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David Frishman: a Writer, a Poet and a Dreamer

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

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Prologue

Two years ago I asked Dr. Nash to recommend a number of short Hebrew stories for the purposes of personal interest and potential teaching material. One of Dr. Nash's recommendations was the story by David Frishman "The Dance." I was captivated and charmed by Frishman's writing style and by the depth of his message.

This and eight other stories came from a collection of stories called "Bamidbar." David Frishman depicted in these stories the world of our Israelite ancestors in the most colorful and captivating manner. The characters were striking in their unique personalities and appearances. They did not conform to the societal norms and as a result of that, they found themselves in difficult situations. Their fate was often tragic and their legacy would live among the desert people for a long time afterwards. I found these stories not only clever and unique in their composition, but also deeply moving in their message.

David Frishman wrote these stories in the last decade of his life. They were a culmination of his literary experience and psychological maturity. I decided to explore the work of this writer further and in a greater detail. The work on my senior thesis afforded me the opportunity to do so.

I was born and raised in Kiev by a family of book lovers. The great works of Russian, European and American masters filled our bookshelves. However, Soviet authorities allowed only several Jewish writers appear among these literary giants. Due to Soviet oppression we were mostly cut of from our Jewish culture and its riches. It took immigration, education and discipline to discover and claim the past and the present of my people.

When I settled in the United States, on my bookshelves the writings of Hebrew writers and Russian writers were respectfully arranged side by side. But there was no end to my delight when I held a single volume of David Frishman's translations of Alexander Pushkin's poetry. That thin and fragile, yellow-stained book merged my two worlds together. I was most grateful to Dr. Phillip Miller for helping to locate this volume and other materials in the library such as Louis Firestein's fine Rabbinic Thesis of 1953.

It has been a privilege to explore the prose work of this Hebrew literary giant David Frishman in the original Hebrew and also to discover Frishman's talent for poetry and translations.

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Nash and to Dr. Miller for their assistance in this task.

Table of Contents

"I shall not go with them, I shall not go; their way are not mine...

I detest feelings, feelings without hearts." (David Frishman, "Lo Elech `Immam")

I. David Frishman, biographical sketch of a writer

David Frishman, a writer, poet, critic and translator, was born in Poland in the town of Zgierz, near Lodz. His father was a well-to-do merchant who, although traditional, approved of the Haskalah. In his father's household Bible and Talmud were taught along with foreign languages and European and Greek classics. Frishman's love of languages began in early childhood. His nanny spoke beautiful German to him and his studies abroad introduced him to French, English and Russian. As Frishman matured as a writer his love of literature was demonstrated in his painstaking efforts as a translator. It was Frishman who brought to the Hebrew reader the works of George Eliot, Hans Christian Andersen, Alexander Pushkin and Nietzsche.

At a young age, Frishman already showed signs of literary talent. At fifteen he published his first writings, the story "Tarnegol ve-Tarnegolet," and the sonnet by Heine's "Don Rimo" in his own translation(1) It is from his father that Frishman inherited his critical spirit; from his mother's side of the family he inherited a dreamy and idealistic nature. In his autobiographical sketch Frishman noted: "The spirit of criticism, and the spirit of poetry both possessed me at the same time....and they have not ceased wrestling within me to this day." (2) Along with the childhood wonder and naïveté that seemed to permeate this writer's works, his sharp wit and touch of cynicism could surprise his readers and keep them on guard in anticipation. This writer's pen became his

weapon of love and destruction. In his famous poem "Lo Elekh `Immam," Frishman voices his refusal to follow the old path of conformity. He demanded radical changes within the Jewish community. In this poem he wrote:

I can not tolerate their ways, their manners, or their thoughts,

Their prophets are not my prophets, their angels are not my angels.

Their thoughts repel me, thoughts without minds....

He had a biting wit that he applied to the cause of awakening sensibilities and provoking his readers to feeling outrage and wanting to take action. Frishman devoted his entire life to literature, avoiding involvement in political or communal affairs. He tried to effect changes and reforms indirectly.

Frishman's knowledge of the classical Jewish sources was staggering. An avid reader, who was endowed with remarkable memory, the writer could recite the Hebrew Bible by heart. Therefore, the lines from Bible and Mishnah were seamlessly interwoven with his own writing, providing the reader with a multicolored, intricately woven tapestry.

In time his writings become more socially critical. He was influenced by the writings of his earlier contemporaries J.L. Gordon and K.E. Franzos. Eventually, his short stories became Frishman's main genre of expression.

The main characters in these stories were Jews who had to face a conflict with the mores of the traditional society. The endings of the stories were mostly tragic, since the heroes either become estranged from their society or rejected by it. In the story "Yom ha-Kippur" (1881), a writer describes a beautiful girl who in order to become a famous singer leaves her widow mother and her native town behind. At her performance on Yom

Kippur she is murdered by her deranged mother. This woman becomes deranged as a result of losing her beloved Rachel. In the story "Ha-Ish u-Miktarto," a famous rabbi has a secret addiction, smoking. The rabbi is powerless in the face of his addiction. His inner struggle is wearisome. The obsession with smoking leads him to violate the Sabbath both privately and then publicly. The rabbi's actions leads to his excommunication from the Jewish community.(3)

As a literary critic, Frishman uses his pen mercilessly. In the brochure called "Tohu va-Vohu" (1883) the writer criticizes contemporary Hebrew journalism and calls it a failure because it offers a provincial form of literary expression. (4) The Hebrew journalism of Frishman's day lacked sophistication and did not call for change. This brochure was published a year after the first series of pogroms that swept Russia between 1881-1882. These tragedies brought a sense of displacement and fear into the Jewish circles. The Jewish press failed to reflect these struggles. The writings of contemporary journalists were vague and flowery, using the style of traditional Jewish writings called "Melitza." Frishman did not feel that these flowery intricate expressions did justice to the Jewish experience of their time. (5) Frishman became infuriated with the Jews' passivity and attacked and mocked this sort of writing. His contemporaries were angered by his stark honesty, but in time gave him his well-deserved credit.

This writer's sensitive spirit was deeply influence by the events that occurred around him. The workers' strikes in Europe at the turn of the twentieth century, the Russian revolution of 1917, and rebellions against Rabbinic authorities within the Jewish communities were the signs of the mass response to the failing reigning order. (6)

Frishman often chose a Biblical setting for some of his most memorable narratives, but the issues in these neo-biblical stories were current for him. Frishman was deeply sympathetic to the human sufferings under the yoke of the ruling class. The inexhaustible narratives of the Hebrew Bible provided a fertile soil for his expressions and experimentation.

As a poet Frishman is lyrical and somewhat melancholy, resembling other European poets like Frug and Pushkin. One might say that his prose in his short stories reads like poetry. Frishman wrote several wonderful poems -- among them "Ba-Laylah"("At Night"), "Muzar ben Zarim Ve-Shonim" ("Estranged Among The Strange and The Different") vividly demonstrated Frishman's sense of loneliness and displacement at certain moments in his life. The poem "Messiah," movingly written, is a long poem expressing the painful Jewish social and political condition and the anticipation of a new era. However, Frishman suggests this new era can only come about with the birth of the new, free thinking generation:

A generation that will understand redemption,

A generation that will desire to be redeemed,

Whose soul will be prepared to be redeemed!

Frishman was a non-observant Jew, but was deeply connected to his people's destiny and their struggle. Feeble attempts at religious reforms by the organized Jewish Community in the nineteenth century were criticized and challenged by him. The reforms were attempted by talmudically trained Jews like M.L. Lilienbaum to engage the rabbis in talmudic discussion in order to gain some tiny concessions on legal matters. Frishman

was among those who thought this gentle and gradualist approach from inside the system to be slow and ineffective. He wanted a more revolutionary approach to alter the condition of Jewish life, practice and belief totally. (7)

In the writer's pursuit to awaken his people, Frishman became in 1901 an editor and publisher of several journals like "Ha-Dor" and "Sifrut" and became an editor of the literary Vilna daily newspaper, "Ha-Zeman," whose high literary standards attracted the most talented writers of the day (8) He also published several short stories in the German literary monthly "Salom," in 1885 and in "Ha-Melitz" in 1896.

David Frishman initially was not a Zionist. However, after visiting Palestine in 1911 and 1912 he published his travel diaries in the Yiddish newspaper "Haynt." He was overwhelmed by his impressions. "His initial skepticism gave way to enthusiasm, and he candidly and openly retraced his reservations about the rebirth of Hebrew language as a vernacular." (9) Frishman was deeply moved by the spirit of the pioneers and the startling beauty of the landscape. It was no wonder, therefore, that the famous literary masteries "Ba-Midbar" depicted the nature of the wilderness in an emotionally charged manner. This collection of short stories described the Israelites' experience in the wilderness. Written in the prose-poetry style, the writer wastes not one syllable or word. Each sentence in these stories is thoughtfully and lyrically composed. Note this example from Frishman's story "TheDance": "A heavy sorrow, dull and silent, seemed to have sprung up from the ground and enveloped her in its dim shrouds

The series of "Ba Midbar" that described the life of a nation during their desert travels not only inspired and challenged readers of his time, but also continues to delight Hebrew readers of today. "Ba Midbar" was Frishman's last literary work before his

death. These stories encompassed this writer's literary maturity and life experience. They are a masterpiece in their originality and wisdom. Unfortunately, only a couple of them have been translated into English, leaving many non-Hebrew readers deprived of their beauty and uniqueness.

In this thesis I, with Dr. Nash's help, will offer new translations of two stories from the series of "Ba-Midbar": "Be-Har Sinai" and "Sorer u-Moreh." I will also include much of Dr. Nash's translation of "Sotah." These stories will be analyzed along with two other stories from this series, "Meholot" and "Ha-Mekoshesh." Frishman's stories are a fine example of this master's genius

This thesis will also examine Frishman's translation of Pushkin's poetry. His translations are remarkable even though not always exact. Frishman used artistic license in his attempts to transmit the spirit and rhyme of the Russian literary giant.

II. "Legends of a People's Childhood"

"Legends of the Desert" was written in the last years of Frishman's life. These stories are a compilation of his literary experience, worldly exposure and love of his people's glorious past. They are written in the simple form aided by vivid and bold descriptions, depict national childhood of the Jewish nation. As Louis Firestein so eloquently noted in his thesis on Frishman, that the writer felt the pulse of events which beckon to us out of the unwritten lines of the Pentateuch.

Louis Firestein felt that these legends were Frishman's last legacy to Hebrew literature and were unparalleled in beauty and craftsmanship. Firestein writes: "The vibrant inner life is a chief principle in (these stories)...Frishman was an apostle to

beauty, art and a freer life among Jews." Within few lines Frishman was capable to describe and transmit the feel of the severe desert, the conflict between the law and the desire, between life and morality, love and despair. Not a word wasted, not a line out of place, the legends flowed from under Frishman's pen straight into the Jewish psyche, rich in its past and tradition, but always conflicted.

Frishman's message was universalistic and it called for justice and tolerance within greater society, but he chooses to convey this message through an experience of a particular group of people, the Israelites. Within those boundaries Frishman selected passionate, bold characters, which challenged existing societal order and as a result suffered the consequences of their rebellious actions.

It is not surprising that Frishman is deeply moved by the Biblical narrative. For Frishman, Bible is a live, breezing entity, because its antiquity could picture his contemporary reality through the prism of the Bible. In his legends, Frishman holds society accountably to behave justly and mercifully towards individuals who choose not to confirm, but walk to the sound of their own heartbeat.

Frishman's story "The Dance" is a stunning example of this writer's literary craftsmanship and in-depth knowledge of the Biblical text. With few pages the lures us in to the Israelite camp, along with Israelites Frishman leads us on to the journey from place to place; he makes us witness painful love affair; and he leads in to become spectators of the dance of all dances, one *mahol* dance distilled or invented by Frishman out of the collective reality of the Biblical "*Meholot*" (in the plural. This *mahol* ends tragically for all who are involved.

True to the genre of the short stories, the events in "The Dance" unfolded quickly and dramatically. This story opens up as a legend. Frishman claims that is told to him by his mother, who in turn heard it from her mother and so on and so forth... With this innocent gesture Frishman drapes a gauzy cloth over the unfolding events, allowing reader to dream and suffer with these very real, albeit fictional heroes.

The children of Israel leave Egypt accompanied by the multitude of others hangers-on whom the Bible pejoratively nicknames the "'erev rav." Among these "others" there was a young and very handsome man by the name Putth, who was admired and loved by all women and girls in the camp. Frishman warns us of the upcoming conflict immediately. The writer describes the group that accompanies Israelites in the dessert with negative terms, "rebels" or "non-Israelites." These terms point out that there is a division between the masses of Israelites and some fringe groups who had joined them. Subtly, Frishman suggests to the reader that the bond between two groups is fragile and anyone who gets involved with these foreigners might get hurt.

A handsome foreigner Putth meets Timna an Israelite girl from the house of Gershom from the tribe of Menashe. They fall in love with each other instantly. It is a common theme in Frishman's short stories: one look, one touch and the life of the heroes is changed forever. The write describes the power of that love in his extravagant terms: "In those far-off wonderful days, the skies were still young and a thousand times bluer than they are today, and the soil was still fresh and a thousand times greener than it is today, and the love, too, was a thousand times stronger than it is today." These words are Frishman's signature. He uses them repeatedly through out his stories to demonstrate the romantic notion of those far away days and their authentic and powerful presence in the

history of the Israelite nation. It is important to mention that Frishman was not the only writer who romanticized about these far off days and the striking beauty of the desert. David Frishman was influenced by Bialik's masterpiece "*Mete Midbar*," "Dead of the Desert" and his romantic depiction of the wilderness.

