"*Mah Gadla HaAhavtam* – How Great Grew their Love"

Visualizing God, Prayer and Love in the Poetry of
Dahlia Ravikovitch and Yehuda Amichai

Dusty Rose Klass

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion
School of Rabbinic Studies
Los Angeles, California

February 1, 2016
Adviser: Dr. Leah Hochman

Introduction

God: a force greater than oneself. Prayer: seeking help from the universe. Love: a most basic and difficult human emotion. The most ancient texts available communicate just how long people have been in conversation about these three topics. Yet, conversations about each one consistently invite more questions than answers: Is there a God? What can I know about God? Why, God why? Does prayer work? What is the "proper" way to pray? What does true love look like? Many of these questions seek definition: God is X. Prayer is Y. Love is Z. Others dive deeply into discussion about the nature of these ideas and unveil convoluted and multivalent definitions.

My interactions with poetry up until January of 2007 were sporadic and ambivalent. Once in a while a poem would resonate with me, but often poetry confused me. A poem's message rarely felt clear. Over the last two years, a variety of classroom and *chevruta* opportunities transformed the way I experience poetry. I have found that precisely because of poetry's ability to offer multiple messages it expresses the inexpressible and articulates that which can seem impossible to articulate.

The elasticity of poetry allows for the flexibility required in a conversation about God or prayer or love. Two people encounter the same poem and render their own unique reading based on personal history and the way they interact with the poem. The poet may or may not have written the poem with those readings in mind and such a takeaway may or may not agree with the messages other readers find. Yet all renderings and readings co-exist because poetry is multivalent. It allows its readers to think together with the poet in ways that are at once familiar and foreign while simultaneously encouraging one to think entirely independently. I find that prospect thrilling.

The inherent opportunity poetry provides for multiple interpretations makes it a perfect medium through which to explore God, prayer and love. This study specifically focuses on the poetry of 20th century Israeli poets Dahlia Ravikovitch (1935-2005) and Yehuda Amichai (1924-2000). My exploration of God, prayer and love through the lens of the poetry of Ravikovitch and Amichai has shown me new elements of all three concepts and inspired me to interpret their poetic words through art. Using ink drawing as a medium, I have created visual portrayals of these poet's respective complex interpretations of God, prayer and love both as individual topics and in conversation with each other. This "midrashic art gallery" helps me articulate my own encounter with the poetry.

The Poets

Dahlia Ravikovitch (1936-2005) was born to Russian immigrants and met tragedy early in life when her father was killed in a car accident. After a number of "years of misery" living on a kibbutz with her mother, she spent her teen years in the foster care system in Haifa.[1] Scholar llana Szobel places Ravikovitch squarely within a group of poets known as the "Generation of the State." This group "embraced the personal and endowed it with universal valence,"[2] and if that sounds like Amichai, it should – he essentially served as the poster child for this generation of poets.

However, Ravikovitch departed from many of the stylistic shifts her contemporaries made. In discussing the relationship Ravikovitch shared with another poet of the time, Yona Wallach, Szobel describes the contrast clearly: "Ravikovitch, the poet of reticence, who embraces the rigid language of the symbolic order and uses it to express her deviance, speaks

[1] Ilana Szobel, "Introduction," *A Poetics of Trauma: The Work of Dahlia Ravikovitch* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis
[2] Szobel, xxi.

to [Wallach] who muddles and tangles the symbolic order, and articulates her aberration in a scraggly and tumultuous language."[3] In contrast to Amichai's vernacular, seemingly unstructured style, Ravikovitch works within a highly structured, form-sensitive poetic space.[4] Her use of grammar, rhyme and repetition create poetry whose messages come both from within the words of the poem and also the ways in which they are pieced together.

Yehuda Amichai (1924-2000), Israel's best-known poet, was born in Germany and made *aliyah* to Israel with his family in 1936.[5] As an 11-year-old, he immediately began supporting pre-state Palestine and served in all of the major wars as part of his military service. His poetry reflects his life story, a story shaped by war and independence, by World War II and its aftermath, and a life lived in Israel as it shifted and defined and redefined itself over the years.[6] Amichai draws heavily upon everyday moments that speak to the nature of being human and interacting with the world. Amichai often eschews classic poetic form and structure in favor of direct, colloquial language. He builds metaphors from these everyday interactions in such a way that can have his readers feel and recognize the experiences he describes while still grasping for the metaphor to which he alludes. In doing so, Amichai transformed Israeli poetry. Robert Alter has identified his earliest work as the "turning point" for the "vernacular revolution in Hebrew verse, rejecting the high literary language and

[3] Szobel, 35.
[4] Bloch and Kronfeld suggest that "much of Ravikovitch's early poetry is written in a combination of full rhyme and grammatical rhyme and uses variations on metrically strict forms." Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld, "Introduction," *Hovering at a Low Altitude,* ed. Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), 39.
[5] Robert Alter, "Introduction," *The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai,* ed. Robert Alter (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), xv.
[6] "He is obviously an intensely personal poet, with a large number of his poems explicitly anchored in autobiographical experience." Alter, xxi.

rhetorical thrust of the previous generation."[7] Amichai's choice to use simple clear language contributed greatly to the popularization of his work.

As two main Israeli poetic voices, the works of Amichai and Ravikovitch invite comparison and contrast. While their styles and foci differed,[8] both Amichai and Ravikovitch often reacted to current events through their poetry. In the sections that follow, I look at Amichai's "Yom Kippur in the Year of Forgetting" (1967) and Ravikovitch's "The End of the Fall" (1969) to examine their respective ideas and methods of using news as poetic topic. "Jerusalem in the Year of Forgetting," written shortly after the Israeli Defense Force won the 1967 War, takes place in the Old City, an area to which Israelis gained new access after the conclusion of the war. That access affected Israelis in profound ways and while this increased access is not the focus of the poem, it certainly contributes to the context in which the poem was written. "The End of the Fall," written soon after the death of author Antoine de Saint-Exupery in a plane crash, in part reflects Ravikovitch's processing of that event.

Both married twice and both had children, and each grapples, throughout their respective poetry, with love and the way people exist in relation to one another as parent to child, lover to lover, stranger to stranger. However, as their respective poems make clear, the two experienced love and relationships very differently. Amichai speaks to love's difficulties but recognizes the difference between "good love" and "bad love." One finds good love when one searches for a partner close to home, "the way a sensible house will choose local stones/ that have frozen in the same cold and baked / in the same scalding sun."[9] Bad love, in

[7] Alter, xv.
[8] Amichai's poetry was greatly influenced by his time as a soldier and is full of images of war from a soldier's perspective (Alter, xvi-xvii). Ravikovitch too was concerned with Israel's relationship with other nations, but focused much more on Israel's role in the plight of the Palestinians (Bloch and Kronfeld, 29-30).
[9] Yehuda Amichai, "Advice for Good Love." *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, trans. Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell. (Oakland: University of California Press, 1996), 119-120.

contrast, results from infusing "leftover" love into new relationships: "with the love / left over from the one before / make a new woman for yourself."[10] While his love poems complicate the possibilities of love, he displays a genuine belief that love's power has the capacity to be a positive force in the world and in human interaction.

Perhaps as a result of the clinical depression with which she openly struggled throughout her life, Ravikovitch portrays love as a state of being that one perpetually seeks despite a notion that love is inescapably tragic, all-consuming, and isolating. In "The Love of an Orange" (1959), Ravikovitch explores the relationship between an orange and the one who eats it. She inverts the classic understanding of orange as object so that the orange's love for the one who eats it becomes the subject of the poem. In "The Love of an Orange," the object of the orange's desire literally consumes it.[11] For Ravikovitch, love requires the willingness to give oneself over to the object of one's love completely. She speaks further to this understanding in "Love" (1959), a description of two fishes[12] whose love increases in direct relation the depth to which they dive deeper into the ocean and away from the rest of the world. The poem suggests that real, deep love comes through isolation from others.

