea there is a palm with stooping treetop,
The palm has tousled hair like a mischievous young child,
Who has slid down (unnoticed to the shore) and in the waters of the Kinneret
He is splashing his feet.

How many flowers there are on the Kerak.⁴
The blood-red (color) of anemones and orange of saffron,
There are days -- the vegetation is seven times greener,
The sky blue color above is seventy times more blue.

Even if I should be reduced to (being or feeling) destitute and walking about downcast,
And my heart should be turned into a devastated area of (taken over by) strangers,
Could I (ever) betray you (O Kinneret), could I (ever) forget
The favors⁵ of (our) youth?⁶

שֵׁם הַרֵי גוֹלָן, הוֹשֵׁט יָדוֹ וְגַע בָּם!
בְּדַמְמָה בּוֹטַחַת מְצוּיִם: עֲצֹר.
בְּבִדְיוֹת קוֹרְנַת גַּם הַרְמוֹן הַסָּבָא
וְצִנָּה נוֹשֶׁבֶת מִפְּסִגַת הַצְּחוֹר.

שֵׁם עַל חוֹף הַיָּם יֵשׁ דֶּקֶל שֹׁפֵל צְמֻרֵת.
סְתוּר שִׁעָר דֶּקֶל כְּתִינוּק שׁוֹבֵב,
שֶׁגִלַּשׁ לְמַטָּה וּבְמִי כַּנְרֵת
מִשְׁכָּשֵׁף רַגְלָיו.

מֵה יִרְבוּ פְּרָחִים בְּחוֹרֵף עַל הַכֶּרֶק,
דָּם הַפְּלִגְנִית וְכֶתֶם הַכֶּרֶכֶם,
יֵשׁ יָמִים - פִּי שֶׁבַע אֲזוּ יָרֵק הַיָּרֵק,
פִּי שְׁוֹעִים תִּכְלֶה הַתִּכְלֶת בְּמָרוֹם.

גַּם כִּי אֲוָרֵשׁ וְאֶהְלֵךְ שְׁחוֹת,
וְהָיָה הַלֵּב לְמִשְׁוֹאוֹת זָרִים, -
הָאוֹכֵל לְבָגֵד בָּךְ, הָאוֹכֵל לְשִׁכְחַךְ
חֶסֶד נְעוּרִים?

Questions and Notes:

1. This highly popular poem/song focuses on three typical scenes of the Israeli landscape, all of which emanate confident repose, playfulness and beauty: the Hermon, a solitary palm tree on the Kinneret and flowers on a meadow beneath a blue sky.
2. Analyze the Hebrew of the first stanzas. what are the grammatical forms of the verbs. Note and translate the phrases: בּוֹטַחַת בְּדַמְמָה and קוֹרְנַת?
3. Why does the poet refer to the Hermon as "sabba"? Note that this is also colloquial with the accent on the penultimate syllable (not on the last syllable as it should be according to strict grammar. Why do the mountains command: "stop." (note: for this I do not myself have a perfect answer; it is a guess).

⁴ A hill that served as a cemetery for Kibbutz Kinneret.

⁵ *Hesed* here refers to loving and unselfish deeds, emotional and physical closeness.

⁶ The Biblical reference to the verse in Jeremiah, chapter 2:2 resonates here:

הֲלֹךְ וְקִרְאֵת בְּאֲזֵנֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם לֵאמֹר כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה זְכַרְתִּי לָךְ חֶסֶד נְעוּרֶיךָ אֲהַבֵת כְּלוּלֶיךָ
לְכַתֵּב אַחֲרַי בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּאַרְצָ לֹא זְרוּעָה:

4. The central image of the second stanza is the most charming and original of all. What does the palm tree remind the poet of? There must also be something in the clumsy position of the palm tree that elicits this metaphor. What do you make of it?
5. The third stanza grows more ecstatic in tone: it is characterized by hyperbolic language such as "the blood of the anemone"; seven times more green; seventy times more blue. Explain how this prepares us for the last stanza's outpouring of emotion. Kritz points out that the uncommonly ornate metaphor למשואות זרים also contributes to this tone of emotional intensity. I would add that the Biblical allusion in the use of the word "hesed" is equally effective in elevating the pathos of the ending. Look up the Biblical reference and explain.