This infatuation of Bialik's and Frishman's with Israelite's experience in the desert found its origins in the ancient Prophets' romanticization of the *dor hamidbar* (the generation of the desert). The eighth century prophet Jeremiah for example spoke of the Israelite's wilderness experience as a honeymoon period between God and his people: "*zakharti lakh hesed ne'urayikh, ahvat kelulotayikh, lekhtekh aharai ba-midbar, be-eretz lo zeru'ah*":

"I accounted to your favor
The devotion of your youth,
Your love as a bride
How you followed Me in the wilderness,
In a land not sown." Jer.Ch 2:2

The memories of those far off romantic days, when God courted bashful bride Israel, could serve as a healing element in God's severing relationship to this presently sinful nation. The prophetic authors, in a manner similar to selected verses in the book of Deuteronomy, idealized the desert as a foil to the Israelites grown fat and spoiled." (Deut. 32:15) ("*vayishman yeshurun vayiv'at* and *shamanta 'avita kasita.* ")

The meaning of those magical and romantic days for Frishman and Bialik is not the same as their meaning was for the prophets. It is not a closeness to God or even an anti-urban and anti-affluent tendency that we find in Frishman's treatment of these unusually moving stories. For Bialik it was a Zionist and anti-galut message that emerged

from his "Dead of the Desert" For Frishman, who was at first ambivalent about his Zionism, the message was different. Frishman wanted to return to an era that was bold and free before the giving of the Law. As Dan Miron points out, Frishman did not assume the same kind of "prophetic" stance as Bialik. (9a) Frishman's approach is primarily esthetic. With all of their anti-rabbinic overtones the stories may indeed be primarily an esthetic exercise.

Just as God's romance with Israelite nation had its peak moments, that were followed by a period of decline, so the romance in the story of "The Dance" had its moments of elevation and painful disillusionment. Initially the Israelite community envies Timnah and her happiness. The local tongues are vicious and cold. The happiness of the lovers is interrupted by Putth's disappearance. Timnah, who was given the gold ring as a sign of his love for her, refuses to believe that her lover is not coming back. As long she has the ring, she has a hope. Timnah does not hear the mockery of the people around her, nor is she aware of the events in her surrounding community. All she is aware of is her golden, shiny ring and her profound hope that one day her lover will come back. However, the days rolls into years, the touch of gray appears on her temples and a deep wrinkle forms on her forehead, and yet the girl does not give up. Even the community around her becomes more compassionate. They see her pain and desperation and try to speak to her comfortingly. Timnah hears none of their voices. Frishman writes beautifully: "And as the days passed the girl clutched the ring more tightly, gripping it to her soul, for it had become for her the essence of life, the core of her being....All her dreams and all her longings were embodied in this ring." Arriving at Mount Sinai the

Children of Israel prepare themselves to meet God face to face. The excitement spread over the camp, but soon died out when the longing for God was not materialized. The masses surged around the High Priest demanding a more physical god that could lead them. The Priest agrees and asks for gold from every Israelite in order to fashion for them a god of gold. Up to this point Frishman follows the biblical description. But then he elaborates: everyone in the camp throws something of gold into the wagon that was pulled by two red bullocks. Accompanied by the priests who were blowing horns, the procession made its way around the camp. The euphoria that spread around the camp was so catching that people were giving up their most priceless possessions in order to join the religious process. For example, "One woman of renown tore a little gold flute from the limp grasp of the sick child that lay at her breast and flung it into the wagon."

The wagon passes by Timnah's tent. The great fear has seized her: "Before she was fully aware of what she had done, the ring had left her finger and had descended in a glittering arc on to the overflowing heap of gold in the wagon. At that moment she felt a terrible wrench in her heart, as it something had been torn away leaving an aching emptiness.... And suddenly the girl knew that her lover would never return to her to the end of her days." Frishman use of Hebrew is poignant and succinct; in just a few lines we are set to witness the end of this tragic drama.

The Priest throws gold into the fire, fashions the Golden Calf and builds the altar in front of it. The celebration begins with feasting and drinking, and concludes with dancing. What the Bible describes merely as "meholot," Frishman describes in great detail. Women and girls joined hands and danced in a ring around the Golden Calf. However, their dancing suddenly comes to an end, when Timnah begins to dance. Her

movements were striking it their beauty and painful in the honesty. This dance told the story of her love for Putth. At first she danced slowly and gently: "...like the early hope that had once risen within her, when the delicate flowers of spring had bloomed over the earth and in her heart."

Timnah's steps had changed when her dance began to reflect her great anguish that shattered her heart. "The next movement she was tripping with light, airy steps, gay and carefree. She still had the ring!....Her life and soul, her love and her beloved were all bound up in this one ring, the ring from which she drew the breath of life." Then suddenly her dance had changed. Her expression became lifeless. The tiny hope she had for her lover's return had left Timnah. Deliriously, she began to whirl around the calf, hardly touching the ground. "Her soul, her beloved, her ring, her life and this god suddenly merged into one, so that she could no more distinguish between them...For the pain was no longer in her heart alone, but in the hearts of all men- the aching cry of all humanity that rose up to the god of all the earth."

People became frightened watching the raw honesty of her dance. They threw down their instruments and ran away. Timnah danced madly and endlessly. White foam formed around her lips. Suddenly she stumbled and fell to the ground. "When they raised her, she was dead."

"The Dance" is a strikingly beautiful and thought provoking tale. The event in the Bible surrounding the Golden Calf were described in negative terms and, later on, commented on by our sages as a shameful experience. Frishman, however, skillfully describes this usually frowned-upon incident in neutra, if not positive, terms. For Frishman the God at the Mount of Sinai is not superior to the God of Gold.

Frishman's strategy in not placing a value judgment on the event of the Golden Calf may have its origin in the writings of the Medieval Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides. For Maimonides, worship of the graven image did not deny the existence of God. The worshipper merely makes the mistake of supposing that the images of his own construction resembles a being that mediates between him and God. (10) Maimonides does not condemn the worshipper; he just thinks that the believer is gravely mistaken. Frishman however, goes one step further. In his description of the Golden Calf incident, the religious excitement and euphoria are understandable, if not catching: "The High Priest took all the gold that had been collected in the wagon and cast it in the fire. Then he fashioned the molten gold with an engraving tool and made it into a Golden Calf, which people worshipped with great joy for they could now see their god face to face." Frishman provokes the reader to abandon his earlier prejudices regarding the Golden Calf and subtly suggests that the joy of the community is founded on the fact that every person, not only Moses, can see God face to face, and take an active part in this free worship.

The event described in the Book of Exodus 32 is a communal event, where the behavior and feelings of individuals are not expounded. Frishman, however, looks at it from a different angle. He is interested in the behavior and feelings of the individual. The writer tries to answer several questions: who were the individuals dancing at the Golden Calf, what they might have felt and experienced and what were their struggles and hopes in their new God.

Frishman named this story "The Dance," however it could have been easily called "The Ring" or even the "Dance of Death." The image of the shiny ring made out of

beaten gold is repeated numerous times through out the story. The reader is reminded over and over again of the power of this tiny token of love. "No! She would not give up the ring. Anything else, but not the ring! The ring was her whole life, it meant everything that had been, everything that was still to be." The ring is round in its form. It raps around the finger in a complete whole, leaving nothing extra or superfluous in its design. And so as a beautiful dance. Choreographed well it often opens and concludes with the same graceful movement bringing the viewer to a closure. Frishman loved drama. This image of a beautiful woman swirling in the passionate dance that leads to her death as ultimate liberation, is gripping.

Frishman possessed a very fine classical education and most likely was exposed to the folklore of Medieval Europe. From that well he could have drawn an idea on the "Dance of Death" that was found in Medieval Europe between the 13th and 15th century as a response to the frequent epidemics of the Black Death. Seeing death as a constant, daily companion the populace began to create dramatic expressions for their experience. The plays were written and acted out publicly with "Death" as a main character. Dressed in black a tall figure would appear on the scene, not as a destroyer, but as a messenger of God summoning human being to the world beyond the grave. (11) In Frishman's story "The Dance" death becomes a liberator of Timnah's pain, just like in the medieval plays revolving around "The Dance of Death." Death was a welcoming, freeing agent: "Her pain had ceased, her pain had become the god himself. For the pain was no longer in her heart alone, but in the hearts of all men...For an eternity she went on dancing, madly, ecstatically. A white foam covered her lips, then her limbs seemed to crumple and suddenly she collapsed to the ground. When they raised her, she was dead."

The story "Be-Har Sinai" was not translated till now. This jewel of a story thematically links itself to the story of "The Dance." It is also a story about two lovers and their tragic end. Once found each other, these lovers ignore the world around them and escape into the wilderness to enjoy their love. The love Frishman describes in the story "Be-Har Sinai" is a dream love that seduces the reader with its powerful intensity. The lovers are so enchanted with each other that they regard all surroundings as bothersome elements to their great love. "And there were times they were bitter, because there were shrubs and birds in the sky and stones and grains of send, all outside of them. All of them were distractions to them and their isolation and their love and their life." However, just as in the story of "The Dance" the encounter with God brings on the tragic end. The great love experienced by these lovers does not survive the revelation. In the end of the story "Be-Har Sinai" one lover says to the other: "Once the eyes of a man have been open, it will not help him to close them again. The images that he saw once will never leave him."

Even though the translation to the story "Be-Har Sinai" is provided, it is useful to summarize the events of this masterful short drama. The narrative opens up with events strikingly similar to the events in the life of Moses. (Exodus: ch. 2) A midwife threw a boy named Moshi into the Nile. After floating on the river for days he was rescued by the Israelite people, who gave him the name *Pel'i* ("Wondrous One"), since he had survived Pharaoh's harsh decree. The boy grew and turned into a young, handsome man. One day he saw a young girl, Puah, who worked on the walls of the city of Pithom, and fell madly in love with her instantaneously. Puah responded to his passion eagerly. She became

afraid: "Then both of them knew in their hearts that in that moment God's great hand was upon them and that there was no escape from it." This swift description of falling in love is very much Frishman's style. For this romantic writer the love comes from nowhere and from deep within: "He approached her the same way a person approaches someone to whom he has spoken just the day before or whom he has left just a moment ago. He took her by the hand and asked: 'What are we waiting for?'" Once the lovers find each other they run away in to the wilderness. Like the lovers in the story of a "Dance" they seem to cease to exist. For Frishman the glory of love has little to do with mundane concerns. The writer describes them as pure and naïve as children whose hearts were singing for joy. Wandering through the desert they are carefree and occupied only with their love: "...then all of a sudden they would take each other by the hand, stretch out their arms, throw back their heads and begin to dance in a circle."

Finally, our lovers find a cave on the mountain and call it home. "They made for themselves a place to dwell and set up a spot of soft sand for on which to lie down," saying: "....We do not need to wander anymore, because here we can live forever." Frishman's descriptions of this carefree life and of his protagonists' concern's only for love's delights, captivate the reader. The reader dances and runs among the wells and the trees of oasis with these young lovers, sings for joy and avoids any contact with the outside world in order to preserve this love's bliss. Frishman was a masterful writer. We are captivated by these lovers and unprepared for what yet will be. Since the writer spent most of his career as a critic the reader is naïve to relax and to believe that these lovers will live "Happily ever after." The surprise comes when we discover that the mountain these lovers have chosen for their home is none other than Mt. Sinai. The couple who

wished so much to leave the worries of the world behind find themselves in the midst a huge spectacle of theophany.

The language of love used by the lovers is riveting. Their words fall from their mouth in a string of beautiful pearls. Puah whispers to Moshi: "Your curls are as soft as the delicate rays of the sun, whereas the hair of other men is coarse and straight. In your eye sockets two suns are burning, whereas the eyes of other men are like dull stones." These passionate expressions are strikingly similar to the words found in the biblical "Song of Songs." We read in "Songs of Songs": "His head is finest gold, His locks are curled, and black as a raven. His eyes are like doves by watercourses, Bathed in milk." (Ch. 5:11-12) When it came to the language of love no other literary works could have been as expressive and moving for the Jewish reader as the "Song of Songs." The beauty and elegance of these words were at the source of Frishman's inspiration.

The passion of Puah and Moshi for each other escalates. It turns in to the delirious desperate cry for help as the revelation on Mt Sinai takes place. Their love turns almost violent in response to God's interference. Clinging desperately to each other the lovers whisper in fury: "Swear to me by the name of God, swear to me by the sun of the day and by the moon at night, swear to me by the sky and the earth: Let me, and I will suck with my lips the tasty wine from your lips...let me get drunk with your burning blood, for my flesh is longing for blood." As the Ten Commandments are proclaimed from the fiery mountain for the entire world to hear, our lovers realize that their magical existence has to come to an end. Puah is suddenly reminded of the story of the "Garden of Eden" and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden. Moshi is also aware that revelation they just heard has changed their life forever. For him the laws kill the free and

unbridled love for his Puah. In Moshi's sorrow, we gain a sense of Frishman's understanding of love. Frishman views love as an instinctual feeling that cannot be confined. Once limitations are set on it, it is stifled and dies like a bird in captivity. Frishman views knowledge as a sobering agent that changes life forever.

In the morning Puah fled from Moshi and returned to her people. Moshi followed her, but when he would encounter Puah, the feeling inside him was one of sudden disgust in his spirit. He could not tolerate the look in her eyes and he fled from her.

Reading these two stories we can safely assume that for Frishman love contains an element of mystery. Love appears from nowhere as a gift from God and unannounced, it disappears into the desert sunset. Drama and sadness are woven into both stories as a natural outcome of an intense love experience. The outcome is sorrowful in both cases. The experience of knowing God for our heroes means loss of love and life: Timnah dies dancing near the Golden Calf and Moshi and Puah loose love and joy of life after hearing the revelation at Mount Sinai.

Frishman's characters strike us with their desert beauty. Timnah's big and expressive eyes, Puah's and Moshi's long and dark curly hair, their slender bodies and gracefulness of motion -- all of these descriptions invite us into an exotic world of this writer's travels. Frishman's trips to the land of Israel in 1911 and 1912 served as transforming events in his life. He fell in love with the natural beauty of the landscapes and the exotic appearance of the Middle Eastern people.