Both poets came from observant backgrounds; Amichai spent his youth in Orthodox day school in Germany and Ravikovitch grew up in conversation with religion, as a descendent of one of the founders of ultra-Orthodox Jerusalem community Mea Shearim. Neither lived *halakhic* Jewish lives[13] but their unique Jewish backgrounds provided each

[10] Amichai, *The Selected Poetry*, 119-120.
[11] Bloch and Kronfeld note this "motif of being devoured." Bloch and Kronfeld, 20.
[12] This alternative plural form of "fish" is used in Bloch and Kronfeld's translation of the poem and highlights the companionship of the two fishes. Bloch and Kronfeld, 70.
[13] As Alter explains, "[Amichai] never underwent a crisis of faith, he once told me; he merely became bored with the world of observance." Alter, xvi.
Bloch and Kronfeld argue that "one compelling reason for Ravikovitch's sustained dialogue with Jewish sources is her commitment to rescue them from the hands of religious zealots and sloganeering politicians, and to recover from within Judaism a secular ethical compass for her culture." Bloch and Kronfeld, 25.

poet with the tools with which to engage in conversation with Jewish texts. They weave biblical and liturgical phrases into their poetry and create metaphors, along with other lines of connection, between the characters and events of their poems and biblical characters and events. Sometimes the allusions are explicit, as in "Eyn Keloheynu" (1998), in which Amichai quotes the prayer Eyn Keloheynu extensively in order to criticize the prayer's efficacy.[14] Other times, liturgical phrases sneak into the poem unannounced, and are difficult to recognize in English translations. In "Requiem after Seventeen Years" (1964), a poem that takes place in a graveyard, Ravikovitch uses the phrase *kedoshim ut'horim* (translation: holy and pure) to refer to the dead. Drawn from the funerary prayer El Malei Rachamim, the phrase connects the poem to the prayer, but because the prayer is recited in Hebrew, the liturgical connection is hard to render in English.

The Poems

In choosing poems for this project, I read through a lot (though by no means all) of the corpus of Ravikovitch and Amichai's work. As I read, I sought poems that spoke as directly as possible about God, prayer or love. The 12 poems I chose resulted from my desire to grapple as much as possible with God, prayer and love. I looked for poems that described these themes in the abstract rather than within a specific relationship.

I also chose poems that personally spoke to me or that I found particularly challenging. The nature of a project based on analysis of God, prayer and love through poetry

[14] Glenda Abramson provides larger context that helps explain Amichai's technique. His writing is particularly peppered with biblical and liturgical references. As Abramson describes, "Amichai's usage of biblical and liturgical sources…is one of the fundaments of his poetics, as a result of his own conflict…which others either do not share or merely take for granted. These sources are an integral part of his own experience, rather than assumed or superimposed knowledge or a conscious aiming for effect." Glenda Abramson, "Allusion and Irony," in *The Writing of Yehuda Amichai: A Thematic Approach* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 34.

lends itself to a great deal of individual discretion which comes from the life experiences and understandings of these ideas that I bring to this work. As such, this endeavor aims to present my own understanding of these three amorphous themes through the lens of two people's poetry.

Appendix A includes a list of the 12 poems analyzed in this project, along with author, year of publication, and translation information.

Analysis and Research Methods

First, I read each poem in Hebrew and English, researched biblical, liturgical and current-event-based references, and discussed my findings with Dr. William Cutter and two of my classmates, Jay LeVine and Leah Citrin. As I read and analyzed, I looked for the way the poem itself described each theme and how the poems as a group spoke to one another on that theme.

I waited until after I had analyzed Ravikovitch and Amichai's poetry before researching the poets, their biographies, and scholars' studies of their work. I chose to analyze prior to learning more about the poets in order to glean as much as possible from the poetry itself without reading the poet into his or her poems. I believe deep meaning can be found in poetry regardless of the reader's knowledge of the biography and influences of the poem's author. Furthermore, the intent of this project is to explore God, prayer and love through poetry, not poets.

Once I had formed my own thoughts and ideas about the poems, I began exploring scholars' thoughts and ideas. I relied heavily on Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld's *Hovering at a Low Altitude: The Collected Poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch*, both for its

translations of Ravikovitch's poems and for its wonderful introduction to Ravikovitch's life story and poetic technique. For insight into the way Ravikovitch's life story influenced her poetry, I read Ilana Szobel's *A Poetics of Trauma: The Work of Dahlia Ravikovitch*.

Dr. William Cutter was an important resource on Amichai. Additionally, Glenda Abramson's *The Writing of Yehuda Amichai: A Thematic Approach* provided analysis of much of his poetry and Nili Sharf-Gold's *Yehuda Amichai: The Making of Israel's National Poet* presented a provocative re-telling of his biography. Lastly, the many translations found in Robert Alter's new collection of Amichai's work *The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai* proved immensely helpful.

The Art

When I began my studies at HUC-JIR, I found myself drawing my way through lecture as an attention-maintenance technique. In an attempt to ensure that my doodles contributed to rather than distracted from my engagement with the topic of my classes, I doodled based on concepts being discussed in class as often as possible. The art presented here continues my effort to connect words to images. As such, each illustration seeks to accomplish one of two tasks: translation or interpretation. First, I will include – within the written analysis – illustrations that assisted me in deciphering the poem. These pieces endeavor to translate the poet's words into images. Second, I include more over-arching, interpretive illustrations that speak to God, prayer and love as understood through the poems post-analysis. These pieces represent an attempt to interpret the words and images of the poem, to create art that adds to the conversation between the poet, the poem and the reader.

Appendix B contains a list of all art included in this project, along with the page on which each piece can be found.

Acknowledgements

As a classic extrovert, I speak in order to think and none of these written words or drawn pieces would have been possible without the help of people willing to talk through all aspects of this project with me.

I am especially grateful to Dr. William Cutter, who introduced me to modern Hebrew poetry and has been stuck teaching it to me ever since. Dr. Cutter, I appreciate your candor and your patience. Thank you for opening your home, sharing your wisdom with me, and making time to sit and talk a lot of poetry. More than all of that, thank you for loving Israeli poetry so deeply. It has rubbed off.

Jay ASHER LeVine, translating Amichai's *Open Closed Open* in *chevruta* last year legitimately transformed my relationship with poetry. I am so grateful for that time, and for our Thursday afternoon study hall hours this year. Thank you for diving deep into the sea with me for a time. Leah Citrin, life *chevruta* of mine, your willingness to study words that lie so far outside your "required reading" zone means so much to me. Monday learning with you gave me so much new insight into the text. Julie Bressler, thank you for literally living with me through all that this year has required, and for letting me commandeer the kitchen table for the past month…or so.

Peachy Levy and Jean Abarbanel – you both opened your homes to me and thought out loud with me about what I might need in order to make pictures out of poetry. Thank you

for taking me seriously and for believing in my project long before I could even articulate its scope.

Gavi Ruit, I am grateful for your friendship always and for your uncanny ability to check in on me just at the moment I most need a check-in. Thank you for reading, and appreciating, and commenting. Matt Driscoll, you have a keen eye for editing and I appreciate all of your grammatical catches. More than that, I really enjoyed reading, through your comments, the conversation you had with the poems yourself. Thank you for taking this project seriously and for taking the time.