7. R. Bluvstein's "And Perhaps..." - מאת ר. בלובשטיין - וְאוּלַי לֹא הָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים... מֵעוֹלָם לֹא הָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים מֵעוֹלָם.

And perhaps did these things never happen,

וְאוּלַי לֹא הָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים מֵעוֹלָם.

Perhaps

אוּלַי

Did I never arise early (and go out) at (the break of) dawn to
the garden,

מֵעוֹלָם לֹא הִשְׁכַּמְתִּי עִם שַׁחַר לְגַן,

To cultivate it by the sweat of my brow?

לְעַבְדוֹ בְּזַעַת-אִפְי?

(Could it be that) Never, in the long and scorching day
Of the harvest,

מֵעוֹלָם, בְּיָמִים אַרְכִּים וְיוֹקָדִים

שֶׁל קִצֵּר,

(Could it be that never) High atop a wagon laden with sheaves
That I never bursted out singing?

בְּמְרוֹמֵי עֲגָלָה עֲמוּסַת אֲלָמוֹת

לֹא נִתְתִּי קוֹלִי בְּשִׁיר?

(Could it be that) Never did I achieve purity (while bathing)
in the quiet blueness

מֵעוֹלָם לֹא טָהַרְתִּי בְּתַכְלֵת שׁוֹקֵטָה

וּבְתֵם

And in the (holy and wholesome) perfection

שֶׁל כְּנָרֶת שְׁלִי ... הוּא, כְּנָרֶת שְׁלִי,

Of my Kinneret...O, my Kinneret,

הֲהִייתִי, אוֹ חֵלְמִתִּי חֵלוֹם?

Did you (really) exist, or was I dreaming a dream?

Questions and Notes:

1. This poem may contain the very highest level of pathos. The well-known musical rendition contributes to this in no small way.
2. The Hebrew should be savored. The phrase *עם שחר לגן* may remind you of *וישכם אברהם בבקר לגן*... Note the usage *עם השכמתי* without any other intervening verb and the phrase *עם שחר* meaning "at dawn."
3. Some of the critics argue over whether the poet is really in doubt or whether these are rhetorical questions. The second question is so detailed as to make this question moot. Of course the things happened, but if it all was **like** a dream then the present is a lackluster reality.
4. Analyze the Hebrew of the middle part of the long question beginning with the word, "bimromei."
5. The last part of the question uses the word "taharti" ("I bathed") instead of "rachatzti" to bathe. The notion of purification goes far beyond simple cleansing. Connect this idea to the philosophy of the religion of labor of A.D. Gordon
6. The use of the words "bitchelet shoketa u-ve-tom" is elegantly ecstatic. Analyze the Hebrew construction. Note the ascending emotion of the three parts of the middle question.

8. Rachel Bluvstein – Biographical notes

(Highly abbreviated) from Ori Kritz, "Rachel—Mishpahtah ve-Qorot Hayyeha" in Reuven Kritz, *Shirei Rachel, Shirat Rachel, Rachel (Israel: Pura Books, 2003)*, pp. 478-512.

During Rachel's lifetime her poetry did not arouse very great interest, and she and her poetry were known only to a relatively small circle.

Rachel was born in September 1890 in the Ukraine. She studied in a Jewish elementary school where Russian was the language of instruction. At home she received tutoring in Hebrew and Yiddish. Afterwards she studied in a Russian gymnasium. At 15 she wrote poems in Russian and was a gifted artist as well. At 13 Rachel and her sister Shoshana joined a Zionist youth group. At age 14 Rachel was infected with TB and was sent to convalesce in the Crimea. After that she studied for a while in Kiev and then in Italy. In 1909 Rachel and Shoshana went to Odessa and from there took a boat to Palestine. In Rehovot they studied Hebrew several hours a day and also spent time with children in a nursery school to learn Hebrew from them. She came to work in the Mount Carmel area to learn agronomy. During this period of hard work in isolation Rachel was always joyful and of good humor. In 1911 she left Haifa and went to the Kinneret to a formal agricultural school. The two years she spent near the Kinneret were apparently the happiest of her life, and she was in love with the scenery. She also seems to have been enamored of Berl Katznelson the Labor-Zionist ideological leader and Zalman Rubashov Shazar, a young Russian Jewish intellectual who was later to become president of the state of Israel. Another possible love interest was Moshe Beilinson, an Israeli writer.