Frishman's contemporaries criticized his choice of characters in these stories. One notable critic is Avraham Kariv in his book "Adabberan Veyirvach Li." They referred to Frishman's protagonists as unstable and extreme. He was scorned for describing

monomaniacs. However, these critical voices ignored the fact that the genre of short stories, in general, requires a swift development of the events and immediate reaction of the characters to their circumstances. Frishman was well familiar with the great literary giants of his time like Chekhov, O'Henry and De Maupassant, who all wrote in the short story genre. A single idea or an extreme idea is common to the stories of these great short story writers. Characters described in the short stories, owing to their rich emotional life, respond swiftly and boldly to the events around them. Frishman followed this model. Within a few opening paragraphs Frishman oriented the reader in time, space and circumstances. Our heroes meet in the story of "The Dance" and their hearts unite till death: "...and as her eye rested on him she blushed and paled in turn, for she had fallen in love with him."

Frishman's stories possess striking beauty and sadness. They convey Frishman's nostalgia for the ancient era, but they also reflect universal themes, that were relevant to Frishman and his time: the tension between order and passion and between human potential and its limitation, and the depiction of religion as an act of faith and instinct.

The next three stories in Frishman's series "Ba-Midbar": "Sorer u-Moreh," "Ha-Mekoshesh" and "Sotah" are also based on the Biblical verses this writer found difficult to understand and to accept as a part of his beloved text. All three cases deal with people who seemingly transgressed the law and, as a result of that, were cruelly punished. The rebellious son, the transgressor of Shabbat and a wife suspected of adultery were the tragic heroes whose bitter end was to serve as powerful example to the rest of the Israelite

community. In these stories, the priestly class was insecure in its new position over the Israelite nation and behaved especially cruelly towards anyone who would challenge their position. These difficult and thought-provoking stories will be discussed separately and later on, will be compared and contrasted as a literary unit of Frishman's writings.

"Sorer U-Morehr" is a story about a rebellious son who chooses not to hear his parents disciplinary warnings and behaved in a manner that was unacceptable to his family and to the leaders of the Israelite community. In the Book of Deuteronomy ch 20:18 we read the following verses: "If a man has a way ward and defiant son, who does not heed his father or mother and does not obey them even after they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his town at the public place of his community. They shall say to the elders of his town, "This son of ours is disloyal and defiant; he does not heed us. He is glutton and a drunkard." Thereupon the men of his town shall stone him to death. Thus you will sweep out evil from your midst: all Israel will hear and be afraid." Reading these verses we are stunned by their harshness. If Torah's words to the Jewish people are meant to be a guiding light and a blue print for a compassionate and meaningful life, then the case of the "Rebellious Son" becomes incomprehensible. Along with David Frishman these words blunt cruelty and intolerance puzzle us. The Bible does not expand on these verses and it leaves the reader wondering about the outside circumstances that could have lead the family to sentence their child to death. This masterful writer took this chance and weaves through these verses a tale that startles and haunts us long after we closed the book.

From the few opening verses of "Sorer U-Morehr" Frishman engages the reader in a story that takes place in the wilderness as Israelite wonder through out the dessert. The new order of Israelite priests and the rulers have been established, but in addition this nation needs an army to fight its enemies. Therefore, all men who happen to be of the age of twenty and up must be counted and recorded in the ledger book to be used for army purposes. However, not everyone agrees with this plan. Frishman begins to describe the conflict almost immediately: "On this very day beginning in the morning, guards went passing through the camp, each one with his spear on his shoulder accompanied by one of the sons of the priests. And they walked from one end of the camp to the next, from one group of dwellings to the next...." The reader is keenly aware of tension in the Israelite community. The marching of guards from one end of the camp to the next holding their ammunition and being accompanied by their priests warns reader of an upcoming conflict. The mood of the Israelite camp is one of surveillance. The guards are placed on the top of the cliffs and on the high hills. It is obvious that the nation is not at all in agreement on sending their young sons to war. However the masses are quite because spears of the guards and presence of the priests represent the authority of a new order that is not to be challenged. The spiritual and military life of the nation seems to be intricately linked together. Rebellion against an army could mean rebellion against God. Nonetheless, the consciousness of the masses is awaken by a single young man who can not find peace with this new bureaucratic and heartless government.

The worrisome draft scene of the Israelite's so vividly described by Frishman was not totally outside of his contemporary reality. The fear of being drafted into an army service that could have lasted up to 25 years was a wide spread practice in Eastern

Europe. Fearing that many young men would flee their homes and headed for the great unknown like United States and other parts of Western Europe. This practice was abolished in the 1874 and military service was reduced to six years.(12) The sigh of relief was heard through out the eastern territories. Frishman was a sensitive witness to these significant events.

As a young man raises his voice against this draft, he is noticed by the authorities. Defiantly he aroused opposition to the army: "What good will it do us and what benefit do we have from serving Moses and Aaron? Who is this man Moses to us who has suddenly lorded it over us to be a boss over us all day long and Aaron who is he that overnight he has been appointed a priest for us? Why do we need an army? Why do we have to fight?" this young rabble-rouser's name was Kehat ben Pagiel. His father was a minister among the high ranking Israelites and his mother was a Hittite whose name was Dvorit.

The concept of a man standing up against the reigning order as a challenge to the authority is not new in Hebrew Bible. In Numbers 16 we read of a rebellion of Korah and his sons who were accompanied with other Israelites contested Moses' and Aaron's single authority: "You have gone too far! For all the community are holy, all of them, and the Lord is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above the Lord's congregation?" Just like Korah, Kehat ben Pagiel challenged Moses' and Aaron's leadership. The Bible deals with both Korah's rebellion and the case of "Rebellious Son" mercilessly. Both were to be put down.

Frishman describes this young man as a fascinating and turbulent individual: "The young man was unruly, violating any discipline and transgression law whenever his bold

willfulness came upon him, but never the less in all the borders of Israel there was no one as good- hearted and generous and full of mercy as he, no one who shared in the pain of every sufferer and cried with every hungry person." Every word of this description is permeated by Frishman's love and admiration of his sensitive hero.

We cry along with Kehat ben Pagi`el and the victimized widow in a memorable vignette as Frishman skillfully describes a sacrificial scene: "...at a time that a woman brought her offering to the priest of two young tender doves, and the priest twisted the head of one dove from the back of its neck and pulled it apart at the wings, with the bird chirping bitterly, the young man's eyes suddenly were filled with tears." It is obvious from this description that Frishman's view on the sacrificial cult was less then positive. Frishman goes on even further in his description of the sacrificial system: "...they also manufactured for themselves a group of priests, a coterie of laggards who did nothing all day long except devour the flesh on the people form their bones and they would grab the food right out of their mouth and take it for themselves." As a silent protest our hero Kehat ben Pagi`el stealthily reach out and steals from the basket the bread and matzot that was intended for offering and give's them to the poor and needy people.

Kehat ben Pagi`el was not the son parents boast about. "He did not respect his father did not love his mother.... When his father rebuked him for his behavior...then Kehat would talk back to him in front of all slaves and maidservants: 'Who asked you to fulfill your bodily lust, and besides, human life is propagated for no purpose or goal, only to endure the ennui of an empty drifting existence?'" Kehat's moods were unstable and unpredictable: "Then another mood came upon him and he suddenly stopped from walking about downcast and gloomy all day and seeing only the bad in things and always

complaining, and he became only happy. Only eat and drink, brothers only eat and drink and enjoy all that the moment can offer! Tomorrow we are going to die, so today let us enjoy ourselves." Frishman's hero views life as a purposeless existence.

Kehat ben Pagi`el stole from his mother and gave her treasures to poor and destitute. When people spoke words of rebuke about his actions, Kehat ben Pagi`el would respond in anger. His eyes would cloud over and he would yell: "There is no private property and there is no ownership, there is no owner of the possessions and there is no master of property! Everything on the face of the earth exists there for the sake of all its inhabitants, and every person can merely reach out his hand and take it for himself." Frishman's description of this man's outrage is very real. Reading these verses we can imagine ourselves standing in the crowd watching this young passionate revolutionary speaking out on behalf of the less fortunate. It is possible that Frishman himself could have attended some of these protests riles when he lived and worked in Russia between World War I and the Revolution of 1917.

Frishman's literary activities led him to Odessa and later on to Moscow. (13) Both places were saturated with political unrest and social changes that led to the outbreak of the Socialist Revolution in 1917. "Strikes spread throughout the country. Student protests and disturbances became more frequent." (14) Revolutionary activists demanded equality and elimination of poverty. The daring image of Kehat ben Pagi`el speaking out and defending the less fortunate came directly from Frishman's first hand experience in pre revolutionary Russia. The new socialist society was established through pain staking efforts. The road to better life was paved with blood and sacrifice. The hero's end in the story "Sorer U-Moreh" was of no exception.

Kehat's father chose a bride for his son. She was the daughter of a rich man and wore silks and fineries. Kehat ben Pagi`el rejected her on the basis of her noble birth. "He was associating with girls who were poor prostitutes, good hearted and tender in their souls, whose flesh was impure, but souls were pure. He had wild times with them and he caroused with them all day and all night and it was a scandal in all of the camp." The fine maiden did not take Kehat ben Pagi`el's rejection lightly. In the end of this short, powerful story Frishman presents her again as she takes her revenge on this rebellious young man.

Frishmans' description of the prostitutes who possessed impure flesh and pure souls is endearing. These verses reveal our writer's artistic nature and free spirit. Groups of artists and writers often found themselves on the fringes of main stream societies. The major cultural centers in Europe at the turn of 20th century, like Paris, Berlin and St Petersburg, were permeated by the spirit of free thinkers, writers and avanguard artists. Prostitutes often accompanied these societies and frequently became an inspiration and "muse" to the great mind. Frishman is not judgmental to their behavior but on the contrary calls their souls "pure."

For Frishman Kehat ben Pagi'el was not only the revolutionary, but also a prophet and a poet. People would gather around him in the evenings to listen to his words: "...there would gather around him a group of complainers and grumblers: every slave who sighed under the stick of his master and every maidservant who was tormented under the hand of her mistress. He would speak words of comfort to them and his words would be like the balm of Gilead. There was no prophet that could speak better than he was, and there was no heart that felt pain more than he. And all his listeners were

standing around him and drinking in his words with thirst." His sorrow however he kept to himself: "...at nights when he was alone and the type of visions and dreams would come to him that come only to seer and poet-then this would bring him to tears and only the stars in heaven would see this."

The gang of unsatisfied masses began to turn in to a group of conspirators and insurgents. They would gather around Kehat ben Pagi'el and their complaints turned into a protests: "And they gathered at the entrance tot he Tent of the Meeting protesting against Moses and Aaron and against the large and numerous group of priests and against the chieftains of the community princes and officers of the camp....They complained and grumbled and spoke terribly words, because the people were disgusted with the desolate life of the desert and with all the days of their wandering." In this description Frishman points out that the new order of Moses and Aaron is failing to address the needs of the masses. Many individuals are unsatisfied with their leadership and their life in the wilderness.

The story of "Sorer u-Moreh" reaches its climax when it becomes obvious that something had to be done about Kehat's behavior. Otherwise his activities would lead the masses to an open rebellion. During the daily sacrifice Kehat ben Pagi`el defended a woman whose sole possession, a little lamb was taken away by the priest. The priest claimed that it was his right according to the Law of Moses: "Everything that has been proscribed in Israel shall be yours - - the priest's!" Kehat was incensed by the heartlessness of this behavior and stirred the people standing around: "The sound of commotion and tumult passed through the camp from one end to the next." His radical behavior did not go unnoticed: "...some men from the guards suddenly walked about in

the midst of the camp and circled around the speaker a few times and they took a good look at his face in order to remember him always and they made a careful note of the matter in their minds."

The following events unfolded tragically: "In the evening of that same day the priests, the princes the elders, the judges and the policemen all convened and met together, and they also called Pagi'el ben `Ochran the chieftain, the father of the young man, and they consulted for a long time until the middle of the night." The reader is prepared for the negative turn of the events, but no one has expected the father of our hero to be part of this conspiracy. However, Frishman describes him as a high-ranking official in this new societal structure. The father of our hero has "bought into" this system and will be convinced to comply accordingly: "The outcome of their consultation was not known to anyone. However, the knees of Pagi'el the minister were trembling a little as he exited, and his face looked very fallen. But after a moment while he still stood at the entrance, he fortified himself and said quietly as if speaking to himself: "It is my obligation to my nation and I will do it...It is time to act for the sake of God. What is a father's mercy at time when a person must act for his nation and for his God?"" We read these verses with horror; a father's mercy towards his child and the love of God do not seem to be one and the same.

The nation becomes lethargic and weary of complaints. Life does not improve and hope for a better future has faded: "Occasionally the nation sighed from the burden that was placed upon it. And afterwards it ceased. Little by little it forgot its grievances and its complaints, and it became convinced in the end that it is good for a person to bear a yoke." However, suddenly the camp awakened to news unlike any they had heard before.

The chieftain Pagiel son of `Ochran and his wife Dvorit the Hittite one morning came before the elders that were at the gate of the encampment, and they brought with them their son, Kehat son of Pagiel. Kehat was tied with robes and accompanied by the policemen. The mother spoke: "This son of ours, Kehat, the son of Pagiel and me, is unruly and rebellious.....The day before yesterday he raised his hand against his mother to hit her, and yesterday he cursed his father. He is a glutton and a lush, he associates with hooligans and consorts with whores. We tried to discipline him, but to no avail. And now behold we have come. We seized him and have brought him to you." We read these words in disbelief. Could a mother do this to her own child? Frishman gives this woman a Hittite background and states that the eyes of this woman shone with an alien lust: "And those who saw her suddenly remembered the Hittite women who ate the flesh of their newborn infants and licked their lips from great pleasure." We can only ponder where Frishman found this image, except for the fact that he does not give the mother an Israelite identity. He underscores the gleam in her eyes as foreign and strange to suggest to the reader that no Israelite mother could do that to her child.

The priest and judges took counsel together, and afterwards came out and proclaimed: "Here is God's judgment: every rebellious son who does not heed the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, who strikes his mother and curses his father, incurs the sentence of death. All those that dwell in his encampment will pelt him with stones. Let his mother throw the first stone..."

