



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 –Conclusion** **Fulfillment and Healing in Zionist Poetry** **Dr. Stanley Nash**

Almost all of our concluding remarks are implicit in the questions posed. As a radical humanist, Tchernichovsky had no tolerance for arbitrary boundaries between what was Jewish and what was universal. All that was best in human striving fell into his Jewish purview. As a result, he felt himself a kind of “alien transplant” and a type of Jewish visionary who was born before his time. Generations of future Jews, both in Israel and the Diaspora (Reform Jews prominent among them), could well claim Tchernichovsky as their spiritual ancestor and, as the master poet predicted hopefully, could gather flowers from upon his grave to grace the foreheads of future poets with laurel wreaths.

Rachel Bluvstein’s plaintive verse resonates with its tones and nuances of a longing ever pulsating, unrelenting even in its imperfections and frustrations. The “soap opera” quality of this poet’s experiences clearly continues to touch the souls of the hundreds of thousands of Jews who continue to purchase and peruse books of her poetry and life in lavish album-quality editions.

Isaac Lamdan’s Masada is a work that should be known if only for its brilliant recreation of a formative decade of modern Israel’s history, a decade that should never be forgotten. The image of Masada in its multi-dimensional significance for the Israeli psyche should never be underestimated, as one can judge from Robert Alter’s brilliant article of 1973, “The Masada Complex.” The horrendous pogroms in the Ukraine in the aftermath of World War I and the Russian Revolution were a nightmarish event that precipitated the birth of Israel as we know it. One era’s suffering should not dwarf nor eclipse the suffering of earlier generations, and would that it were possible to keep history alive and current. Perhaps that is poetry’s potential, if we can only read attentively.

The gruesome images of Uri Zvi Greenberg’s post-Holocaust opus, Rehovot ha-Nahar are unmatched in their pathos, perhaps precisely because Greenberg was not there, and he is obsessed by a survivor’s guilt. Greenberg was a poet of volcanic temperament, and he could enflame emotions on a variety of issues over the course of his long poetic career. “Beerah shel Miriam” is but a tiny sample of his voluminous work, but it is a modern Midrashic jewel. It captures Greenberg’s immense power to project a psychic destiny and meaning for Jewish suffering. One should bear in mind that this poet was an ultra-nationalist, but we are witness to the literary phenomenon in Israel that thousands who rejected his politics continued to acclaim his genius.