In 1913 she set out for Toulouse France to acquire a formal degree in agronomy. This trip was done without the support of the members of the Kinneret kibbutz where she lived. In Toulouse she fell in love with a Jewish electrical engineer, Michael Bernstein, but their paths separated on account of the war. Rachel, as a foreign resident, was forced (at the latest by 1915) to leave France for Russia. It may be that Rachel wanted to marry Bernstein and he was not prepared to decide. For a variety of reasons Rachel could not or did not want to return to Palestine at this time, perhaps because of her Russian passport, perhaps because of strained relations with her friends there, or perhaps because she hoped to marry Bernstein.

Rachel developed allergic asthma and a recurrence of her TB, perhaps because of her employment as a caretaker of children. In 1919 she set sail from Odessa to Palestine on the ship *Ruslan*, the first ship to go to Palestine after the war. She joined kibbutz Degania Alef. Her illness made her cough and she was always tired. She was banned from working with children. In 1920, only 8 months after her arrival, she was forced to leave Degania. Her first Hebrew poem "Halakh Nefesh," dedicated to A. D. Gordon, published in 1920. In Tel Aviv she lived with her father and stepmother, with whom she had always had a very bad relationship). She left shortly after and went to live in Petach Tikva and Jerusalem. She taught in girls' agricultural schools in both locations. From 1924 her illness worsened.

The newspaper *Davar* began to appear in 1925 and Rachel published poems in it periodically. From 1926 she lived in Tel Aviv under her death six years later.

Suggested Reading:

Susan Sered, "A Tale of Three Rachels, The Natural History of a Cultural symbol," *Nashim*, 1 (1): 5-41; 1998.

Wendy Zierler, *And Rachel Stole the Idols*, pp. 81-86.

9. Isaac Lamdan's "Masada"⁷ - **מַסָּדָה *מֵאֵת יִצְחָק לָמְדָן**

(קטעים מתוך פרק שלישי, הנקרא "מְדוּרוֹת-לֵילָה," חלקים ב' ו-ג')

(Portions from Chapter Three, entitled "Night Bonfires," parts 2 and 3)

2. From Bonfires to Bonfires

ב. מְדוּרוֹת לְמְדוּרוֹת

מְדוּרוֹת-אֵשׁ כְּשִׁדְרוֹת-תְּמִיד עַל כָּל דְּרָכַי יִשְׂרָאֵל נִטְעוּ,
מְדוּרוֹת-אֵשׁ -- צִיּוּנֵי כָּל דְּרָךְ הָעוֹלָה אֵלַי מַסָּדָה...

Bonfires like eternal boulevards have been planted along all the paths of Israel,
Bonfires -- the markers of each path that ascends to Masada...

מְדוּרוֹת -אֵשׁ חֲרָגָה זַעֲקָתֵנוּ יְתוּמָה "שִׁמְעַי יִשְׂרָאֵל!"
וּכְנָנִים-קָלוֹן עַל אֶזְרוֹ-תֵבֵל עָרְלָה נִתְלַתָּה...

From out of bonfires our orphan-scream lurched out: "*Shem'a Yisrael!*"

And like an earring of disgrace it hung on the uncircumcised (unopened) ear of the world...

מְדוּרוֹת -אֵשׁ פָּרַח כְּתָב מְגִלּוֹתֵינוּ הַנְּשָׁרְפוֹת,
לְאוֹר מְדוּרוֹת-אֵשׁ נֶאֱסַף עֲתָה הָאוֹתִיּוֹת פָּרְחוּ...

From out of bonfires the script of our burnt scrolls flew upward,
By the light of bonfires we will now gather the letters that have flown away...