The father grew paler as his son was brought out from the guardhouse where he was held till they decided what to do with him. Great many walked behind him. And the trumpets and horns and shofars blew the awesome sounds and the drummers beat the

drums in great tumultuous noise. Frishman's depiction of the following scene is striking in its accuracy and clarity. The writer has little regard for the masses. Their behavior is easily swayed by the current mood. They forget very fast their redeemers and thirst for new experiences. "As if a great intoxication penetrated the camp. A great hysteria was arouses in the mob, and the nation could smell the scent of blood." Frishman does not let up. He continues with his harsh criticism of the masses. As Kehat is led through the streets of his encampment to his death his demeanor is stoic However, when he sees in the crowd also the group of people that he was helping all of those days, all the ones in pain and oppressed, the hungry and the miserable then for a moment his heart froze. From that moment Kehat could no longer walk upright.

The first stone was thrown by his mother and the second by Kehat's father. His father's hand trembled and yet it held the stone firm. The bride rejected by Kehat due to her noble birth finally had her chance for her revenge: "...slowly she approached the site in a primping step; she posed erect and covered in the long scarf, pampered and spoiled... and she threw the third stone in the aristocratic manner of poise and softness."

Frishman is a fine craftsman in the art of story telling. As we about to plunge into the depths of the despair staring at the bloodthirsty crowds, he offers us a tiny hope. A positive character, unknown before, appears on the scene. Her name is Keturah. She was the servant in the house of Pagiel son of `Ochran. As the stones are thrown towards this young man, the girl tries to push them away: "This young, poor girl felt as if she was part of this man, who lay there on the ground,..."

"The pile of stones rose high from the ground. And the Great Priest stood erect and stretched his hands to the heavens and said: "This is what is done to the person that

does not hear the voice of his father and the voice of his mother....'The evil has been purged among you! The evil has been purged among you!' The elders repeated after them: 'All Israel hears and is afraid!'" The maddening scene ends with Keturah, the servant girl, standing near the pile of stones confused and her eyes staring.

David Frishman leaves the reader sad and ill at ease. The beloved Bible, the cornerstone of Jewish life presented the case of "Sorer U-Moreh" mercilessly. Who can comprehend parental behavior that leads to the death sentence of their child? The case was no doubt used to control the behavior of the masses. The rebellious child was made an example to all others that might not wish to conform to societal demands. Remarkable storyteller that he is, Frishman takes his readers by the hand and leads them into a world of a rebellious young man, who spoke the words of a prophet and dreamed the dreams of a true poet. Along with Frishman, we mourn his loss.

The story of "Sotah" can be found in the book of Numbers V:11-31. It is the case of a suspected adulterous brought before the priest by an irate husband. Having no proof of his wife's misconduct, the husband's only recourse is to bring her to the sanctuary, where she undergoes an ordeal. "The priest makes her drink a potion consisting of sacred water to which dust from the sanctuary floor and a parchment containing a curse have been added. The curse spells out the consequences. If she is guilty, her genital area will distend and she will no longer be able to conceive. If, however, the water has no effect on her, she is declared innocent and she will be blessed with seed."(15)

As we read these verses from the Bible we are initially struck with their cruelty and unfairness to a woman. The biblical instructions are clear. It is a husband's right to put his wife through this ordeal in order to put his mind at rest. We can only imagine this scene: In the afternoon around Minchah time as the sun about to seek its nightly refuge, a woman is led by her husband towards the sanctuary ashamed and saddened. The crowd of curious observers accompanied the suspicion-driven tormented couple. They gather around them, young and old alike, pushing, whispering and laughing quietly. Yesterday they were this woman's friends and neighbors, who tapped on her tent and borrowed or exchanged some goods, shared stories about their children or their families. But today the woman is all alone, standing in front of God's altar, and her community is nothing more then a group of vultures looking for delicious gossip.

It is not surprising that Frishman was moved and puzzled by the case of the "Sotah" in the Book of Numbers. The writer expands on these verses and gives the participants names and identities. He endows them with feeling and thoughts. "Sotah," the story of a suspected adulterous in the Israelite camp is a moving account of love, jealousy and terrible injustices.

At the beginning of the story, Frishman grounds the reader in the place and time in which these turbulent evens were about to take place: "When Israelites dwelt in Bene Ya'aqan, in the thirty-fourth year of their departure from Egypt, in the first days after the people had come to this place to pitch their tents, twenty-two years after the erection of the Tabernacle." Among the people there was a man name Iy`ezer ben Machir, who was a wealthy man and husband to six wives. One day he saw a young woman named Shifrah bat Sered. He fell in love with her instantly and desired to marry her. However she

refused. Iy`ezer ben Machir, whose name suggests "helplessness" could not find comfort in his six wives. He fell sick with love for Shifrah: "His face gradually became paler and paler with each passing minute and his flesh became so emaciated on his bones that it was horror to look at." Iy`ezer continued to pursue her and eventually she agreed and he betrothed her. She followed him to Etsion Gever and when Shifrah saw that he had divorced six wives due to his love for her, she fell in love with him: "...then she, too, loved him dearly and her love for him grew stronger from day to day. And indeed the man adored her as one might worship the divine: he provided for her maidservants and servants girls in abundance, and she was able to run her household like a queen."

Frishman describes romance between husband and wife in a beautiful, dream-like way. As Shifrah waits for her husband's return she is anxious, but when he finally comes home all her worries are forgotten: "And at the entrance way to the tent the face of Iy`ezer ben Machir appeared and there was light all around- - and there was light for her in her soul as well. Then she fell on his neck and hugged and kissed him with tremendous agitation, and he did not know what had come over her. However, the next minute she had forgotten all of the terrors and nightmarish images, and she did not go back to them anymore, and she became as gleeful as a young girl."

Frishman, who is usually eager to describe the physical appearance of his characters, makes us wait several paragraphs. But when he finally describes Shifrah, the reader is warned that this woman's sticking beauty might bring on disaster: "And indeed truly wondrous were her stature and her appearance and the way she extended her arm and lay down her small foot. Such an appearance only one of myriad women might have, and only a queen or daughter of queens could walk this way. At times two burning and

warming eyes would radiate on all sides from beneath her splendid veil. And at times also rows of gleaming white teeth would shine through the veil, glittering and momentarily blinding the eyes of the passerby." Everyone was aware of her beauty but Shifrah herself. Her innocence warms our hearts: "She did not know nor understand why it was that group of people would always gather around her whenever she appeared outside and what was going outside around her and why they were looking at her in this way." Like a young girl she found all that attention to be a burden, and chose to remain in her tent.

Frishman describes her as a woman of great faith and a sense of awe towards God. Shifrah spends many nights alone. Her spindle and loom that she brought from her home become her companions: "And there were times that the clanking of the spindle would gradually sound joyful, and then her thoughts would become happy and bright, and other times that it gave off a sound of heavy sadness, and then an oppressive and doleful mood would overtake her...and she thought suddenly about God and his many miracles. For indeed she had been a most God-fearing woman since her youth." Shifrah remembered the awesome stories told her by her mother and grandmother: "...and she would recall what her mother had related to her from when she was still and child that she had stood before the smoking mountain, Mount Sinai, and just as smoke comes up from a furnace so did smoke come up out of the mountain, and the mountain was suddenly uprooted and went heavenward, and the desert fled suddenly and disappeared."

Our heroine's upbringing was full of superstitious stories that held a significant influence over her life: "And sometimes she would recall her nursemaid and what she related to her about the priests, that if a man or a woman incurred their wrath that snakes and scorpions would come up instantly and bite the man or a woman and they would die

as in an instant." Shifrah's profound belief in these stories and her inability to question authority was going to determine the course of future events. Carefully, Frishman introduces to the reader the heartless and godless priestly class, first in the tale of a nursemaid, and then in Shifrah's ordeal in the sanctuary.

The community in Bene Yaaqan was laboring to erect the Tabernacle. Everyone contributed to this significant project. Finally the cloud settled down over the Tabernacle and covered it. And the people brought sacrifices and abundance. Shifrah bat Sered was among them. The priest allowed her to wait until all the people had finished and gone away. He looked her over carefully and proceeded with sacrifice: "suddenly he stopped and held back for a moment from the work: 'My daughter, take off your veil. It is not good to offer up a sacrifice with covered face.' And the woman heeded him at that moment with great humility. After all, the mouth of God had commanded –and she hurriedly removed her veil from her face." A sad smile passes the lips of a reader. Our dear Shifrah cannot tell the difference between God and this lustful priest. What comes next is an abuse of power and trust by the upper crust of Israelite society.

As Shifrah was ready to leave the lustful priest called after her saying: "My daughter, you are a sinful woman, and you must also bring a sin offering. God wants your sin offering and that you should bring Him your sacrifice each and every week..." When Shifrah returned home she wanted to tell her husband about it, but she found no words for it. Week after week she brought a fully burnt offering and the sin offering to the Sanctuary and the priest became friendlier and friendlier each day. "And one day when he was standing alone with her near the altar that was in front of the entrance to the Tent of Meeting while he was offering up her sacrifice, he suddenly grasped her fingers that

were rigid in her hand and demanded of her that she go to the back of the cleft in the rocks on the mountain, and he would wait for her there in the evening." Shifrah understood nothing of his words, but suddenly she blushed deeply and became alarmed and ran for her life. She could not believe what had happened.

Frishman was keenly aware of the psyche of a victim, a wronged person who feels that the wrong done to her was her fault: "However, her heart was pounding inside her over the infraction she had now committed against God. For the mouthpiece of God was with the priest, and she, sinful woman, had interpreted the matter wrongly...What did the man of God want form me today? Where have I sinned before God that the priest should threaten me that if I do not heed the words of God Who speaks to me through him mouth that he would bring upon me a calamity which I would not be able to shake off for my neck forever?..." Despite her fear and confusion she continues bringing the sacrifices to God.

The abuse of Shifrah by the priest escalates. He insists on their sexual involvement. Angered by her rejection he whispers a terrible lie in her husband's ear and plants the seed of suspicion. Frishman's choose the name of Shifrah's husband, Iy`ezer, which means helplessness. I do not feel it is by accident. Iy`ezer falls helplessly in love with this beautiful girl; as a helpless man he divorces his other wives, and he is helpless in the face of a rumor that potentially can destroy his beloved wife Shifrah. He is a man given to obsessions. Frishman's choice of Shifrah's name is also not accidental. It is a name given to the great midwife who saved the children of Israel at their birth from Pharaoh's terrible decree, because she was "A God-fearing woman." Frishman calls Shifrah "A God-fearing woman" numerous times in this story. It is a terrible pity that this

woman's great faith in God did little to protect her from an enemy and from her vicious community.

Driven by jealousy and suspicion Iy`ezer approached Shifrah without looking at her and spoke to her calmly: "Three days hence prepare the meal offering of jealousy that you are to bring: one tenth of a ephah of barley flour. Do not pour oil nor lay any frankincense on it." In disbelief she walked near her husband. For seven days she was to purify herself before God before the day of judgement. She sat in seclusion dumbfounded. Silent in her sorrow she spoke not a word. When he reached to touch her, she screamed and the priest got scared and left in a hurry.

The last scene to this tragic story is startling: "An audience seven times the size of the first gathered around. At her right stood Iy`ezer with his head lowered to the ground and to her right was the priest. The woman was not wearing any normal clothing but only a white gown covered her nakedness, and she appeared to the eyes of the onlookers in this song white gown twice as tall in her stature. And yet her face was seven times as white as the gown. And the priest was dressed in the special head covering, breastplate and sash, and he was performing his rites with deft routines and with perfect and amazing composure." The reader is amazed by the cruelty of the man of God. The innocent victim by his side suffers from his ugly behavior and yet there is no sign of worry on his face.

Shifrah cannot hear the words of the priest. She feels dizzy and ill. Her long hair covered her body and wrapped around her beautiful feet. When her husband looked at her he could not longer recognize his beloved Shifrah. As a priest walked slowly with measured steps he wrote all the words of the curses in ink on the parchment scroll and he placed the parchment into the water of bitterness. However, the woman did not know

anymore what was done to her. Black and red and blue circles started spinning around in front of her eyes. Within moments she fell backward with her full height to the ground: "The priest attempted to pick her up but was unable to, because there was no life to her. And Iy'ezer suddenly rushed over to the body of his wife and he seized her, called out not in a human voice: 'Forgive me! I am the guilty one and you are the righteous one, we have all committed evil against you...'" The empty crowd became satiated with this spectacle and began to disperse. Over the body of this innocent and beautiful woman stood priest, raising his hand and saying: "God has given and God has taken away, Blessed be the name of God!" Slowly he walked away with measured steps.

Sadly we put this story down. The image of an innocent woman who was so terrible mistreated haunts us. Her unshakable faith in God served her poorly. Her trust became her enemy. Shifrah challenged the Israelite society by her goodness. Her innocence did not belong among gossiping, envious and week people, who were led by the crooked priests. As Shifrah stood in front of her community innocent, we are waiting for the voice of Kehat (from the story Ha-Meqoshesh) to ring from amidst the crowd demanding justice and honesty, but our hero was silenced and Shifrah stands there all alone waiting to join him.

Frishman knew the Biblical law that implied that a woman's defilement was offensive to God and, if not punished, would lead to God's abandonment of Israel. The metaphor of Israel as being an unfaithful wife pursuing other gods was common in writings of the prophets like Jeremiah 5:7. David Frishman comes on to the Jewish scene after the age of enlightenment. He is not confounded by the same set of rules as the RaMBaN (Nachmanides). It is Frishman's duty to critique his beloved text, the Bible.

For Frishman, two thousand years of Jewish exile, numerous pogroms and unbearable anti-Semitism were the mark of God's abandonment of Israel. Frishman joined the ranks of Jews who decided to take the Jewish future into their hands. Many Zionists worked the land of Palestine and drained the swamps. People like Frishman, even if they were not overt Zionists, participated in a cultural revolution that helped to fashion the image of the new Hebrew person.