Finally, Dr. Leah Hochman. Thank you for agreeing to take on this ambiguous project, for learning with me, for the phenomenal questions you ask in your revisions, for your truly thoughtful wordsmithing, and for engaging with the poetry yourself. I asked to work with you because I knew you would challenge me to produce something I could be proud of, and you have succeeded.

Section One: God
Divine Interactions in Death and in Life

The four poems discussed in this chapter describe God as God interacts with humanity, often at the moment of or in relation to death. Far from the universal God who can be all things to all people, Ravikovitch and Amichai present highly personal, fallible images of God. Neither Ravikovitch nor Amichai negates God as a potential force in the world and both openly dialogue and contend with biblical and rabbinic understandings of God and the ways in which God acts in the world.

The two poems by Ravikovitch play with human relationships to and awareness of the divine. In "The Central Pillar" (1959) ("*Amud HaTichon*"), Ravikovich presents God as a central pillar, around which all living souls swirl intentionally and to which they offer praise. God acts as the connection point between all of their bonds of life and consciousness. God as central pillar also acts as a final resting place for the dead. The poem "The End of the Fall" (1969) ("*Sof HaNefilah*") describes the moment of a person's death. Grappling with the mysterious and untimely death of a famous poet, Ravikovitch paints a picture of a God who serves as silent, supportive witness to the uncertain discovery by a newly disembodied soul. Both poems showcase Ravikovitch's more formal poetic style and utilize specific language from biblical, liturgical, and rabbinic texts.

The two poems by Amichai, "And This is Your Glory" (1960) ("*V'hi T'hilatecha*") and "The Names of God" (1998) ("*Ho, Shemot Haelohim*"), challenge common notions of God's glory. Amichai describes God as a car mechanic, busily working underneath the earth in an effort to repair a perpetually broken world. God is not to be found by looking *l'mala (*toward the heavens). Rather, people must look down in order to spot God's feet sticking out

from under the earth. Many of Amichai's poems complicate the sacred and the mundane, bringing God down to earth and elevating seemingly ordinary moments. "The Names of God" highlights the indeterminacy of the divine. Pointing out various ways one can call upon God, Amichai simultaneously reminds the reader that God's actual name is "unspeakable."[15] Looking for a reference or a memory of God's name in the head of a woman after she dies, God finds it is not there. This image suggests to me that despite God's multiple names and the following implication that God can play multiple roles for people, none of those roles or names fully encompass or define God. In failing to find God's name in the dead woman's head, the reader learns that God's true name has remained hidden.

Each poem describes a very different idea about God. "And This is Your Glory" suggests that people must adjust their expectations of God's glory and uses a liturgical refrain to challenge the idea of a transcendent, separate God on high. In contrast, "The Central Pillar" repeats phrasing from Psalms to create an image in which all souls, bound up in the bonds of life and connected to God as central pillar, encircle God in constant praise. Each of these ideas can provide comfort for different moments in life. When everything spirals out of control, an image of God at the center of the spiral can offer a sense that something greater is paying attention to the various moving pieces. Conversely, when life seems entirely unexciting, a reminder that God is as much car mechanic as anything else might serve as a way to infuse Godliness back into what otherwise could seem like dull Godless places.

"The End of the Fall" describes a gentle God, while "Oh, the Names of God" describes a God who pries in people's heads. Here too, both descriptors are helpful for a person in the midst of different life experiences. Sometimes people need gentleness, while other times call for strong inquiry.

[15] "The Unspeakable Name" is one of the names of God offered in "Oh The Names of God."

None of the four poems negate God. Biblical allusions and liturgical phrases connect the poet's respective contemporary concerns with the oldest words used to speak about God. The poems offer different aspects of God to the reader, giving readers – and me – a real sense of God's multiplicity and service to each individual.

The Central Pillar (1959)
By: Dahlia Ravikovich

Among the four winds stands the central pillar,
The central pillar for all living souls,
Every soul bound in the bond of life
And the bond of life in the central pillar.

בֵּין אַרְבַּע הָרוּחוֹת יֵשׁ עַמּוּד הַתִּיכוֹן
עַמּוּד הַתִּיכוֹן לְנִשְׁמַת־כָּל־חַי
כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה בִּצְרוֹר הַחַיִּים
וּצְרוֹר הַחַיִּים בָּעַמּוּד הַתִּיכוֹן.

Every soul shall praise the Lord,
Shall have no end in the central pillar,
The central pillar of the rising sun,
The central pillar of the setting sun.

כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְּהַלֵּל־יָהּ
וְאֵין לָהּ סוֹף בָּעַמּוּד הַתִּיכוֹן,
הָעַמּוּד הַתִּיכוֹן לְמִזְרַח־שֶׁמֶשׁ,
הָעַמּוּד הַתִּיכוֹן לְמִבּוֹא־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ.

And every soul shall have no end.
Father's soul too in the central pillar,
And Father's soul like a flower that opens
From rising sun unto setting sun.

וְכָל הַנְּשָׁמָה אֵינֶנָּה כָּלָה
אַף נִשְׁמַת אָבִי בָּעַמּוּד הַתִּיכוֹן
וְנִשְׁמַת אָבִי כְּפֶרַח נִפְתָּחַת
מַעֲלוֹת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ עַד בּוֹא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ.

Every soul shall praise the Lord.
Praise ye the Lord in his faithful flock,
Praise ye the Lord in the bond of life,
Praise ye the Lord in the central pillar.

כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְּהַלֵּל־יָהּ
הוֹדוּ לַה' בִּקְהַל חֲסִידָיו
הוֹדוּ לַה' בִּצְרוֹר הַחַיִּים
הוֹדוּ לַה' בָּעַמּוּד הַתִּיכוֹן

Every soul shall praise the Lord.
Indeed the dead praise not the Lord.
Father's soul in the central pillar
And its voice goes out to the end of the world.

כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְּהַלֵּל־יָהּ
וְלֹא הַמֵּתִים יְהַלְלוּ־יָהּ
נִשְׁמַת אָבִי בָּעַמּוּד הַתִּיכוֹן
וְהוֹלֵךְ קוֹלָהּ עַד קְצֵה הָעוֹלָם.

In “The Central Pillar” (“*Amud HatTichon*”), Ravikovitch introduces the reader to a metaphorical column around which all else revolves (Figure 1). The structure of the poem, with its constant repetition, creates an experience in which I feel the words revolve around me, encircling me, and force me to feel as if I might be the *amud hatichon***.** In the first stanza, the title phrase repeats as the beginning of the second line:

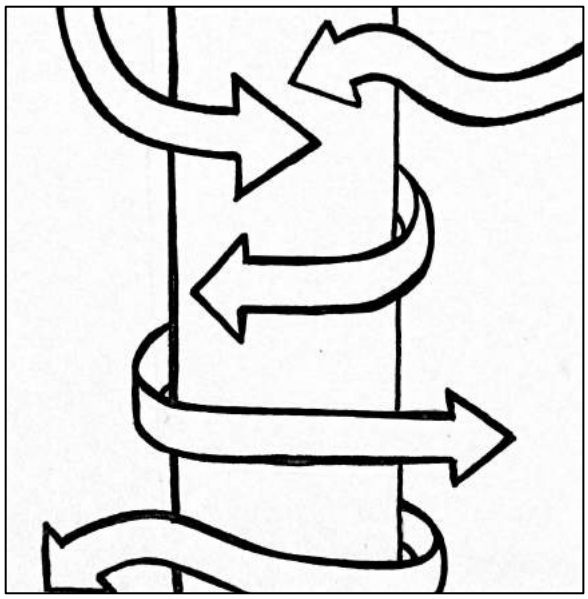


Figure 1

“Among the four winds stands **the central pillar**

The central pillar for all living souls.”