מְדוּרוֹת-אֵשׁ בְּלִילוֹת-זְנוּעָה הָאִירוּ חֵלוֹם-מַסָּדָה מֵרְחוֹק,
בְּמְדוּרוֹת -אֵשׁ נֶאֱדִיר עֲתָה שִׁבְרוּ פֶה מְקֻרֹב...

During nights of terror bonfires illuminated the dream of Masada from afar,
Now by the light of bonfires, from up close, we will shed light on its interpretation (meaning)...

מְדוּרוֹת-אֵשׁ עַל חוֹמַת מַסָּדָה -- גְּרוֹת גְּדוֹלִים הֵן
לְנִשְׁמַת מִשְׁכָּנוֹת-יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁהֶעֱלוּ בְּמְדוּרוֹת -אֵשׁ.

Bonfires on Masada's wall are great memorial candles

For the souls of the habitations of Israel that have been consumed on the pyres of bonfires.

לְמְדוּרוֹת -אֵשׁ קָפְצוּ אֲבוֹת בְּחֻדוֹת-מוֹת וַיְהִיו לְחִידָה,
סָבִיב מְדוּרוֹת-אֵשׁ עֲתָה בָּנִים מְחוּל-פִּתְרוֹן יְחוּלוּ.

On to the pyres of bonfires our ancestors leapt with the joy-of-death becoming an enigma,
Around bonfires now their descendants will dance the riddle-solving dance.

⁷ The name Masada was a metonym for all of Palestine, not just the fabled last fortress in the war against the Romans. Having become a symbol for Judaism's last hope and refuge during the period of pogroms in Russia, "Masada" was first the name adopted for a burgeoning Zionist movement in 1905 by Yosef Hayim Brenner in London; the name "Masada" it quite naturally carried forth this symbolic valence for the generation of the Third Aliyah (1918-1923) following the devastating pogroms in the Ukraine and elsewhere. [From the article on "Pogroms" in the EJ: "Partial data are available for 530 communities in which 887 major pogroms and 349 minor pogroms occurred; there were 60,000 dead and several times that number of wounded (according to S. Dubnow).] And see the book by Leon Yudkin, Isaac Lamdan.

3. The Chain of Dances

The chain has not yet been broken,
The chain still stretches onward
From ancestors to descendants,
From bonfires to bonfires
The chain still stretches onward...

The chain has not yet been broken,
The chain still stretches onward
From the nights of *Simhat-Torah*⁸
To the nights of *Simhat-Masada*.
The chain still stretches onward...

Thus did our ancestors dance:
One hand on a friend's shoulder,
The other holding tight a *sefer-Torah*
"We will carry our people's burden lovingly" (said they)
The chain still stretches onward...

So let us, too, dance,
One hand gripping the circle,
The other embracing our generation's load
A great *sefer-yagon* (scroll of sorrow), so heavy--
So let us, too, dance....

Our ancestors while they danced
They shut their eyes, shut them tightly,
And wellsprings of joy were opened,
Their feet were light, so light
With eyes shut tight--
Our ancestors while they danced...

Our ancestors knew then, they knew
That over abysses they were dancing,
And that if they were to open their eyes--
The wellsprings of joy would be stopped up,
The chain would disintegrate into the abyss,
Our ancestors knew then, they knew...

So let us, too, dance
And this way our eyes are shut tight,

ג. שְׁלֵשֶׁת הַמְּחֻלוֹת
עוֹד נִמְשַׁכֶּת הַשְּׁלֵשֶׁת
מִנֵּי אֲבוֹת אֵלַי בְּנִים,
מִנֵּי מְדוּרוֹת אֵלַי מְדוּרוֹת
עוֹד נִמְשַׁכֶּת הַשְּׁלֵשֶׁת...

לֹא נִתְקָה עוֹד הַשְּׁלֵשֶׁת,
עוֹד נִמְשַׁכֶּת
מִנֵּי לַיְלוֹת שְׂמֻחַת-תּוֹרָה
אֵלַי לַיְלוֹת שְׂמֻחַת-מַסָּדָה
עוֹד נִמְשַׁכֶּת הַשְּׁלֵשֶׁת...