The story "Ha-Mekoshesh" (The Woodgatherer) is a story of a sharply depicted conflict between law and life. This story is full of bitter sarcasm and protest. The consequence of the establishment of a new societal order is loss of innocent lives. The authorities in charge were insecure and frightened. They were eager to enforce the law by founding guilty parties and making an example of them.

Frishman bases the story of "Ha-Mekoshesh" on the account found in the book of Numbers 15:32-36. The verses read as following: "Once, when the Israelites were in the wilderness, they came upon a man gathering wood on the Sabbath day. Those who found him as he was gathering wood brought him before Moses, Aaron and the elders of the community. He was placed in custody, for, as the bible says explicitly, "it had not been specified what should be done to him." Then the Lord said to Moses, "The man shall be put to death: the whole community shall pelt him with stones outside the camp." So the whole community took him outside the camp and stoned him to death-- as the Lord commanded Moses." Frishman is puzzled by this strange story. He demands answers to the most obvious questions: Who was this man? For what purposes did he need the wood? Why is death the only penalty that could be found appropriate for his

transgression? Our writer cannot find the answers within the Biblical text; therefore he retells the story in his own way, filling in the gaps by listening to the quite whispers within this heartless passage.

Frishman describes the new government and masses in the following way: "Those were the days of the new priestly hierarchy which had arisen but a few month back in the neighborhood of Mount Sinai. And this priestly hierarchy was still shaky and infirm and was not firmly established, and a whole community of priests, leaders and law givers and police worked day and night, seeking ways to bolster it and establish it firmly....Laws were given and commandments were brought down from heaven on tablets of stone, in order to separate this newly-formed people from all other peoples, and to set them apart, and the next it forgot everything." (The translation is based on the work of Firestein.) It took time for the new laws and statutes to reach everyone in the community. It was only natural for people to slip back into an old familiar way of behaving. Fearing for the security of their new order the priests had to take drastic measures. Suddenly there was a new law: " ...there arose a fleshy, fat-bellied priest with a headband on his head and forehead, who was wearing a gold-stitched shirt with fringes at its edges. He spoke in his deep bass voice, saying: 'And you shall observe my Sabbath. For it is a sign between Me and you, for all your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord, thy God, who has made you holy---whosoever transgresses this law, he shall be put to death.' And the people listened and didn't believe it. Who would be put to death? Who would do the killing? And why?" Along with Israelite masses Frishman is in disbelief over such new stern measures.

As these events took place in the heart of the camp, this writer leads us to the outskirts of an Israelite camp, where in a fragile dwelling, that was built with his own hands sits Gog the son of Becher, the woodcutter. He is the father of four children and his wife is very ill. But not only his wife; upon leaving the land of Egypt his three children also got sick. Gog's misfortune bewilders and depresses him. Neighbors suggest it is a plague. To comfort his family and attend to their needs, Gog wants to light the stove and make them a warm meal, however the house is empty of wood. We cannot but notice Frishman's sarcasm in this story: the poor woodcutter, whose entire livelihood depends on wood, has no wood in his own home. When he leaves his home his four-year-old daughter Jacoba waits for him and cries when he does not return. As he wanders outside the camp in search of wood for his family, people discover him. They bring him before the authorities. However, they are not sure what to do with Gog son of Becher. After all the verse in the Torah relates to us: "He was placed in custody, for it had not been specified what should be done to him." Numbers 15:34. The priests, judges and the community debate over Gog's fate. At first the community thinks he should be set free, but then under the influence of the High Priest, Phineas son of Eleazar, things change for the worse: " 'No!' and this word was not spoken, but shrieked. 'we shall not do this. I will not permit you to do it. It is God's Sabbath, and once and for all, we must set a precedent, so that all the people may finally realize and know what the Sabbath means, and how important it is to us. This man must serve an example, a sign and a token for all transgressors, in order that all the people, from one end of the camp to the other, shall hear about it, and shall fear and shall not dare to do such a thing again. This man must be

put to death... It is the will of God!' The other judges looked at one another in amazement, and moment later, they agreed with the High Priest."

Throughout this miserable ordeal, Gog son of Becher longs to return home to his family. They need him. Surely he thinks this madness will end and he can be set free. When people found and seized him they said to him that it was the Sabbath. Gog heard them but did not understand a word they said to him. He had heard this word, Sabbath, several times during the last few weeks, but he had forgotten what it meant. He just continued to look confused and sad as he waited for his sentence. Gog's community blind and fearful agrees with the terrible decree: "And therefore, this man, God, son of Becher, shall be put to death for transgressing the Sabbath, for so has God ordained through Moses! And the people all around heard it, and were fearfully afraid. And from the youngest to the oldest, the people shouted as one: 'He shall be put to death! He shall be put to death!'" The corrupt leadership succeeded. The hearts of the masses were swayed and they responded in fear.

The Israelite community, confused and excited, dresses Gog son of Becher in a traditional white gown and leads him to his senseless death. As Firestein writes: "This story contains a profound indictment against the mob, and mocks them for their disgraceful, bovine conduct. The reader gains this impression that the death of the woodcutter was not only unjust but pointless." (15)

Frishman's description of the death of an innocent husband and the father of four, leaves the reader in disbelief and aghast. However, Frishman is not finished; with the hand of a masterful artist, this guardian of truth delivers his final blow. In the last paragraph he writes: "And among the children, there was a little girl who had come at the

very end, and had missed everything, for she had a long way to run from her house at he other end of the camp, to this place---and she was God's little daughter, Jacoba. When she arrived at the place of the stoning, there had risen a large mound of stones upon the ground, and the stoned man already lay dead.

She didn't have the slightest notion as to what had taken place here and she did not know who the man had been. The little girl gathered some pebbles from the ground, and playing with them, she threw them on the mound of stones."

Frishman was frustrated with this Biblical account. It seemed heartless and gave no proper warning to those who could have been confused about observance of Shabbat or to those who could have transgressed the Holy day unintentionally. In the hands of power-thirsty individuals the law became a weapon of oppression.

Firestein eloquently noted in his work on Frishman: "The style of these desert legends is in such remarkable harmony with the period they describe, that they seem like 'pages torn out of a Apocryphal Pentateuch.' These desert legends were Frishman's swan song, and in them he realize his highest poetic talent. In these legends, he raised Hebrew literary creativity to a very high level. The eternal problems of humanity, of love and hate, the individual and society, religion and life---themes such as these found their freshest and most artistic expression in these stories. They shimmer and glow like the desert, and are as powerful and as enduring as its rocks." (15a)

At this point we will leave our desert heroes behind and move towards Frishman's original poetry and his translation of Pushkin's poetry, but before we turn to this new page we will wave our sad goodbye to three people standing outside of an Israelite camp. In the soft rays of a setting desert sun these figures all dressed in white. They are Kehat

ben Pag`iel, Shifrah bat Sered and Gog ben Becher. They stand quietly in judgment over Israel, and yet their hearts are full of mercy for this struggling, newborn nation.

In those far-off days, the sky was a thousand times bluer then it is today, love was a thousand times stronger then it is today and compassion was a thousand times greater then it is today.

III. Frishman, Poet, Prophet or Messiah.

David M. Bethea (16) in his book "Realizing Metaphors" about the life and writings of Alexander Pushkin, related that poetry is "the mortal embrace of the immortal" and "the place where literal and figurative twirl around each other as equal partners in the dance of meaning." Frishman's poem "Messiah" is a masterful demonstration of this "dance." Frishman uses the profoundly Jewish concept of the "Messiah," who one day will come and redeem the Jewish people from their suffering. The idea of a redeemer has been an immortal concept in the Jewish psyche. Homelessness, persecution and instability have been a Jewish reality for centuries. Simple mortals have looked and yearned towards a brighter future for themselves and their children. They were hoping that this future would be ushered in by an individual, a Messiah, sent to them by God. It is this "dance" of the literal and figurative meaning that Frishman tries to portray in his vision of a Messiah and the Jewish people.

David Frishman was only one of many Jewish and non-Jewish writers who used the poetic medium in addressing Jewish longing for the prophetic message, and ultimately, for the Messiah. Writers like A. Pushkin, S. Frug, and S.Y. Nadson were

sensitive ears and eyes of the humanity that was going through painful stages of growth and evolution. The age of prophecy was long over and yet society more then ever needed guidance and vision. The prophetic work had to be continued by poets. These poets emerged on the scene holding the mantle of truth and consciousness. As J. Arlow (17) eloquently pointed out: "At the threshold of the ages stands the prophet, midwife of humanity's dreams." In nineteenth century Russia the poet took on the "prophetic" role. The newborn, divine vision was to be found in their poetic verses.

Frishman's poem "Messiah" was directly influenced by S.Frug's poem "The Modern Epoch." In his poem S. Frug expresses humanity's longing for a savior: "... who will be sent to the sick and gray, not wholly dead, not wholly living." However, the poet warns: "No savior from without can come to those that live and are enslaved. Their own Messiah they must be/ And play the Savior and the saved." The poet suggests very clearly that it will be up to the masses to lift their heads and attempt to create a better life for themselves. The Messiah cannot do it alone.

S. Frug (1860-1916) a contemporary of Frishman was a popular Jewish poet, who wrote in Russian and called the Jewish masses to social awakening and worldly education as a means to liberation. Influenced by the age of the Enlightenment, S. Frug felt that it is no longer blind faith in God and a Redeemer that will liberate the Jewish masses. The social changes within Jewish community and in the greater society will afford the opportunity for a better life.

Inspired by the social reforms of 1860's of Alexander II, S. Frug and his contemporaries hoped for equal rights, education and a merger with the Russian culture.

(18). They thought that these reforms would bring on the new era, where a Jew will feel as an equal and integral part of the society. However, the pogroms of 1880's swept across Russian Jewish communities and left behind broken windows, lives and dreams. From then on, in S. Frug's writings one could depict a call to Zionism and Jewish self-liberation: "No savior from without can come, to those that live- and are enslaved,/ Their own Messiah they must be,/ And play the Savior and the saved."

D.Frishman regarded highly S. Frug's contribution to Russian Jewish literature, so much so that Frishman's poem "Messiah" bears the elements of that influence. The poem "Messiah" is a moving account of a struggling savior whose redemptive destiny cannot be fulfilled until the Jewish people themselves are ready to throw off the bonds of oppression.

In its structure and imagery of the poem is strikingly similar to elements of the book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel was a sixth century prophet who lived during the Babylonian Exile. He was exiled to Babylon along with the priestly and noble classes. He did not resist, but welcomed the call to prophecy (3:3-3) and God's command.

The poem "Messiah" and the Book of Ezekiel both open up with the vision of the heavenly splendor and the description of God's glorious throne: "In the midst of amber and chrysolite, in the midst of crimson clouds,/ Clouds ascending and clouds descending/ There above the flame that flickers like the whiteness of sapphire, / Is the lofty and exalted Throne, " These colorful descriptions Frishman draws from Ezekiel's prophecy (1:26—27). The prophet Ezekiel describes in his vision the following account: "Above the expanse over their heads was the semblance of a throne, in appearance like sapphire;...I saw a gleam of amber—what looked like a fire encased in a frame:" Just

like Ezekiel who falls on the ground (1:28) so, too, does the hero of Frishman's "Messiah." As Frishman writes: "And I fell to the earth and bowed myself and kneeled. Behold, the Lord, the Lord God of Hosts, the Lord God Sabaoth...."

Throughout this powerful vision Frishman describes the sound of a storm: "A storm of shaken chains,/ The clash of link on link..." The reader is held captive in anticipation of a revelation: Who is chained and why? The poet does not reveal the chained, tragic figure until later.

What follows the sapphire and amber depiction of clouds and flames are a few descriptive lines about God. His majesty is seated on the throne with the Sun as the pillow for His head, and the Moon as His stool. The poem unfolds and flows in a dramatically real and surreal manner. Only at the end of the poem, the reader again encounters God.

Frishman finally reveals to the reader the chained hero. We are shocked to read. that it is a Messiah. Frishman's description of the hero is both colorful and painful. The Messiah is chained to the Heavenly throne by gold chains. It is the shaking noise of these chains the reader heard in the beginning of the poem. Frishman masterfully describes the signs by which he recognizes the Savior:

"I knew thee: by the fire that burns in thine eyes,
This is the sacred fire,
That glows in the eyes of all that are singers,
Of all that are seers, redeemers and prophets....
By the signal of pity in thy fallen cheeks,
By the fierce sparks that play about thy lips:

But, more than these,

By the chains which are laid upon thine arms..."

These chains of gold are very strong and not going to break for a thousand years. And the Messiah looks down on the suffering of humanity and its terrors of life, but he is powerless to help:

"And daily, hourly, momently,

As thine eyes see the new evils,

And thine ears hear the crying of new blood

Calling to the from the earth...."

The image is painful and even though it is surreal, it strikes the reader with its reality. The description of God's chosen being tied up with the bonds also comes from the book of Ezekiel. In Eekiel 4:8 God says the following to his prophet: "Now I put cords upon you, so that you cannot turn form side to side until you complete our days of siege." Frishman uses a different word for chains (*kevalim*) than Ezekiel (*avotim*), however both writers convey similar meaning to their readers. The episodes of divine confinements are strikingly similar in the lives of Ezekiel and Frishman's Messiah. (Ez..4:4)

Frishman's Messiah is told: "...Gird thyself with all thy strength

To burst thy chains and break a way to freedom,

That thou mightest descend swiftly to earth,

To redeem and to deliver

The oppressed from the oppressor, and the poor

from those that rob them."

The Messiah tries to break his chains by smashing them link by link. However, his attempts are useless. "In the dead of the night I have heard: "Lord God, Lord God, how long? I wither, I wither!" In contrast to Frishman's Messiah, Ezekiel did not resist the call to prophecy (3:1-3). He was in agreement with God's actions against Judah. He felt they were not capricious deeds, but the Divine response to human sinfulness and that they were profoundly just. (Ez.33:17-19).