A new repetition repeats again at the end of the third line and beginning of fourth line:

“Every soul bound in **the bond of life**

And **the bond of life** in the central pillar.”

The second and third line repeat again:

“The central pillar for all **living souls**

Every **soul** bound in the bond of **life.”**

These phrases continue: “Every **soul** shall praise the Lord…every **soul** shall have no end…,” “Praise ye the Lord in the **bond of life,**” so that the poem places its reader in the center of a May Pole ceremony.

As dancers rotate around a May Pole, each holding the end of a ribbon whose other end is attached to the top of the May Pole, their choreography rotates them around the pole repetitively, so that onlookers recognize the dancers each time they come around. Similarly, when reading this poem, each phrase operates like one of those dancers. The poem places me as reader in the center of the dance. In the midst of "the four winds," the "bonds of life" and the "living souls" pass across my vision, one after the other. Ravikovitch has ordered each phrase precisely so that the differences of the stanzas stack up on the stability of the words they share. Despite their constant motion, no image in the poem spins out of control. All the ideas rotate and orient themselves around the central pillar.

While the first line of the first stanza locates the pillar "among the four winds," the location is not a place that can be found on any map. The central pillar stands in a simultaneously identifiable and yet undisclosed location. The last line of that same stanza tells me what can be found in the pillar, "the bond of life," which I understand as that which binds soul-embodied humans to God. The pillar is God. As the bond of life, God is that around which all else revolves. The poem describes the relationship between the central pillar and souls. Every soul is "bound up in the bond of life" and the "bond of life is in the central pillar." Thus, each person is intimately connected to God, circles God, and God is the energy around which human souls organize.

As the central pillar from which souls and their bonds of life flow, I envision God as a May Pole around which people's innermost expressions and ideas dance. As a tether, God anchors one side of each soul's ribbon allowing the rest of that "bond" to dance freely, rotating around and around, over and under (Figure 2). Each soul's ribbon interlaces over time with all other ribbons and, as souls move around the May Pole, the length of the bond-

of-life ribbon shortens, which brings souls close and closer to the May Pole. Unlike ribbons, however, souls are not finite. Souls "have no end in the central pillar" and God as the central pillar also has no end; God stretches from "the rising sun" to "the setting sun."[16] The dead seem to be the only restricted group for "the dead praise not the Lord." In other words, life itself is finite; people are only ribbons until they wrap completely around God. When the ribbon runs out, people's ability to dance ends.

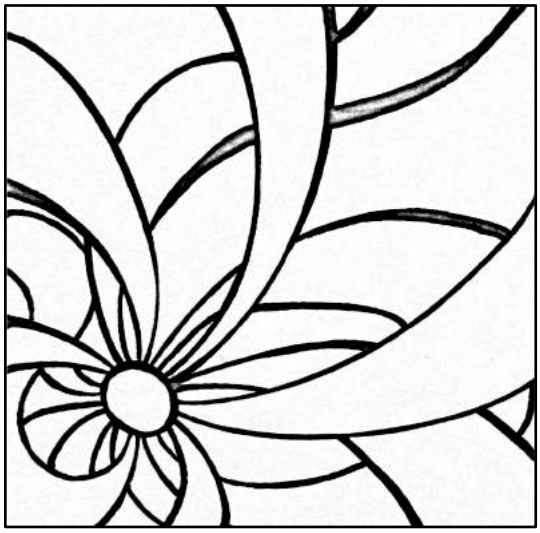


Figure 2

One can interpret the way in which the dead play a part in this poem in a number of ways. Ravikovitch's words suggest that souls do not die and so "dead" describes the physical, not spiritual form. Ravikovitch chooses to use the term *avi* as a character in the poem. Bloch and Kronfeld's translation removes the possessive from the Hebrew word *avi* (my father), rendering the third stanza: "And every soul shall have no end / Father's soul too in the central pillar / And Father's soul like a flower that opens / From rising sun unto setting sun." However, the stanza could be translated as follows: "And every soul shall have no end / **my** father's soul too in the central pillar…." Retaining the possessive personalizes the poem's words; while "Father" implies God as Father, "my father" could refer to the narrator's father or, even more specifically, Ravikovitch's father.

Bloch and Kronfeld translated God as Father. The second stanza refers to God as Lord, "Every soul shall praise the Lord," and it follows that the use of "Father" in the third

[16] I read "the rising sun" to "the setting sun" as a synecdoche for the entire world or at least earth.

stanza could also refer to God.[17] Yet if God is the central pillar, as I see it, then what would it mean for "[God-as] Father's soul too [to be] in the central pillar"? This reading would imply that God has a soul, which is theologically confusing. I believe that the poet here references her own father, who died in a car accident when she was six years old. His death affected her deeply, and a number of her poems throughout her collected works reference him, his life, and his death.[18] Despite their translation choice, Bloch and Kronfeld note that "["The Central Pillar"] echoes the yearning for the missing father."[19] I hear her longing in the absence of the dead in the dance around God as well as the repetition of living souls.

With God as the central pillar and the bonds of life tying God and souls together, "The Central Pillar" offers an image of where people go when they die. Though "the dead do not praise the Lord," Ravikovitch brings her father into the poem to show that God remains in relationship with her father's soul (perhaps along with all other souls of those who have died). "Father's soul in the central pillar / And [his soul's] voice goes out to the end of the world." Though no longer physically present, the dead do not disappear. Their voices remain, become integrated into God as central pillar, and influence the way the living interact with God.

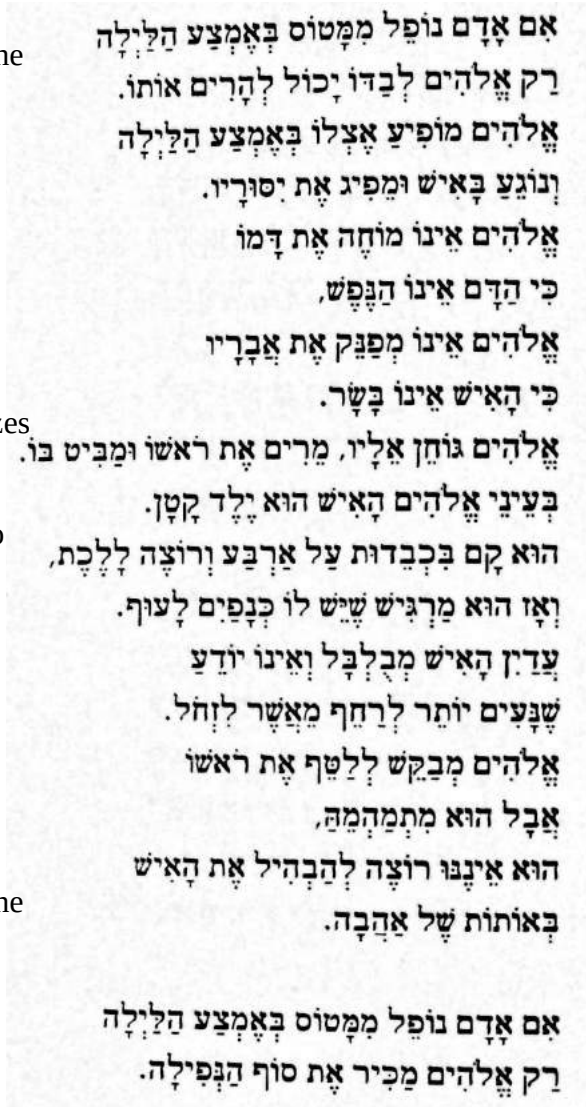
In "The Central Pillar" souls live in perpetual relationship with God. During life, God's steady pillar-like presence serves as the fulcrum. Souls explore and experience the world and praise God along the way. And yet as the bonds of life shorten in accordance with

[17] Liturgy does at times refer to God as "our Father," namely in the prayer Avinu Malkeinu (translation: Our Father, Our King), sung on Rosh HaShanah. See *On Wings of Awe: A Fully Transliterated Machzor for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur*, ed. Richard N. Levy. (Jersey City: KTAV Publishing House, 2011), 158.
[18] Szobel explains, "[Her father's death was] a traumatic event that would fundamentally orient her writing…This incident and its repercussions, which scholars have described as 'a fatal forcibleness' – a force that ties the speaker to her orphanhood appears in various guises throughout Ravikovitch's work. Indeed, as Hannah Naveh suggests, for the speaker in Ravikovitch's writings the work of mourning is an endless quest." Szobel, 3.
[19] Bloch and Kronfeld, 20.

length of days, embodied souls draw nearer and nearer to God. In death, the souls become part of the pillar itself, part of the grounding force whose presence allows other living souls to explore.