אֲבוֹתֵינוּ כָּף רִקְדוּ:
יָד אַחַת עַל שִׁכְמְ רֵעַ,
סֵפֶר-תּוֹרָה שְׂנִיָּה אוֹחוֹת
-- סִבְל-עַם בְּאַהֲבָה נִשָּׂא --
אֲבוֹתֵינוּ כָּף רִקְדוּ...

כָּף נִרְקְדָה גַם אֲנַחְנוּ,
יָד אַחַת תְּאַמֵּץ מֵעַגְלָה,
נִטְל-דוֹר שְׂנִיָּה חוֹבֶקֶת
סֵפֶר-יְגוֹן גְּדוֹל, כִּבְד הוּא -- ...

אֲבוֹתֵינוּ עֵת רִקְדוּ
עֲצְמוּ הֵיטֵב, עֲצְמוּ עֵינַיִם,
וּמְעִינוֹת-חֲדוּה נִפְתְּחוּ,
קָלוּ רַגְלֵיהֶם, מֵה-קָלוּ
בְּעֵינַיִם עֲצוּמוֹת --
אֲבוֹתֵינוּ עֵת רִקְדוּ...

יָדְעוּ, יָדְעוּ אִזּוֹ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ
כִּי עַל תְּהוֹמוֹת יִרְקְדוּ
וְעֵינַיִם אִם יִפְקְחוּ --
יִסְכְּרוּ מְעִינוֹת-חֲדוּה,
תִּתְפַּוֶּרֶר לְתֵהוֹם שְׁלֵשֶׁת.
יָדְעוּ, יָדְעוּ אִזּוֹ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ...

כָּף נִרְקְדָה גַם אֲנַחְנוּ
וְעֲצוּמוֹת הֵן כָּף עֵינֵינוּ

⁸ During the period of the Mishnah the Simhat Torah festival was characterized by much use of fire, such as in the reputed juggling of fiery torches by certain athletic rabbis. In more modern times, of course, marching with candles perched on the tops of flags harked back to this tradition.

Thus let us continue the chain,
With eyes shut tight--
Lest it be broken and disintegrate.
So let us, too, dance...

כֹּה נִמְשִׁיכָה הַשְּׁלִשְׁלֵת
בְּעֵינַיִם עֲצוּמוֹת --
פֶּן תִּנְתַּק וְתִתְפּוֹרֵר.
כִּי נִרְקָדָה גַם אֲנַחְנוּ...

Thus let us continue the chain,
The chain has not yet been broken.
Where will it lead? Whither will it ascend?
Onward, onward, onward, onward,
Let us not probe, let us not ask,
Thus let us continue the chain!--

כִּי נִמְשִׁיכָה הַשְּׁלִשְׁלֵת,
לֹא נִתְקָה עוֹד הַשְּׁלִשְׁלֵת,
אֶן תּוֹבִיל? לָאֵן עוֹלָה הִיא?
הֲלָאָה, הֲלָאָה, הֲלָאָה, הֲלָאָה,
אֵל נִחְקָרָה, אֵל נִשְׁאָלָה,
כִּי נִמְשִׁיכָה הַשְּׁלִשְׁלֵת! --

Questions and Notes:

1. As indicated in the EJ article on Lamdan, this section of the long epic poem is entitled "Night." Bear in mind that the sober reality of the daytime hours was considerably more bleak and difficult. But we are looking at the sections depicting the hope, the dream and the ecstasy of the pioneering spirit of the Third Aliyah at its height.

From the EJ Article (the context of the selections)

Cantos three, four, and five are movements from joyful hope to despair. Night, "in which the air is heavy with blood," transforms into a time for kindling fires, dancing, and the renewal of faith. Night thus becomes a symbol of strength and hope while day is a time of despair and disillusionment. The fortress itself weeps for her listless sons. The ecstasy of the early movement is passed, the verve of pioneering among the weaker is spent and they fall to the wayside. Less and less of those imbued with the spirit of freedom throng to Massadah and peddlers, longing to engage in commerce, increase. Not only the fires but also the "flames of revolt" brought to Massadah as "holy Sabbath candles in the twilight of the worlds" flicker faintly, yet they are not extinguished. There are always those who stand guard over Massadah watching "every cloud rising somewhere over the horizon." In the sixth canto the poet turns to these sturdy souls calling out to them that their sacrifice is not in vain and that all roads trodden by the Jewish people lead to Massadah, none lead away.