Frishman's Messiah however, felt that the life of a Jew was full of suffering do to anti-Semitism, governmental policies and economic deprivations "Wherefore hast Thou given me an eye that sees,

And ears that listen,

That I may see the generations and their tears,

That I may hear the generations and their sighing,

My heart wounded with the wounds of all men...

Wherefore hast Thou created this sea of wretchedness,

All the evil and all the oppression."

Messiah discontent with God goes even further. Messiah exclaims:

"Wherefore hast Thou given me the strength

To save and to redeem, to help and to rescue,

To comfort those that mourn,

To heal hearts that are broken,

To bind up all sorrows-

And hast laid chains upon mine arm?

Lord God, wherefore hast Thou made me a Redeemer,

And hast forbidden me to redeem?"

Between the verses we read the savior's deep discontent with God's plan for him and for humanity. The tormented Messiah clashes links of chains against one another, futilely trying to set himself free.

As the poem draws to closure Frishman repeats its opening verses that describe the glory and majesty of God's throne. Finally, God response to the pleas and questions of the Messiah:

"A voice is heard answering: 'Until a new generation arise,
A generation that will understand redemption,
A generation that will desire to be redeemed,
Whose soul will be prepared to be redeemed
Them wilt thou too achieve thy destiny and be redeemed:
Then wilt thou too achieve thy destiny and redeem!"

Both Frishman and his contemporary Frug believed that redemption of their people was not separate from Jewish readiness to become a new nation. Frishman and his literary circles attempted to create a new Hebrew person who would posssess a new mentality and a new way of being, i.e. of being free. Frishman and Frug both until felt that till then the Messianic era will not arrive.

As mentioned earlier, Frishman, like many other Eastern European poets, was influenced by the writings of the great Russian genius Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) Pushkin's contribution to the world of poetry is immeasurable. His dedication to the evolution of Russian language gave tools and inspiration to other poets long after his tragic death. D. M. Bethea (19) said about this marvelous poet: "Pushkin gave to

Russians an inner world almost as rich in promise as their outer world was rich in denial." The vast and generous Russian soul finally found the language to express its sorrow and longing.

Pushkin's poem "The Prophet" was a fine example of this poet's mastery of Russian language. The use of imagery, rhyme and meter are exceptional. "His style is devoid of the superfluous...It is as if his objective were to exploit the maximum communicative power of each word, the semantic potential of every expression without an excess of modifiers." (20) No wonder Frishman became attracted to this poem and felt compelled to translate it. The poem contained in itself characteristic features of biblical poetry: action, imagery, simplicity, and vigor. Pushkin enlisted every aspect of nature, every human emotion and experience in his artistic search. "...The source of Pushkin's appeal: beneath the polished surface is a moral depth, a suggestion of mysteries to be explored, a potential for meanings, and a fresh significance that each generation discovers. This is what we expect of great art, and this is what we find in Pushkin." (21) Just like great artists the prophets and poets with their poetic power, envisioned a world worthy of humanity, that would seem good in the eyes of God. The poem poignantly calls Pushkin to assume the role of a prophet and carry God's fiery message to the people.

The poem opens up with a poet driven by spiritual thirst who wanders aimlessly through the desert. During this wandering, the poet encounters a "Seraph" an angel. (Here Pushkin borrows imagery from the prophecy of Isaiah) With a light gesture the angel opens the poet's eyes and ears, and fills the poet's senses with images and powerful sounds. Pushkin's descriptions become bolder, and even somewhat violent, as he describes the angel's kiss. The "seraph" pressed against the mouth of the poet and tore

thepoet's sinful tongue out of his mouth, and instead placed there the sharp tongue of a snake. The angel split the chest of the poet with a sword and took out the poet's heart, and instead of the heart he placed there a burning fiery coal. The poet fell into unconsciousness and after that heard the voice of God calling out to him:

"Rise, o prophet and execute My will,

Walk around the sea and the earth,

And with the word (verb) burn the hearts of people."

"Lech, sov orchot yamim ve'artsot yadata, dabber---u-levavot dvarecha yav`iyru."

In my assessment, Frishman did a wonderful job in translation of this brilliant poem. The English translation of Pushkin's "Prophet" is cold and detached. The English language could not have possible conveyed the power and passion of Pushkin's Russian. However, Frishman's Hebrew, in its warmth and in its colorful imagery came close to the original and offered the Hebrew readers Pushkin's masterpiece in their ancestral language.

Bethea said the following about Pushkin: "There is not real creation of beauty without risk. Pushkin lived in a time that was rich in martial spirit and rife with the subjugation of indigenous others." (22) He detested serfdom and called for its abolition. Pushkin's association with the Decembrists gave him a negative reputation in the royal court. However, this poet was called by forces far beyond himself and was compelled to speak against injustices and oppressions. Even though Frishman came on the scene generations later, his fight resembled that of Pushkin. Both men were endowed with the gift of language and extreme sensitivities and they fought similar battles. Both the Russian and

Jewish communities were in need of awakening, education and liberation. These poet-prophets attempted to take on this arduous task.

When I read Hebrew prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah or Ezekiel I often marvel at their intimate relationship and communication with God. It is through them God has chosen to speak the words of truth to the Israelite society. I also cannot help but notice that despite their closeness with God, their personal life was turbulent and often lonely. I feel similar compassion and admiration for the great poets we have discussed in this section.

In the poem "Estranged among the strange and the different" (Muzar beyn Zarim ve-Shonim) Frishman revealed his sense of isolation and loneliness in this world. In the poem, Frishman wonders about unable to express to anyone his discontent and painful loneliness. The autumn reflects his feeling of futility and fallen leaves bring on the sense of loss and finality. "While the falling branch dreams the dream of the tree, I look around and my heart sheds tears." The birds are flying south while our poet stays behind and desires to join them in their liberated flight.

Both Frishman and Pushkin realized that their heavenly ability of expressing ideas in high poetic form came at a very high price. Both poets were both admired and detested by their contemporaries for their brilliance, their vision, literary talents and ingenuity. The loneliness so often mentioned by both writers was part of their reality. D. Bethea wrote about Pushkin: "...From the beginning Pushkin seemed to realize that his acts of daring could not come for free; they had to cost something. It was a cost, however, that was worth it." (23) We can say the same about our dear David Frishman.

Pushkin, Frug, Frishman and Nadson were prophet-poets of their time. "Since poetry is our best human mode of intricately rich communication...it makes sense that divine speech should be represented as poetry." (24) These men used poetry as their means to convey a "divine" message for their time. Reading their poetic expressions one is reminded that despite their realistic depiction of the human condition and its struggles, they still held hopes for a brighter future. "Poetry must always be a ship that is wrecked on entering the harbor. And yet the greatest poetry sings always, at the end, of transcendence: while seeing clearly and saying plainly the wickedness and terror and beauty of the world, it is at the same time humming to itself, so that one overhears rather than hears: All will be well." (25)

"Be-Har Sinai"

In the four hundred and twenty-ninth year of the time that Children of Israel lived in the land of Goshen, about one year and three months before the entire people left Egypt, they together with their young and old to pass through the vast desert and come to Canaan. And there was a young man among the children of the Hebrews that were working with mortar and bricks on the outside walls of Rameses, and his name was Moshi, And the youth was still of very tender age, his beard not yet grown, and he had not yet reached 17 years of age. On the day he came out of his mother's womb, a midwife threw him into the Nile, as the king had ordered, because she was a fearful woman and cowardly of heart, who feared Pharaoh's anger. And the child was floating on the face of the water for about half of the day and a quarter of the evening. And in the evening, the waves carried and brought him to the thick brush that was along the bank of the Nile. And he remained hanging there among the reeds until the people saw him and extricated him from there, and he was saved. From then on they called him "wondrous one," owing to the wonders that God performed for him, by sheltering him in the palm of His hand. His mother tied around his neck a braided ribbon of purple color with seven braids. The ribbon was around his neck all the days. And so when the youth grew up he became one of the workers on the wall of Raamses. One day he saw a young girl, Puah, whose was thirteen years and eight months of age, and who was one of the female workers in the field workers of Pithom. At that moment the plasterer's trowel that was in his hand trembled and fell to the ground. The young girl, too, was suddenly very much afraid.

Then both of them knew in their hearts that in that moment God's great hand was upon them, and that there was no escape from it.

For thirteen days, night and day, they searched but could not find one another. And on the fourteenth day in the early evening suddenly he saw her standing by herself in the field. He approached her the same way a person approaches someone to whom he has spoken just the day before or whom he has left just a moment ago. He took her by the hand and asked: "What are we waiting for here?" The young girl trembled in every limb of her body and answered not a word. Her eyes alone answered.

But in the morning not a soul saw them in Raamses or in Pithom. They had vanished suddenly from amidst the community.

Night and day, night and day the two of them walked together hand in hand, swinging their arms together powerfully as they walked. Where they were walking they did not know. Nor did they know what they wanted. Both of them were like little, pure and naive children. And their hearts were just singing for joy. From the field that was in front of Raamses they came to Succoth; from Succoth to Etham; and from Etham to Migdol that was in front of Pene- hahiroth They did not know where they were and they did not know the name of the places, but in the depth of their hearts there was only joy. On the third day in the morning they lifted their eyes and looked around, and lov and behold, the awesome desert had closed in upon them suddenly. The Shur desert and the vast Aravah spread out before their eyes to awesome distances that the eye could not encompass. And suddenly they broke out in a joyful laughter: What do they care about the desert and the Aravah? They where like the wild lilies of the valley, and like the crane flying carefree in the sky. They kept walking and plucking any edible grasses, any plants

sprouting from among the thorns and any vegetation that was growing from beneath the stone fences. And there were times that they found edible, wild mushrooms, or cucumbers and garlic and there were times that they even ate them and had some left over, so they made for themselves a sack and put the leftovers in the pack and put the pack on a rope that they carried together. And in the depth of their hearts there was only joy. When the daily heat scorched them, the young man would stand next to the young woman with a long palm branch in his hand fanning her with a light breeze. And at night when there was a biting chill, the two of them would lie together in one of the pits, heart to heart, flesh to flesh, and that would warm them. There were times the soaking rain would suddenly pour down and the lightning ramble across the sky with its long wands of fire. Then they would stand still in their tracks for a moment place, not knowing what to do, when they would burst out in loud laughter, and they would fall upon one another and suddenly start kissing one another endlessly and incessantly. And there were times that a terrible windstorm would develop, whistling loudly. The wild animals would hide in their lairs and the wild birds would tremble in their nests. They would then stand in their places for a moment and did not know what to do. But then all of a sudden they would take each other by the hand, stretch out their arms, throw back their heads and begin to dance in a circle. Then Moshi would say to Puah:: "Come on, let us run this time hand in hand. Toward the great desert let us run, to the green oasis that is over there.

Let us go into the thick forest where we can hide behind the bushes! Let's take off our skirts and blouses and run around naked as on the day we were born. Let us make a crown our for our foreheads out of flower blossoms, from the buds of the red poppies that grow wild in flaming color here and let the flowers shake in the wind as we run."

This is how they went on together and came to Marah, and this is how they went from Marah to Elim. At Elim they found twelve springs of water and seventy date palms. So they ran from spring to the spring, starting at the first spring and finish at the last. They would draw a handful of water to their mouths and give each other to drink. The young man gave his handful of water to the young woman and the young woman to the young man. They would frolic in a loud voice till the seventy date palms shook. Afterwards they hurried toward the palms and passed by all of them, starting at the first date palm and finishing at the last. And suddenly there came over them a strong longing to go to the top of a palm and sit there. So each of them climbed and went up to the top of his own tree and sat there, each in his treetop among the thicket of branches and wide leaves, hidden from one another. And they called out to each other: "Yonah o yon?" They played in a loud voice, wildly and in great joy, until all of the twelve wells vibrated. They forgot themselves completely and their hearts sang from an abundance of happiness, good feeling and joy.

And from Elim they went and did not know the way and came to the desert Sin. From the desert Sin they wandered for three days and three nights and came to Rephidim. From Rephidim they walked and here they saw in front of their eyes a mountain. They did not know what it was nor did they know its name. Puah said: "I am a bit tired." and Moshi said: "I desire to sleep a little." And the two of them like children entered into the recesses of the mountain and found for themselves a cave hidden in the cleft of the ravine, and they saw that it was good for them to settle in this cave. They made for themselves a place to dwell and set up a spot of soft sand for on which to lie down. They

said: "We do need to wander anymore, because here we can live forever." They settled there and were like young children.

In their eyes the world that surrounded them did not seem to exist or to be of material significance. They did not regard the sky as important except insofar as it pertained to their love; and the earth, too, only insofar as they required from it some small amount of food or fruit to sate their hunger. And after moment they would forget the sky and the earth and remember only themselves and their great love. They had no desire to see a human face or ask for anything, because the two of them sufficed for each other in everything; and they did not lack for anything. And there were times that every occurrence on the outside taking place around them felt like a burden, an annoyance and a yoke. And there were times the sky was bothersome, interrupting them from their sacred worship, their love. And there were times the earth to them was an obstacle and a distraction that withheld them from the great content of their life. Their wonderful secret was in their hearts day and night. The sights of any stranger and contact with anything from the outside were hostile forces to them. There were times a wayfarer would pass by the area where they dwelt once or twice a month. They would speak two or three words to the person and not ask for a thing or inquire to know anything. They would hurry away and within moments disappear and hide from him in the shelter of their hidden nook. And if a roaming shepherd came to the mountain with his little flock, they would hurriedly give him some of the peanuts and the red poppies they had gathered, and they would barter that for some bread he gave them in exchange, and then within moments they would scurry away and hide.

The world around them sank from view; there was no universe, nothing, only Moshi for Puah and Puah for Moshi; and that was the sum total of life.

In the morning when the sun came out they would lie at the entrance of the cave, both of them naked with her left hand on his chest and his right hand under her neck, and they would daydream and gaze up at the sky.