For me, this poem explores the ways in which the soul interacts with God differently in life than in death. Ravikovitch's exploration of finitude and infinitude suggests that death is not the end of a soul's life because it continues its relationship to God. That relationship is further explored by the poet in "The End of the Fall."

The End of the Fall (1969)
By: Dahlia Ravikovich


אִם אָדָם נוֹפֵל מִמָּטוֹס בְּאֶמְצַע הַלַּיְלָה
רַק אֱלֹהִים לְבַדּוֹ יָכוֹל לְהָרִים אוֹתוֹ.
אֱלֹהִים מוֹפִיעַ אֶצְלוֹ בְּאֶמְצַע הַלַּיְלָה
וְנוֹגֵעַ בָּאִישׁ וּמֵפִיג אֶת יִסּוּרָיו.
אֱלֹהִים אֵינוֹ מוֹחֶה אֶת דָּמוֹ
כִּי הַדָּם אֵינוֹ הַנֶּפֶשׁ,
אֱלֹהִים אֵינוֹ מְפַנֵּק אֶת אֲבָרָיו
כִּי הָאִישׁ אֵינוֹ בָּשָׂר.
אֱלֹהִים גּוֹחֵן אֵלָיו, מֵרִים אֶת רֹאשׁוֹ וּמַבִּיט בּוֹ.
בְּעֵינֵי אֱלֹהִים הָאִישׁ הוּא יֶלֶד קָטָן.
הוּא קָם בְּכְבֵדוּת עַל אַרְבַּע וְרוֹצֶה לָלֶכֶת,
וְאָז הוּא מַרְגִּישׁ שֶׁיֵּשׁ לוֹ כְּנָפַיִם לָעוּף.
עֲדַיִן הָאִישׁ מְבֻלְבָּל וְאֵינוֹ יוֹדֵעַ
שֶׁנָּעִים יוֹתֵר לְרַחֵף מֵאֲשֶׁר לִזְחֹל.
אֱלֹהִים מְבַקֵּשׁ לְלַטֵּף אֶת רֹאשׁוֹ
אֲבָל הוּא מִתְמַהְמֵהַּ,
הוּא אֵינֶנּוּ רוֹצֶה לְהַבְהִיל אֶת הָאִישׁ
בְּאוֹתוֹת שֶׁל אַהֲבָה.

אִם אָדָם נוֹפֵל מִמָּטוֹס בְּאֶמְצַע הַלַּיְלָה
רַק אֱלֹהִים מַכִּיר אֶת סוֹף הַנְּפִילָה.

If a man falls from a plane in the middle of the night
God alone can raise him.
God appears at his side in the middle of the night,
Touches the man and soothes his agony.
God does not wipe away his blood
For the blood is not life,
God does not coddle his body
For the man is not flesh.
God leans over him, lifts up his head and gazes at him.
In God's eyes the man is a little child.
He gets up clumsily on all fours and wants to walk,
Then senses he has wings to fly.
The man is still confused: He doesn't know it feels better to hover than to crawl.
God wishes to stroke his head
though he tarries;
he would not want to frighten the man with portents of love.

If a man falls from a plane in the middle of the night
God alone knows the end of the fall.

The title and opening stanzas of "The End of the Fall" ("*Sof HaNefilah*") have a complex set of referents. Bloch and Kronfeld point to the historical incident that in part frames the poem. The first line of the poem, "If a man falls from a plane in the middle of the night, God alone can raise him," refers to the death of Antoine de Saint-Exupery in a mysterious plane crash in 1944.[20] One aspect of the poem's meaning lies in Ravikovitch's

[20] Bloch and Kronfeld, 119.

attempt to describe the search for answers to that unsolved and unexplained tragedy. A second aspect explores the ways in which "The End of the Fall" describes God's role in the moment of death. Third, the poem's title suggests the Christian theological understanding of "the Fall" as the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Fourth, "the Fall" and the angelic imagery presented in the poem recalls the *nephilim,* fallen angels who appear in Genesis 6.[21] Finally, "The End of the Fall" is the only poem in which Ravikovitch introduces God as a literary character (in sharp contrast to Amichai, in whose poetry God often plays a distinct role) and thus the sole opportunity to explore Ravikovitch's view of God as an explicit player in life's story.[22]

In "The End of the Fall," God does not act as savior in the moment of death: at the end of life, God will not reverse or otherwise interact with the circumstances that lead to death. When read with Ravikovitch's father's death in mind, this poem might offer comfort to those who's loved ones died unexpectedly, indicating that not even God could have done anything to save a person from death. It could also imply feelings of being betrayed by God: even God, who knows when everyone will die, cannot or will not alter the known end.

The first and last sentence of the poem, when examined in parallel to each other, shift the reader away from God's ability to act in moments of crisis ("God alone can raise him") and toward God's knowledge of the end result ("God alone knows the end of the fall"). In the first sentence, God "can raise." Only God is capable of raising a person. In contrast, God "knows the end" in the final line of the poem. To raise requires physical movement that

[21] While most scholars agree that "*nephilim*," derives from the Hebrew root *nun-fey-lamed*, meaning "to fall", they disagree on which form the word takes, so that some translate the word as "those who cause others to fall" and others translated the word as "the fallen." Regardless of whether the *nephilim* were fallen angels or merely giants, "the fall," when read in conjunction with the angelic imagery, may indeed recall the concept of fallen angels. Ronald Hendel, "The Nephilim were on the Earth: Genesis 6:1-4 and its Ancient Near Eastern Context," in *The Fall of the Angels*, eds. Cristoph Auffarth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 21-22.
[22] Bloch and Kronfeld, 23.

results in change: something that starts on one level moves or is moved to a higher level. To know, on the other hand, involves no inherent change. While many changes may recur as a result of knowledge, the knowledge itself does not cause a physical shift. Similarly, God's knowledge does not mean God will necessarily do anything about the known end. This shift represents an overall message of the poem: while God wishes to support us in our transition from life to death, God does not save.

In the moment of falling, i.e., the moment of death, God serves as a witness to the fall. Even in death, no one is alone; God is always there. People often pray to God near their own moments of death or the death of their loved ones; Ravikovitch paints a picture of God acting after a fall is complete. God's role is to comfort, to soothe, but not to change the act of dying.

The poem portrays God as the purveyor of differences between body and soul. "God does not wipe away his blood / for the blood is not life, / God does not coddle his body / for the man is not flesh." The poet acknowledges the futility of cleaning the dead man's body or seeking to make that body comfortable; these are not the tasks of the divine. Instead, God observes separation of the soul from the physical body (Figure 3): "He gets up clumsily on all fours and wants to walk / Then senses he has wings to fly" (Figure 4). God looks on as the man, not yet aware of his new status, attempts to stand. But God chooses not to instruct him or orient him or show him the trappings of death.