2. Explore the Midrashic aspects of Lamdan's recapitulation of the centrality of "bonfires" in Jewish history. Itemize. Although it is not specifically mentioned, recall the technique of advertising the advent of the New Moon in ancient times (linked to the explanation as to why we have *Yom Tov Sheni shel Galuyot*. Also link this discussion to the reference to "*leilot simchat-Torah*" in the 3rd canticle.
3. The word *sederot* might recall to you some of the street names in Israel such as *sederot* Rothschild (as well as the Gazan Israeli town currently in the news). Why is the word particularly graphic. The addition of *sederot-tamid* has an additional sacred connection here desacralized and given a largely historical resonance). Explain.
4. Why does Lamdan point to the "Shema Yisrael" allusion as both a "zaaqah yetomah" and an "ot qalon"?

5. Review the aggadah on the "otiyot porehot baavir" connected with the story of one of the aseret harugei malchut (famous to you from the "Elleh Ezkerah" or "Martyrology" section of the Yom Kippur liturgy). Explain the originality of the idea of "neesof atta otiyyo parachu," and analyze the Hebrew as well.
6. What purpose did the "halom Masada" play during the centuries of persecution? If the idea of Masada historically was a "halom," what is the meaning of the words "na'ir atta shivro (shever here meaning the interpretation or decipherment of a dream)? Lamdan sees the *medurot* as gigantic yahrzeit lamps. Explain.
7. Note the then recent experience of the devastating pogroms in the Ukraine from which the poet barely escaped. Explain the notion of "chedvat mavet." Where does he get this strange idea? Link this to the "hidah," the enigma, and the ecstatic "mehol-pitron."
8. In the section "shalsholet hamecholot" the rhythm of the Hebrew suggests an intense hora dance. Read it aloud with this in mind.
9. The Hebrew usages "minni" instead of "min" and "elei" instead of "el" are archaisms. Recall the usage in the Rachel poem "Rachel" and explain.
10. Explain the midrashic expansion of the image of carrying a sefer-Torah in one hand while grasping the circle with the other, and note what he does with "sefer-Torah" in terms of "sevel-am." "netel dor" and "sefer-yagon"?
11. In stanzas 5 and 6 appraise Lamdan's psychological expansion on the reason as to why in religious (Hasidic?) dances the participants closed their eyes tight. Do you personally subscribe to Lamdan's vision of Jewish history as to one in which the shutting of one's eyes might be vital to Jewish survival?
12. The language of "maayanot-hedvah" opening and then potentially closing ("yissacheru") call to mind the Deluge of the time of Noah--only the imagery is reversed. Explain. Do you find the sub-current of the Deluge nonetheless effective here?

10. U. Z. Greenberg's "Miriam's Well" - גרינברג צבי אורי מאת מרים של בארה

(חלק שני של שלישית השירים "בסוד כנרת וירדן" מן הספר רחובות הנָהָר (שוקן, 1978 עמ' רכד, 224)

(Part Two of the three-part series: "In the Mystery of Kinneret and Jordan" from *Streets of the River*)

No one knows the location of Miriam's Well in the Kinneret
 But our slain ones know it through the mystery of secret paths..
 On the night--their night--of the New Moon's
 Consecration...they come there to bathe
 With hearts torn, wounds gaping, limbs shattered.
 And not merely is this an immersion; this is immersion-verging-on-
 dance:

He, the enemy, did everything to their bodies, everything,
 But their strong spirit he could not destroy,
 For smashing limbs is also an intimation of smashing a yoke
 [the *golah's* enslavement].

If I could but walk awake on a blue night of the Moon's Consecration
 And were I with panoramic range to gaze across all the Kinneret wide
 Then could I perceive with awesome majesty: that immersion-qua-
 dance.

The bodies are pure-as-the-moon, but with a shade of roses
 On the moon-filled night, each gaping wound a reddening dark like
 Mars....