"Look!" she said :"Your curls are as soft as the delicate rays of the sun, whereas the hair of other men is coarse and straight. In your eye sockets two suns are burning, whereas the eyes of other men are like dull stones. You are as handsome as a son of the gods, whereas others are only like earthworms, ugly looking and ungraceful.. You are full of mystery, like the great wonder that has no name. The others are as transparent as broad daylight -- and I cannot suffer the daytime.

And in the early evening when the big and bright stars came out and they sat one next to the other, both of them naked. Their eyes were like spurs thrusting into the curtain of the sky.

"You are darkly restrained," he said," and heavy with pent-up heat like flower in the mighty forest of the wilderness of **Shur.** You overflow with constant, haunting, longing like an evening song floating over an empty open field. Every one of your bones brings me to temptation like to the edge of a sword. You are lying in wait for me, siren-like, calling out to me, stalking me like the light that leads men astray, like the blue haze over quicksand.

And in the afternoon: "You are like a star to me" she said. Like a falling star that falls into my bosom in the darkness like a streak of silver.

"You are deep" he said : "Awesome and dark and forbidding, like a well."

And they did not kiss one another, but rather they devoured each other ravenously. They did not embrace each other, but rather they plunged, dove, cleaved, mixed and melted into one in another: One soul and one flesh.---

Days upon days passed and month upon month, and finally approximately three years elapsed.

There were times they were angry that there was a sun in the sky and that at times it interfered with them, and there were times jealousy came over them that there were other living creatures besides them on the face of the earth. And there were times they grew bitter, because there were trees and shrubs and birds in the sky and stones and grains of sand, in addition to themselves. All of these were occasionally adversaries to them in their isolation, their love, their life. Why did God create all of these? Why He did not create only the two of them alone?...

And they did not know that they were dwelling on Mount Sinai...

Then one day in the morning there was a great sound all around like the sound of stamping of thousands of people with camps of numerous and heavy cattle, herds of sheep and cattle and many animals.

Moshi and Puah were very much astounded. Who had dared to burst in to their quiet corner to assault their resting place and to disturb them from their happiness and their love? ---- And when they came out from their cave and lifted up their eyes, here was a great and mighty throng camping before the mountain.

At that time they heard a strange and miraculous thing: A Torah was to be given here to this nation, a Torah with statutes and laws.

And Puah and Moshi did not understand a thing. Why does anyone need a Torah? Why statutes and laws? ---- A kind of contempt rested on both of their lips.

... And the Torah would conquer the entire world that was all around, from one end of the earth to the next, and the statutes and laws would subjugate and oppress all that dwelled on the earth, every nation and every person on the face of the world.

And Moshi and Puah heard and all of it was a great burden to them. Why should there be such a Torah, one that puts a hook through the cheeks of a man? Why not allow life to be itself, what it is and wherever it is?---Something like mockery arose on their lips. If only these petty things would not come and interfere however slightly from the significant content of their lives!

-Then they hurried to their hidden corner that was in inner cave and hid there, so that no sound from outside would reach their ears. And within moments they were clinging to each other, heart to heart and soul to soul, and all that they saw and all that they heard they forgot.

And this mighty nation, numerous beyond measure, were purifying themselves and washing their garments for one day and then another, and on the third day they were prepared.

And suddenly the entire ground beneath them trembled, from one end to the other. And suddenly the sky above was split and torn open from one end to the next, and strange, wondrous and awesome signs were seen in the sky and on the earth. Red lights and blue lights flew about on the wings of the wind. And tongues of fire and spears of flame were ignited and big stars that sparkled and flickered greatly were seen in the firmament in the middle of the day, and from the North suddenly shined forth a dark emerald colored light.

At that moment the earth shook and suddenly all creation froze in its place: the trees ceased from growing and every shrub was in the field stopped growing; the crevices gaped open-mouthed with their awesome cavities and waited for something to happen; and all animals and everything that had the soul of life in it stood still in place and waited. A flying seraph froze in its flight in the middle of the sky and hearkened, and on the ground a big ringed viper suddenly raised up its head and listened.

And in the cave in the innermost corner, Moshi kneeled at Puah's feet and stared into her eyes.

And suddenly loud sounds and lighting and flames and a heavy cloud came down and settled over the mountain and over all the land around it and on every valley and every hill. And all of the great desert held its breath and hearkened. Suddenly the sound of the shofar and the strong sound of the ram's horn could be heard, and the mountain was smoking, and its smoke went up to the sky like the smoke of a furnace. And the camps of the priests stood at the foot of the mountain, group after group, and after the priests the camp of the Levites, group after group. And after them was the huge mass of people as numerous as the grains of sand at the seashore, their tunics gleaming white after having been washed and a great terror blanketing their faces.

And a heavy dark mist was rising and covering the entire mountain.

The flashes and the sound of lightning gradually became stronger and stronger, and suddenly there was a sound, a sound that was no sound but more like thunder, and yet in spite of all this, one could hear from out of the storm each and every word explicitly. And there were times the listener had the impression that the word could be

audible in to the furthest corner of the world, reaching until the far ends of the most distant island.

"I the Lord am your God ----You shall have no other gods besides Me----" In that very moment Puah whispered in the Moshi's ear quietly :"You are more beautiful then any man! How beautiful you are! How beautiful .

"You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image---You shall not bow down to them or serve them ---

" Moshi intoxicated with love was grasping her hand and stammering he knew not what-: "I love you more then any girl on this earth! How much I love you! How much I love you!"

"You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God-----for the Lord will not clear one who swears falsely by His name.---

" And Puah was chattering and speaking, chattering and speaking: "Swear to me by the name of God, swear to me by the sun of the day and by the moon at night, swear to me by the sky and the earth: Let me, and I will suck with my lips the tasty wine from your lips, because I am thirsty for your lips; let me get drunk with your burning blood, for my soul is longing for blood. Let me bite into your moist flesh, because I have a strong desire for human flesh; let me strangle you with these hands of mine so that little by little I will kill you with my very own hands."

"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy---For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them----"

And Moshi's lips were moving, and but he was unaware of what he was saying, and his lips were whispering: "Look heavily upon me with your flaming eyes! Ignite me

please and melt me, till I am vaporized and exist no more. Let me immerse myself in you until the abyss of your unfathomable soul! Your curls are softer than silk, softer than the herd of sheep that in is the garden of Tachpanes,. Your hair is finer than the papyrus reeds on the banks of the Nile. The curves of your thighs are like the pillars of Pharaoh at Ramses! And your two breasts are like the hills of myrrh, on which I lie in the afternoon!"

"Honor your father and your mother----You shall not murder-----You shall not commit adultery---You shall not steal----You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor---

"And suddenly Moshi's face became very white. The voice came from the storm and reached until the hidden corner of the inner cave and shook him from his place.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife---"

And Puah stood up and stormed from her place: "Do you hear, do you hear Moshi?" Puah and Moshi put their fingers over their ears so as not to hear...

A great anxiety fell on them, and they did not know what it was, only that suddenly they experienced a terrible fear the nature of which they could not understand...

The days passed and the entire large camp that was encamped in front of the mountain went and traveled away. The desert remained empty as before. The boulders stood mute and stared into the wilderness--- and the silence was as before.

The dread that fell over both of them gradually increased in intensity. No longer did they any rest, and they did not know why. A kind of oppressive burden weighed down on them.... The joy of life suddenly left them.

And on one of the nights when Puah was lying near Moshi and could not fall asleep, she said: "You know Moshi? When I was still little sitting on my grandmother's knees, I now remember something. One day my mother's mother told me a terrible thing: There was a man, Adam, in the garden of Eden, he together with his wife, and on the morning of one day the two of them were expelled from Paradise, and they did not know why. God's great hand was upon them-and suddenly their life became a burden to them.

And Moshi was also shaken, confused and distraught, and he was hallucinating. And one time he said: "If once the eyes of a man are opened, it will not help him to close them again. The images that he has once will never leave him again "

The ability to speak left them and they could no longer speak a word to one another for days on end.

And one morning when Moshi woke up from his sleep, he saw that the lying place next to him on his right was empty and Puah was not there. He then understood that at some time in the night she had fled, to pursue the throng and catch up with it - so he, too, bound up his knapsack and left.

And when he, too, came to the camp and saw her, she was walking barefoot after the man Moshe, and she would no longer veer away from him. Like a shadow she followed him wherever he went. Then Moshi's lips muttered in silence: "The Torah has captured the essence of life .."

And also Moshi walked after the throng and clung to them, unaware as to why he walked like a disembodied spirit.

And when he would encounter Puah and see her, he felt inside that he was suddenly disgusted with her, and he could no longer suffer her gaze, and fled from her. And Puah also could not tolerate him and avoided him every single time.

And their joy left them forever.

"Sorer u-Moreh"

It was in the second year of the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt, on the first day of the second month, while the nation was camped at Rimon Peretz, that this event occurred. On this very day beginning in the morning, guards went passing through the camp, each one with his spear on his shoulder accompanied by one of the sons of the priests. And they walked from one end of the camp to the next, from one group of dwellings to the next, or they ascended to the tops of the cliffs and the high hills and stood there. And from there they spoke to the nation in a loud voice and they transmitted the message saying: "Every male from Israelites from the age of twenty years of age and up let him come out today to the field to the watch tower, because there they will all be counted together by the head count. And the man who has reached twenty years of age will be recorded in the ledger book to be one of those going out to serve in the army." And in when the guard finished speaking the priest complemented and reinforced his words. He spread out his hands sanctimoniously and cast his stony gaze, adding: "The one who has set up a tent, but has not dedicated it, let him not go out, because this person is exempt to return to his tent. And one who has cultivated a plot of land and has not harvested it, let him not go out, because he is exempt for the sake of his first fruits. And one who has betrothed a woman and not married her, let him not go out, because he is exempt to be with his bride for one year. Amen, Amen!"----Then all the people came up from every corner, every Israelite; there was not one that was not counted. And the sum of those who were counted on that day was six hundred and three thousand, five hundred and fifty.

There was only one young lad amidst the camp who was disobedient towards the guards, and made himself bold and refused to write his name among those going out to the army. He would walk around all day in the midst of the camp from one from one group of dwellings to another and he would incite the people against their nation's leaders, against Moses and against Aaron, and he would agitate and instigate, arousing opposition to the army and against recruitment and enlisting. "What good will it do us and what benefit do we have from serving Moses and Aaron? Who is this man Moses to us, who has suddenly lorded it over us to be a boss over us all day long and Aaron who is he that overnight he has been appointed a priest for us? Why do we need an army? Why do we have to fight? Why should one man rise against another like himself and murder him and shed his blood upon the earth over nothing? Lets not go out! Let us not go out!" When they investigated and asked about him to find out who he was and whose child this youth was, and what he was, they found that he was Kehat ben Pag`iel ben Pag`iel. His father was a minister among the Israelites among the high ranking ministers, of those chosen in the assembly, and his mother was a Hittite whose name was Dvorit. At that the listener would nod his head, saying: So he's the one! It's Kehat, Kehat ben Pag`iel. It's the notorious Kehat....

In those days the desert was seven times more powerful and awesome than today, the mountains seven times more solid and massive and man seven times more powerful and rebellious, seven times more given to protest, more volatile and more resistant to any yoke than today.

The things they said about they young man were amazing and strange, and at times, even fearful: "The young man was unruly, violating any discipline and

transgressing law whenever his bold willfulness came upon him--but nevertheless in all the borders of Israel there was no one as good-hearted and generous and full of mercy as he, no one who shared in the pain of every sufferer and cried with every hungry person. He would not rise in the presence of a priest nor show respect to a prophet; he abhorred the tribal chieftains and when he saw a holy man he would call him a duplicitous person that pretends to be holy in order to suck the poor dry. And yet on the other hand when he was only seven, while still a child, upon seeing a young man walking around naked outdoors in the evening, he hurried, unable to control himself, and took off his coat and gave it to him. And afterwards he hastily ran away from the young man and did not look back, because he was ashamed of what he had done.

He was ruthless and hard as stone when he was agitating against any officer of his people and against any overbearing chieftain? And yet one day he was standing at the side chamber of the mishkan, at a time that a woman brought her offering to the priest of two young tender doves, and the priest twisted the head of one dove from the back of its neck and pulled it apart at the wings, with the bird chirping bitterly, the young man's eyes suddenly were filled with tears. And there were times in the holy precinct at the time of minhah, when a man would bring an offering of challot from the finest flour and matzah cakes, he would hurriedly approach behind the basket that was in the man's hand and stealthily reach out his hand and steal from the basket the bread and the matzot and quickly escape with his spoils before they were given to the priest and gave them to the first poor person that he met on his way. Indeed when he heard that there were laws and statutes and religious commandments and injunctions, things that a man had to do and things not to do, he would grind his teeth in anger and he would swear and say: Only

power-hungry human beings have contrived all of these for the sake of restricting a person's freedom of action in every sphere and in order to rob of him the freedom given to him at his birth.

And terrible things were also related about him: "He did not respect his father did not love his mother. And when his father rebuked him for his behavior, citing that he was the father and Kehat) was his son, then Kehat would talk back to him in front of all the slaves and maidservants: "Who asked you to fulfill your bodily lust, and besides, human life is propagated for no purpose or goal, only to endure the ennui of an empty drifting existence? Is for the lascivious pleasure you enjoyed and for having created me for a chaotic existence and for a life with no prospects that I should thank you and revere you? " Then days arrived in which he secretly pilfered the treasured possessions of his father taking whatever he felt like and he emptied his mother's concealed precious objects and he took from among her dresses and all that was dear and of value. All of this he gave to every hungry person and everyone down on his luck and all who are poor. And when they spoke words of rebuke to him for his having stolen and misappropriated possessions and property that did not belong to him, his two eyes would cloud over from anger and he would yell: There is no private property and there is no ownership, there is no owner of the possessions and there is no master of property! Everything on the face of the earth exists there for the sake of all its inhabitants, and every person can merely reach out his hand and take it for himself. Man is born naked and naked he will return to the earth! But one day when his father the chieftain chastised him, he could not control himself and he cursed him and raised his hand against his mother....