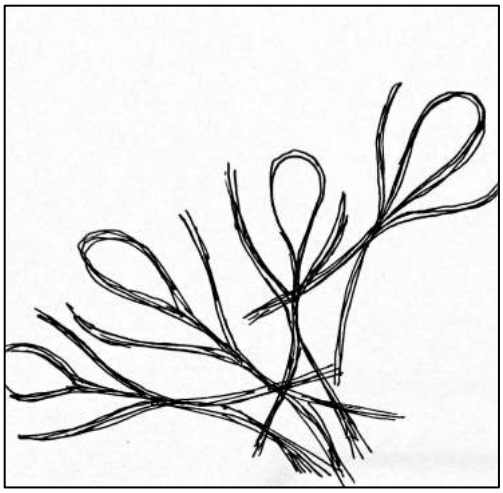


Figure 4

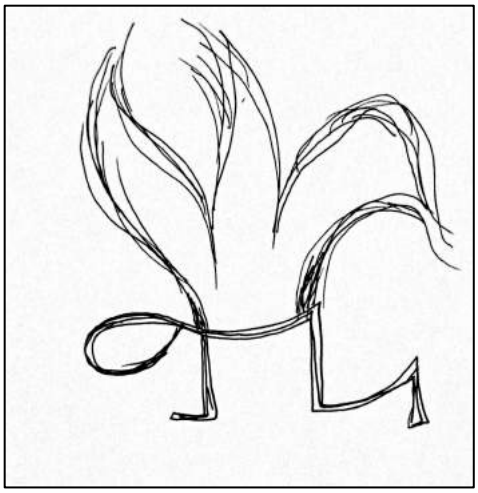


Figure 3

God "wishes to stroke [the man's] head," to help this man's soul recognize itself. God obviously cares and yet God "tarries." The Hebrew word *mitmameha* is the reflexive form from the root *mem-hey-mem-hey* which means "to delay." Thus *mitmameha* means "to delay oneself" or "to tarry." Bloch and Kronfeld draw a connection between use of the word in the poem and its use in Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Faith to refer to the delayed coming of the messiah.[23] The phrase to which they refer comes from the liturgical version of the 12th Principle: "I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the messiah, *v'af al pi she-**yitmameha***, and even though he **may delay**, nevertheless I anticipate every day that he will come."[24] Here, Ravikovitch offers a reason for the delay: "he would not want to frighten the man with portents of love." I prefer to translate *otot* as "signs," because it allows for more freedom to imagine what those signs might look like. The Hebrew word translates to "sign," "mark," or "symbol," and does not necessarily hold the ominous foreshadowing "portent"

[23] Bloch and Kronfeld, 119.
[24] *The Complete Artscroll Siddur*: *Nusach Ashkenaz* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1990), 181.

intimates.[25] In fact, *ot* is the word used in Genesis for the mark God places on Cain's forehead, a mark of protection. I wonder whether Ravikovitch's use of *ot* is an allusion to Cain, in which case God does not stroke the man's head for fear of "marking" him with a sign that would suggest that the man requires protection. After all, the man has not yet done anything in his new disembodied form. To mark him prematurely would permanently alter all of his future interactions.

"The End of the Fall" describes God as present and supportive at the moment of death. God does not prevent people from dying; God ushers them lovingly, though not physically, into death. I find the potential for comfort in this conception of God both for the dying and for those who mourn them. I imagine the act of dying to be quite lonely and to have God present may assuage some of that loneliness. As for those who are mourning, this poem can provide solace in describing God as one who pays individual attention to each individual in death.

There is an imbalance in any attempt to compare Amichai and Ravikovitch on the topic of God, for Ravikovitch does not write about wrestling with God as much as Amichai does. Amichai's work is full of God. *The New Yorker* staff writer James Wood describes the way Amichai interacts with God in his poetry:

> Amichai's personal religious zone—a veritable switchboard of complaint—is so lit up with his own blasphemous electricity. No contemporary writer known to me has written as searchingly and complicatedly about God and the ghost of God, and with such rich mixtures of feeling, such brazen anguish and play... [Amichai is] a man for whom God, like time, is always present and

[25] Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition of portent: "a sign or warning that something usually bad or unpleasant is going to happen." (Accessed January 15, 2016). http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/portent.

> always gone. And these gestures and quarrels are more than the merely familiar struggle of the atheist who constantly invokes a God he does not believe in.[26]

In "And This is your Glory" and "Oh The Names of God," Amichai struggles mightily with the places one might find God and the places from which God may be missing.

[26] James Wood, "Like a Prayer: The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai," *The New Yorker*, January 4, 2016, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/01/04/like-a-prayer.

And This is Your Glory (1960)
By: Yehuda Amichai

וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתָךְ

(מתוך פיוט לימים הנוראים)

בִּשְׁתִיקָתִי הַגְּרוֹלָה וּבְצַעֲקָתִי הַקְּטַנָּה אֲנִי חוֹרֵשׁ
כְּלָאַיִם. הָיִיתִי בַּמַּיִם וְהָיִיתִי בָּאֵשׁ.
הָיִיתִי בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם וּבְרוֹמָא. אוּלַי אֶהְיֶה בְּמֶכָּה.
אַךְ הַפַּעַם אֱלֹהִים מִתְחַבֵּא וְאָדָם צוֹעֵק אֵיכָה.
וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתָךְ.

אֱלֹהִים שׁוֹכֵב עַל גַּבּוֹ מִתַּחַת לַתֵּבֵל,
תָּמִיד עָסוּק בְּתִקּוּן, תָּמִיד מַשֶּׁהוּ מִתְקַלְקֵל.
רָצִיתִי לִרְאוֹתוֹ כֻּלּוֹ, אַךְ אֲנִי רוֹאֶה
רַק אֶת סְלִיּוֹת נְעָלָיו וַאֲנִי בּוֹכֶה.
וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתוֹ.

אֲפִלּוּ הָעֲצִים הָלְכוּ לִבְחֹר לָהֶם מֶלֶךְ.
אֶלֶף פְּעָמִים הִתְחַלְתִּי אֶת חַיַּי מִכָּאן וָאֵילָךְ.
בְּקֻצֵּה הָרְחוֹב עוֹמֵד אֶחָד וּמוֹנֶה:
אֶת זֶה וְאֶת זֶה וְאֶת זֶה וְאֶת זֶה.
וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתָךְ.

אוּלַי כְּמוֹ פֶּסֶל עַתִּיק שֶׁאֵין בּוֹ זְרוֹעוֹת
גַּם חַיֵּינוּ יָפִים יוֹתֵר, בְּלִי מַעֲשִׂים וּגְבוּרוֹת.
פִּרְקֵי מִמֶּנִּי אֶת שִׁרְיוֹן גּוּפְיָתִי הַמַּצְהִיבָה,
נִלְחַמְתִּי בְּכָל הָאַבִּירִים, עַד הַחַשְׁמַל כָּבָה.
וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתִי.

תָּנוּחַ דַּעְתְּךָ. דַּעְתְּךָ רָצָה עִמִּי בְּכָל הַדֶּרֶךְ.
וְעַכְשָׁו הִיא עֲיֵפָה וְאֵין בָּהּ עוֹד עֶרֶךְ.
אֲנִי רוֹאֶה אוֹתָךְ מוֹצִיאָה דָּבָר מִן הַמְּקָרֵר,
מוֹאֶרֶת מִתּוֹכוֹ בְּאוֹר שֶׁמְּעוֹלָם אַחֵר.
וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתִי
וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתוֹ
וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתָךְ.