And in the skin of the flesh between one wound and another --
 shivering,

As they emerge from the water without clothing to cover them.
 Males and females lacking signs of their sex and nipples.
 The cross-bearing enemy cut them off with a doctor's scalpel.
 They scalped them as one would the bodies of rats and
 monkeys,

Without anesthetic drug, while blood and tears flowed
 abundantly.

And they experimented on them with ice water where they lay freezing.
 And so the sufferers come with the noose that strangled them
 To bathe in Miriam's Well and to heal their broken necks
 And the gashes in their flesh at the hands of the lacerating *goy* .
 Jacob's Ladder stands once again on the earth ... however
 Not angels ascend it, but rather going up to sit on the rungs
 Are they, those who bathed in Miriam's Well, all of them.
 To their backs -- the Golan and the whole land to their side and before
 them

(And the Yishuv is asleep like Jacob while windows are darkened).
 Thus do they sit: ignited with moonglow,
 Dead of flesh ... yet living in eternal radiance, dominating distances.
 And the Kinneret's appearance is sparkling with the secret of stars.
 From it a breath-like mist ascends to soothe those suffering in pain.

...אין יודעים אי מקום בארה של מרים בכנרת,
 אבל הרגיננו יודעים מסוד שביל נסתרים..
 בליל-קדוש-החדש לילם ... הם באים שם לטבל
 קרועי לבבות, פתוחי פצע, שבורי אברים.
 ואין הם טובלים טבילה סתם, זו
 טבילה-מין-מחול:

הוא עשה בגופם, האויב, את הכל, את הכל,
 אבל לרוחם הקשה עז אויב לא יכול..

בשבירת אברים יש גם מסוד שבירת מוטות על.
 לו ער התהלכתי ליל קדוש-החדש כחל
 והבטתי לכל הכנרת במערה עגל

ונחיתי לראות נורא הוד: את טבילת-המחול:
 טהורים-כנרת גופים, אף כעין ורדים

בליל ירחי, כל פי פצע מאפיל-במאדים...
 ובעור הנשור שבין פצע לפצע -- רעדים,
 בצאתם מן המים מבלי כסויים מבידים:

זכרים ונשים בלי הכר אות מינם ורדים.
 כרתם האויב הצלבן באומל הרופאים.

אזמלו כם כמו בגופי עכברים וקופים,
 בלי סם הרדמה והדם והדמע שופעים.

ונסוים במי קרח לשכב ולהיות בקופאים
 ובאים המורדים עם החבל אשר החניקם

לטבל בבארה של מרים ולרפא מפרקתם
 ואת הרטישות בבשרם מיד גוי מסרקתם --

סלם של יעקב שוב בארץ נצב ... ואולם
 אין עולים מלאכים, כי עולים בו לישוב בשלבים

הם, שטבלו בבארה של מרים, הם כלם.
 לגבם -- הגולן וכל הארץ לצדם ולמולם

(והישוב ישן כיעקב וחשכים אשנבים).
 כך הם יושבים: בלהיבה ירחית להבים,

מתי בשר ... חיי זיו נצחיים, שליטי מרחבים.
 ועין הכנרת נוצצת בסוד כוכבים.

ממנה עולה נשימה ללטה נכאבים --

Questions and Notes:

1. The poem has a hallucinatory quality that must be understood against the backdrop of the poet's extraordinary survivor guilt. Although Greenberg had gone on Aliyah in 1924, he was living in Warsaw at the time that WWII broke out. He had gone to Warsaw because it was politically very uncomfortable for him in Palestine. Greenberg was an extreme right wing ideologue and propagandist for the Revisionist party. After the murder of Chaim Arlosoroff, an important leader within the labor party, in 1933, Greenberg was suspected of having incited the killing. The climate of suspicion was intolerable, so Greenberg accepted an editorial post in Warsaw. Greenberg was able to use his Palestine passport to board the last train out of Warsaw. His guilt and remorse agitated the already intense Greenberg to such a degree that he produced the stunning diversity of poems that appeared in 1950 in his collection *Rehovot ha-Nahar*.
2. The poem seems convinced that Miriam's Well, which followed the Israelites through the desert, had entered into the Promised Land with them and that it was situated for all time in the Kinneret. (I do not know what, if anything, is the midrashic basis for Greenberg's statement.)
3. Count up the rather limited number of rhymes that occur over and over again (kacho, agol, etc. and the recurrences of rhymes ending in **im** and **am** in a kind of drumbeat. Note the usage of **מסוד שביל נסתרים** and **מסוד שְבִיֶרֶת מוֹטוֹת עַל**. Greenberg often refers to something as a **טוד** as if it is a known thing, but in reality what he is suggesting that there is a hidden logic governing his poetic/hallucinatory visions. The murdered victims of the Holocaust (**הַרוֹגֵינוּ**) now their way to Miriam's Well as if by some mysterious sense. The second use of the word **טוד** suggests that there may be a higher purpose in this monumental tragedy. The step in this higher purpose is the "secret" of the breaking of the yoke of the galut that is achieved horrifically through the breaking of the limbs of these unfortunate people.
4. When Greenberg writes of the victims' bathing their tortured bodies in the Kinneret he describes it as a **טְבִילָה-מִין-מְחוּל**, a bathing that has a dance-like quality to it. This ghostly and ghastly scene epitomizes Greenberg's will and need to believe that the victims are triumphing over their horror and dancing because their being healed has a celebratory quality to it. The only sense of this "dancing" is that it is a bridge to the new reality of the fulfillment of the Zionist dream in the wake of, and perhaps because of, the holocaust. Note the phenomenal combination of final words ending in **ol**. When he says, for example, that the enemy could not overcome **לֹא יָכוֹל** their indomitable spirit, it can only be that Greenberg senses the imminent presence of the slaughtered Jews in his consciousness in Palestine. He imagines them coming to bathe each night of the full moon **בְּלֵיל-קְדוּשָׁה-הַחֹדֶשׁ לַיָּלֵם**, and he speaks of this with such certainty that it has a surreal quality.
5. Note the haunting rhymes of the words **וְנִדְדִים** and **בְּמִנְאֵדִים**. The redness, of course, to their being covered in blood. Instead of saying they are naked, he uses the rhyming word **מִבְּדִים** (of fabric) to suggest their lack of clothing, and he concluded with the horrifying word **וְנִדְדִים** to ever so graphically depict the way the enemy had experimented, cutting off nipples, genitals and the like.

6. Note also the rhyme at the end of these lines:

כָּרְתֶם הָאוֹיֵב הַצֶּלְבֹן בְּאִזְמַל הַרוֹפְאִים.
 אִזְמְלוּ בָם כְּמוֹ בְּגוֹפֵי עֶכְבְּרִים וְקוֹפִים,
 בְּלִי סֵם הַרְדָּמָה וְהַדָּם וְהַדְּמַע שׁוֹפְעִים.
 וְנִסּוּם בְּמִי קָרַח לְשֹׁכֵב וְלַהֲיוֹת בְּקוֹפְאִים

The rhyme of קוֹפִים and קוֹפְאִים is thoroughly ingenious. Explain what Greenberg says about the Nazi doctors.

7. If the "dance-like" bathing is one bridge to transcend what the Nazis tried to do to demean and destroy the Jews, the next bridge is image of Jacob's ladder reaching out of the Kinneret skyward. After their curative bath in the healing waters, the sufferers climb (remembers: once a month in the full moon) and seat themselves on the rungs of the ladder (assuming the place of angels).
8. This poem does not specifically connect the Shoah with the rebirth of Israel. All we see here is their climbing the ladder and gazing out over the historic scenery. But elsewhere in the book *Rehovot ha-naharit* is abundantly clear that Greenberg needs most desperately to believe that their death will lead to Jewish sovereignty. Perhaps the words "shallitei merhavim" hints at this notion of destiny that is Greenberg's only solace. The ending does also hint at another סוד.

וְעֵין הַכְּנֶרֶת נוֹצְצָת בְּסוֹד כּוֹכָבִים.
 מִמְּנָה עוֹלָה נְשִׁימָה לְלִטֵּף נְכֹאֲבִים --

9. What is the סוד of the stars? Is it not a hint also at some manifest destiny beyond the healing?