Then another mood came upon him and he suddenly stopped from walking about downcast and gloomy all day and seeing only the bad in things and always complaining, and he became only happy. Only eat and drink, brothers, only eat and drink and enjoy all that the moment can offer! Tomorrow we are going to die, so today let us enjoy ourselves! There is no goal or purpose and or future life, and therefore the only good thing a person can do is eat and drink. And he showed himself a good time and was drinking and stuffing himself gluttonously. And he forgot his terrible sorrow that was what he called life. And he would take his father's wines, his sheep and his cattle, and a group of idlers and riffraff would gather around him and they would eat and drink and be very merry. Then he took the bride his father had chosen for him to be his wife and he rejected her and sent her away. The only reason was because she was the daughter of a rich man and wore silks and fineries, and he was associating with girls who were poor prostitutes, good hearted and tender in their souls, whose flesh was impure, but their souls were pure. He had wild times with them and he caroused with them all day and all night--- and it was a scandal in all of the camp.

This young man was like the north wind on the face of the great Aravah desert, knowing no limits, respecting no boundaries, and recognizing no inhibition. That was the way this lad was. And there were times that he was like the flaming and all-consuming fire that this mountain of Sinai would sometimes vomit forth from its cavernous mouth.

During the daytime, when he was among the people, he spoke rebukingly with every oppressor and every evil doer, and his heart was harder than flint and his manner of speaking so bold and cruel as to know no mercy and show no pardon. Not only did he

speak brazenly and aggressively, he took with strong arm measures from anyone he could and gave to those who had nothing. In the evenings when he was out in the field in the great Aravah desert, there would gather around him a group of complainers and grumblers: every slave who sighed under the stick of his master and every maidservant who was tormented under the hand of her mistress. He would speak words of comfort to them and his words would be like the balm of Gilead. There was no prophet that could speak better than he, and there was no heart that felt pain more than he. And all his listeners were standing around him and drinking in his words with thirst. However, at night when he was alone and the type of visions and dreams would come to him that come only to seer and poet ----then this would bring him to tears and only the stars in heaven would see this.

He was like the north wind that storms over the face of this great Aravah desert, but his heart was like the sun, full of warmth and tenderness and solace.

And the group that had gathered around him gradually turned into a gang of conspirators and insurgents.

The land was in mourning and the sky was filled with clouds and the roads were desolate. From the tents that were pitched on the face of the Aravah desert and from out of the nooks and crannies there gathered together innumerable masses, an extremely large assemblage, men dressed in rags and tatters, with fearsome faces and fierce eyes and with them their women and their young barefooted children. And they all gathered at the entrance to the Tent of the Meeting protesting against Moses and Aaron and against the large and numerous group of priests and against the chieftains of the community princes and officers of the camp, who were owners of numerous cattle and sheep and

always satiated. They complained and grumbled and spoke terribly angry words, because the people were disgusted with the desolate life of the desert and with all the days of their wanderings. Why do they need the pillar of cloud and of what benefit to them is the pillar of fire? They could not eat the fire and they could not drink the cloud. There was no meat and no fish, neither was there even the paltry vegetable meal they had in Egypt, the meal of garlic and onions.

They had not been brought to a land of milk and honey as they had been promised at the beginning, but rather to a desolate and terrible wilderness to kill them there one by one. They was not given to them possession of field and vineyard as they had been promised before they went out from Egypt. All of these were just empty promises. And if this was not enough, suddenly these people came along to become their masters, starting to lord it over them, to exploit and to tyrannize them by force. And not stopping there they also manufactured for themselves a group of priests, a coterie of laggards who did nothing all day long except devour the flesh of the people from their bones and they would grab the food right out of their mouths and take it for themselves. And the people were required to support and sustain the priests each and every moment by giving them taxes and tithes - never mind a tithe, ninety nine percent of everything they had....

On the raised platform that was at the threshold of the Tent of the Meeting the man of God stood. His face grew very pale because he was not used to hearing such harsh remonstrations and having the people so rebellious against him as to tell him quite bluntly that he was oppressing and extorting the nation. Quietly and in an almost inaudible voice he said: "I have not taken the ass of any one of them...."

"**Not one, but many**!" was suddenly heard in an arrogant voice from the midst of the assembled group. When they looked toward the place of speaker they saw that it was Kehat ben Pag`iel.

And the man of God did not utter a thing, but became suddenly silent---and he fell on his face. And instead of him the High Priest stood on the platform and also spoke in the same manner and veins added:

"Whose ox have I taken?"....

"The ox of Zavad son of Yarha and the ox of Regem the son of Merari and the ox of Evyasaf the son of Mahli and the ox of..."

When they looked at the speaker they saw that it was Kehat son of Pagi`el.

However, the priest did not take these words to heart nor did he become embittered. He continued to speak calmly as if he were a man who already knew these things by heart and his words of reply were well rehearsed, and he said:

"...and whose donkey have I taken and whom did I rob? And whom did I oppress, and from whom did I take a bribe?"...

"So who took the ox of Elyashiv son of Malkiah? And who oppressed the Moabite widow, Eifah daughter of Hatush? And who took a ransom price from the Aramian slave Zif son of Gazez?-We know you! -We know you! And we know very well what words like these are worth!" And again they looked to see who the speaker was and here it was Kehat son of Pagi`el.

And some men from the guards suddenly walked about in the midst of the camp and circled around the speaker a few times and they took a good look at his face in order

to remember him always -- and they made a careful note of the matter in their minds.

But at that moment Kehat Ben Pagi`el approached the threshold of the Tent of the Meeting to position himself in front of the people and with him was a poor woman dressed in thick sackcloth and barefoot.

The young man spoke, and his words were like sharpened slaughtering knives: "Please look, here is the widow! I will not relate to you her terrible suffering; her withered face will relate it to you! I will not tell you to what degree she has been starving; her bare bones will tell you about it. However, allow me to tell you: only one small young lamb did her husband leave to her upon his death and when she came to shear the wool, the priest whose bailiwick was close to her house came and took the wool for himself, saying: "It is mine." And when the widow yelled at him that this was robbery, he answered: "This is the law. This is what Moses commanded to us: The first shorn wool you should give to the priest. But the poor woman did not despair. Behold the ewe still had its first born inside of her, and at the end of the period of gestation she would give birth to a tender and good calf. And when the days were completed and this ewe delivered this good and tender calf, the priest took it for himself and said: "It is mine, and when she yelled at him about this new oppression , he answered:

This is the law: this is what Moses commanded to us: Every first born male that was born among the bulls and among the sheep will be dedicated to God." When the widow saw that she could not escape it, she slaughtered the newly born sheep; however even this did not help her, because the priest came quickly and took for himself the arm and the cheek and the stomach, and every good portion. He gazed intensely heavenward

and raised his hands sanctimoniously, and said: " This is the law, this is what Moses our master, this man of God, commanded to us: "And he shall give to the priest the arm and the cheeks and the stomach." The widow stood still and all of her flesh was trembling under her. Then she arose and swore the following oath: Let the flesh of this lamb be proscribed -herem -- for all those who would eat it and proscribed for me and proscribed for everyone who would touch it.. However, by doing this she made it worse, because at that moment the priest took all the meat for himself and said: "This is the law, this is what Moses have commanded: "Everything that has been proscribed in Israel shall be yours - the priest's!"

The sound of commotion and tumult passed through the camp from one end to the next.

At that moment the High Priest, who was standing behind the platform that was at the entrance of the Tent of the Meeting, gave a sign to the officers, the officers passed it to the senior officers, the senior officers to the policemen, and the policemen began suddenly to walk around amidst the camp. In the evening of that same day the priests, the princes, the elders, the judges and the policemen all convened and met together, and they also called Pagi`el ben `Ochran the chieftain, the father of the young man, and they consulted for a long time until the middle of the night.

The outcome of their consultation was not known to anyone. However, the knees of Pagi`el the minister were trembling a little as he exited, and his face looked very fallen. But after a moment while he still stood at the entrance, he fortified himself and send quietly as if speaking to himself-- "It is my obligation to my nation and I will do it..

It is time to act for the sake of God. What is a father's mercy at a time when a person must act for his nation and for his God?" *

The pillar of cloud went before the people during the day and the pillar of fire at night. The sun rose and the sun set. The nation became tired of complaining and was silent. Everything returned to the way it was in the beginning. Occasionally the nation sighed from the burden that was placed upon it. And afterwards it ceased. Little by little it forgot its grievances and its complaints, and it became convinced in the end that itis good for a person to bear a yoke. Like a hot flame a ferocious heat rested over the yellow sand that was in the desert, and the crags of boulders smoked occasionally from the intensity of the heat. The skies were like lead and the sand was transformed and its color was like a dark blue.

The small group of insurgents surrendered-----however, there remained one whom it was feared might instigate the ignorant populace from time to time.

And suddenly the camp awakened to news unlike any they had heard before in their midst.

The chieftain Pagi`el son of `Ochran arose one morning with his Hittite wife Dvorit, and they came before the elders that were at the gate of the encampment, and they led with them their son, Kehat son of Pagi`el. Kehat , however, was tied with ropes, and many policemen from the riffraff were following them.

The chieftain Pagi`el was silent and did not say a word; only his wife Dvorit the Hittite was speaking, and she said:

"This son of ours, Kehat, the son of Pagi`el and me, is unruly and rebellious. Cursed be the night when a man made me pregnant and cursed be the day when I gave

birth to him! Woe to me if I speak and woe to me if I am silent. But know this: This son of ours does not heed what we say. The day before yesterday he raised his hand against his mother to hit her, and yesterday he cursed his father. He is a glutton and a lush, he associates with hooligans and consorts with whores. We tried to discipline him, but to no avail. And now behold we have come. We seized him and have brought him to you."

The face of the Pagi`el was a little pale as his wife spoke these words, and his eyes looked to the ground. However, his wife spoke, and in her eyes there shone a great and powerful and alien appetite, and her saliva sprayed from her mouth. And those who saw her suddenly remembered the Hittite women who ate the flesh of their newborn infants and licked their lips from great pleasure.

From the time of the daily `olah sacrifice until the priests gathered around for sacrifices they could eat, for the duration of eight degrees on the sun dial, the judges took counsel together, and afterwards they came out:

"Here is God's judgement: every rebellious and unruly son who does not heed the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, who strikes his mother and curses his father, incurs the sentence of death. All those that dwell in his encampment will pelt him with stones. The first stone let his mother throw..."

The face of Pagi`el became seven times paler then before, and yet, his facial expression did not change. However as his wife heard the sentence her face became extremely flushed.

After ten minutes the policemen brought the young man from the guard house where they had placed him until it might be explicated what should be done to him. And

they led him to the field outside of the camp, and a great throng of people walked behind him following, men and women and a great many young children.

And the trumpeters were blasting their trumpets, and the shofar-blowers were blowing the shofars, and the drummers were beating the drums in tremendous noise and tumult. A kind of great intoxication passed over the camp. A great blood-lust as powerful as the grave arose, and the nation could smell the scent of blood.

And Kehat was walking with an erect posture, not fidgeting or trembling in any expression of emotion. However, at that moment he saw that among the crowd there was also a group of some of the people whom he had been working to assist all of the days - those who were in pain and suffering, those hungry and unfortunate - and for a moment his heart's blood froze. From then on could no longer walk staunchly upright. And when they came to the designated place they dressed him in a long white linen tunic that covered him completely from the top of his head to the soles of his feet and they bandaged his eyes with an eye covering so that he could not see anything, and they made him lie down on his face.

And the people carried the stones from every direction and corner, and the hungry and the unfortunate, the poor and the needy, the male and female slaves also brought stones.

And the first stone was thrown by his mother, Dvorit the Hittite, and her face was hotly flushed. And the second stone was thrown by the minister, Pagi'el son of 'Ochran. However, his hand trembled as he threw the stone.

Then the young woman approached who was intended to be his wife, since in the eyes of this entire congregation she was still considered his intended bride.

However, there was one small girl whose name was Keturah, and she was the maidservant in the house of the Pagi`el son of `Ochran, and this girl tried to push the rich maiden away to the side. Indeed this young, poor girl felt as if she owned a part of this man, who was lying there on the ground, ...

But the aristocratic maiden was determined and she approached slowly with prancing step, standing erect and covered with her long scarf, pampered and delicate, because she was the daughter of an aristocratic family. And in a delicate and aristocratic pose she threw the third stone. Third stone.

And the entire throng began to throw stones, and a hail of stones fell from every direction and corner and became a big pile. In the first moments one could still hear something like sobbing and brief, stifled and muffled sighs, but afterwards they stopped and not another thing was heard.

And only Keturah, the young girl, knelt on the ground and acted as if crazed: With a quick hand she had been trying each time to catch away the stone that was thrown and deflect it to the side----however she did not have enough strength against the entire large group of people.

And the trumpeters were blowing the horns and shofar-blowers were blowing shofars the awesome sounds and the drummers were beating the drums with great noise and tumult.

And afterwards there was suddenly a great silence. The sun shone with a strong light. A large pile of stones rose high above the ground.

And the Great priest was standing tall and raising his hands to the heavens and saying: "Thus will be done to the person that does not heed the voice of his father and the voice of his mother."

And the priests and the apprentice priests and the Levites and the apprentice Levites said to one another: "And you shall purge the evil from your midst! And you shall purge the evil from your midst! And you shall purge the evil from your midst!

And the elders were responding after them: "And all Israel will hear and be afraid!" And the Keturah the little maidservant was standing confused and her eyes were staring about, and on her tongue there was no utterance nor sound, and she did not know what had come over her.

End Notes

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3. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, "David Frishman" Vol. 7. pp.198-203.
4. Louis Firestein, *The Critic as Artist* (Rabbinic Thesis, 1953) p. 33.
5. Louis Firestein, *The Critic as Artist* (Rabbinic Thesis, 1953) p.34.
6. Louis Firestein, *The Critic as Artist* (Rabbinic Thesis, 1953)
7. Stanley Nash, *In Search of Hebraism: Shai Hurwitz and His Polemics in the Hebrew Press* (Leiden: Brill, 1980).
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