"And this is your glory" - From a liturgical poem for the Days of Awe

In my great silence and my small scream, I inspire
Mixed kinds. I was in water and I was in fire.
In Jerusalem and in Rome. I may get to Mecca, too.
But this time, God is hiding and Adam shouts
Where are you.
And this is your glory.

God lies on his back under the world. There,
Something's always breaking down, needs repair.
I wanted to see Him, but I keep
Seeing only the soles of his shoes, and I weep.
And this is His glory.

Even the trees went off to choose a king.
A thousand times I started my life wondering.
At the end of the street someone counts out flat:
That one and that one and that one and that.
And this is your glory.

Like an ancient torso with no legs and no arms,
Our life is more beautiful, without heroic charms.
Remove my undershirt armor, yellow in the night,
I jousted with all the knights, till we switched off the light.
And this is my glory.

Put your mind at rest, your mind ran with me all the way,
Now it's tired, worthless, you might say.
I see you open the refrigerator, my girl,
Illuminated in the light of another world.
And this is my glory.
And this is His glory.
And this is Your glory.

In her book on Amichai, Glenda Abramson offers an analysis of "And This is Your Glory" ("*V'hi Tehilatecha*") as an example of the ways in which the poet subverts biblical and liturgical sources throughout his poetry. As poetic parody of a prayer found in the Yom Kippur *mussaf* service "And This is Your Glory" utilizes several sources to flip one traditional view of God after another.[27]

The poem's speaker searches all of the places religious people might find God — Rome, Jerusalem and Mecca — but God is hard to find. Reversing the biblical story of the Garden of Eden in which a newly self-aware and self-conscious Adam hides from God, here "God is hiding and Adam shouts, Where are you?" In this "savage inversion,"[28] Amichai expands our understanding of the relationship between God and Adam; both do the hiding

[27] Abramson, 39.
[28] Wood, "Like a Prayer," *The New Yorker*.

and both do the seeking. Abramson writes, "The traditional antitheses [in the first stanza] — silence and cry, water and fire, Jerusalem and Rome —opposing and destructive extremes, indicate desperation, confusion, a fruitless search, even chaos, due to God's absence."[29] In indirect response to Adam's "Where are you?" the poem continues with the liturgical phrase that will become its refrain "and this is your glory." In following Adam's question with a statement of God's glory, like calling someone up for an *aliyah* who is not in the room to accept the honor, Amichai highlights God's absence.[30]

In the second stanza, the narrator finds God. Like Moses, he yearns to see all of God, but also like Moses, he is not permitted. The soles of God's feet are all he can see. In a second reversal, "God lies on His back **under** [*mitachat*] the world" (Figure 5), like an overwhelmed car mechanic whose work is never complete: "something always needs repair." God's placement under the world rather than *l'malah,* above, or *bashamayim*,[31] in the heavens, flips God's location as described in liturgy. The placement of the second acknowledgement of God's glory, directly after the narrator

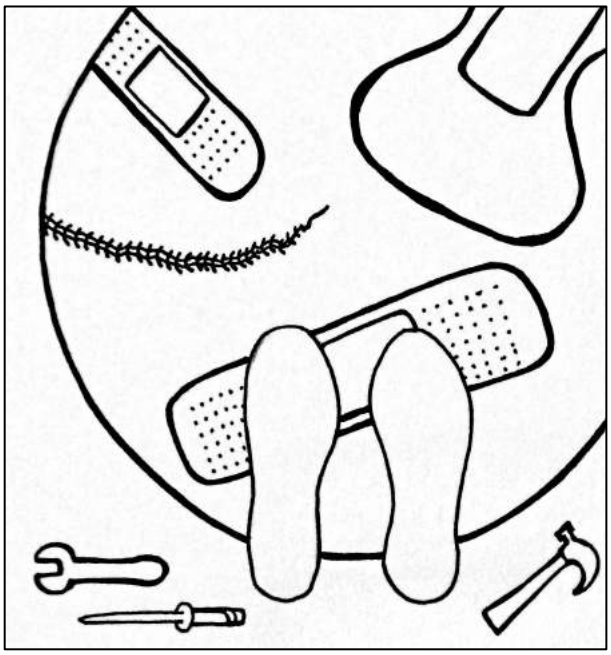


Figure 5

[29] Abramson, 40.
[30] Abramson argues that "the poem's liturgical refrain, 'And this is your praise,' consequently assumes a satirical and accusatory power." Abramson, 39.
[31] One of the oldest liturgical pieces of the Jewish prayer service, *Aleinu L'shabeiach* include the following*: "Shehu noteh shamayim v'yosed aretz, umoshav yikaro* ***bashamayim mimaal****, ushchinat uzo b'govhei meromim* – For you spread out the heavens and established the earth; Your majestic abode is in the heavens above and Your mighty Presence is in the loftiest heights." *Mishkan T'filah*, ed. Elyse D. Frishman. (New York: CCAR Press, 2007), 588.

weeps over the sight of God's shoes, could be read in a number of ways. Perhaps the narrator is weeping tears of relief for having found God, and exclaims "and this is His glory" in relief. He could also be shocked by the position in which he finds God and exclaims "and this is His glory" simply out of the inability to find alternative words.

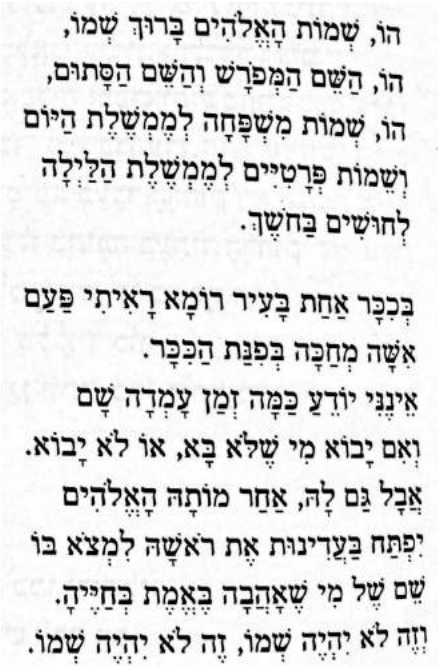
At the beginning of the third stanza, the poem's speaker, frustrated by his search for God, exclaims, "even the trees went off to choose a king" (emphasis: mine). Like the Israelites in Samuel's time who desire a human king, a man – not God – to rule over them, the narrator indicates a desire for someone other to lead. The reference to trees seeking a king comes from a parable in Judges 9:8-15. In the parable, each tree declines kingship until finally bramble accepts. In the biblical text the parable serves as a warning to the people, intimating that they have chosen the wrong king. In "And This is Your Glory," the reference seems to chastise God for being so difficult to find that even the trees have given up and gone in search of alternate authority.

The last two stanzas offer a shift in tone. After struggling with all of the ways in which God's glory does not manifest in the ways the poet wants and expects, the narrator begins to alter expectations and definition of glory. As he searches, he finds beauty --- and God --- in the mundane: "Like an ancient torso with no legs and no arms / Life is more beautiful, without heroic charms." In other words, beauty can be found in the simplicity of a broken old statue, stripped of appendages. Charm and heroism may be overrated and like the God this narrator has found, may not be as they seem.

Also, the following prayer is chanted in preparation for recitation of Kol Nidrei: "*Bishivah shel **malah** u-vishivah shel **matah**, al da'at haMakom v'al d'at hakahal* - By the authority of the heavenly court and by the authority of the earthly court, with the permission of God the Ever-Present and with the permission of this congregation…" *On Wings of Awe: A Fully Transliterated Machzor for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur*, ed. Richard N. Levy. (Jersey City: KTAV Publishing House, 2011), 252.

In the final stanza of the poem, the narrator has fully embraced a glorification of the mundane. “I see you open the refrigerator, my girl, / Illuminated in the light of another world. / And this is my glory.” In describing the way the refrigerator lights up a dark room, shedding an otherworldly glow onto the woman who opens it, Amichai alludes to the *aron kodesh* with its *ner tamid*, another closet from which light emanates. In doing so, Amichai both elevates the mundane and brings God down to earth. God can be found just as easily (and perhaps more easily) in the refrigerator as in the *aron kodesh*.

Oh, the Names of God (1998)
By: Yehuda Amichai



הוֹ, שְׁמוֹת הָאֱלֹהִים בָּרוּךְ שְׁמוֹ,
הוֹ, הַשֵּׁם הַמְפֹרָשׁ וְהַשֵּׁם הַסָּתוּם,
הוֹ, שְׁמוֹת מִשְׁפָּחָה לְמֶמְשֶׁלֶת הַיּוֹם
וְשֵׁמוֹת פְּרָטִיִּים לְמֶמְשֶׁלֶת הַלַּיְלָה
לְחוּשִׁים בַּחֹשֶׁךְ.

בְּכִכָּר אַחַת בָּעִיר רוֹמָא רָאִיתִי פַּעַם
אִשָּׁה מְחַכָּה בְּפִנַּת הַכִּכָּר.
אֵינֶנִּי יוֹדֵעַ כַּמָּה זְמַן עָמְדָה שָׁם
וְאִם יָבוֹא מִי שֶׁלֹּא בָּא, אוֹ לֹא יָבוֹא.
אֲבָל גַּם לָהּ, אַחַר מוֹתָהּ הָאֱלֹהִים
יִפְתַּח בַּעֲדִינוּת אֶת רֹאשָׁהּ לִמְצֹא בּוֹ
שֵׁם שֶׁל מִי שֶׁאָהֲבָה בֶּאֱמֶת בְּחַיֶּיהָ.
וְזֶה לֹא יִהְיֶה שְׁמוֹ, זֶה לֹא יִהְיֶה שְׁמוֹ.

Oh, the names of God, Blessed be His Name,
The Speakable Name and the Unspeakable Name.
Oh, family names for the dominion of day
And first names for the dominion of night,
Names whispered in the dark.

In a piazza in Rome, I once saw a woman waiting
at a corner. I don't know how long
she stood there, or whether the one who hadn't come
did come in the end, or not. But after her death, God
will gently pry open her head, as He always does,
to look for the name of the one she truly loved.
And it won't be His name, it won't be His.

A similar contrast between openness and hiddenness runs through "Oh, the Names of God" ("*Ho, Sh'mot HaElohim*"). In the poem, one may call on God explicitly or implicitly, publically (the "family name") or privately (*shemot prati'im*), [32] in the light of day or the dark of night.[33] *Shem Hamephorash*, translated as "The Speakable Name," refers to the tetragrammaton, the four-letter spelling of God's name (*yud hey vav hey*) that many Jews actively refrain from uttering. The term *shem hamephorash* also refers to the kabbalistic understanding that God has 72 names and power can be culled when *tzaddikim* intentionally

[32] Bloch and Kronfeld translate *Shemot prati'im* colloquially: "first name." *Prati'im* stems from a root meaning private or personal.
[33] *Shemot mishpacha l'memshelet hayom / l'shemot prati'im l'memshelet halailah* recalls Genesis 1:16 - "And God made the two great lights: the greater light *l'memshelet hayom* - to rule the day, and the lesser light *l'memshelet halailah* - to rule the night...." I prefer maintaining the biblical translation here so that Amichai's words would instead translate to "Family names to rule the day, and private names to rule the night." Amichai's use of the wording clearly alludes to the biblical text and maintaining the biblical translation clarifies the allusion for the reader. With this connection intact, one could argue that the "family name" holds more power, as it is associated with "the greater light." Interestingly, God does not have a "first" or "last" name. Perhaps this distinction between names used during daytime versus nighttime refers not to actual names but rather to the way God's name is used: the frustrated "God damn it" by day and the passion-induced "Oh God!" by night.

repeat a recitation of all those 72 names. Thus, in contrasting *shem hamephorash*, the "Speakable Name," with *shem hasatum*[34] the title of the poem in translation highlights just how many options one has when referring to God even in the face of the name which Jews are forbidden from speaking.

In the second stanza, a woman stands on a corner waiting for "the one" (Figure 6). When she dies, God will search her memories for "**the one** she truly loved" and God will not find God's name (Figure 7). The repetition of "the one" suggests a connection between "the one" for whom she waits, "the one" she truly loves. That God does not find God's name implies that is, at least in part, for what God searches. Despite all of the names, all of the different ways to refer to God, she does not – did not – think of or name God. God is not the one she truly loves. As a reader, I feel sad for God, as if God hopes to be the one she loves and will learn only after she dies that she loved another more.

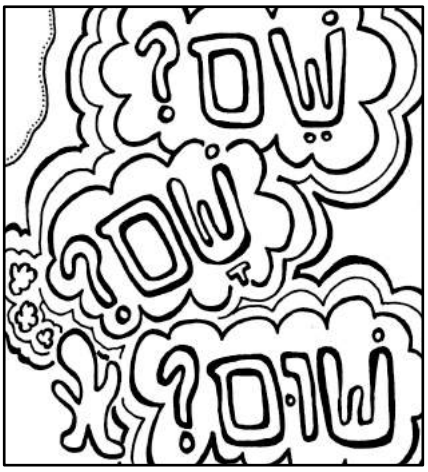


Figure 6

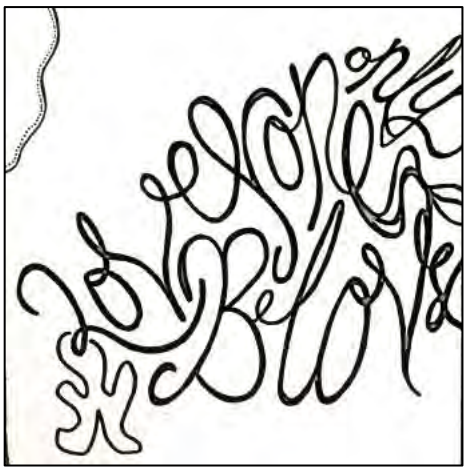


Figure 7

Alternatively, the end of the poem can be read with the beginning in mind, in which case there is simply no way God will find God's name in the woman's head. God's

[34] *Shem Hasatum*: The "Unspeakable Name." Yehuda Amichai, "Ho Shemot HaElohim," *Open Closed Open,* trans. Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld (Orlando: Harcourt, 2000), 132.

Speakable Name is, in fact, unspeakable and, thus, unknowable. God could be checking the contents of people's heads after they die to ensure God's name remains hidden.

In the world of Amichai's poetry, God often acts like people do and has emotions like people have, and for people, names hold incredible importance. People name their children after relatives who were significant in their lives. They take on titles that reflect degrees and professions. A person's name defines him/her. This reading of the poem highlights the idea that no one really knows God's name, a discovery that could upset a God who wishes to be known or delight a God who wishes to remain hidden.

In writing about God, Ravikovitch and Amichai grapple with God as both hidden and found, one who comforts but is also removed. Read through one lens, Ravikovitch's poems describe God as the one who grounds souls and comforts the dead. Read through another lens, the same poems show a stoic unmoving God who allows people to die. Amichai's challenges with God have more to do with a conflation of the sacred and the mundane. In one poem he challenges people to look for God in the everyday, while in the other he reminds people that despite the search, God may remain hidden.

Section Two: Prayer without God?
Secular Expressions of Praise and Remembrance

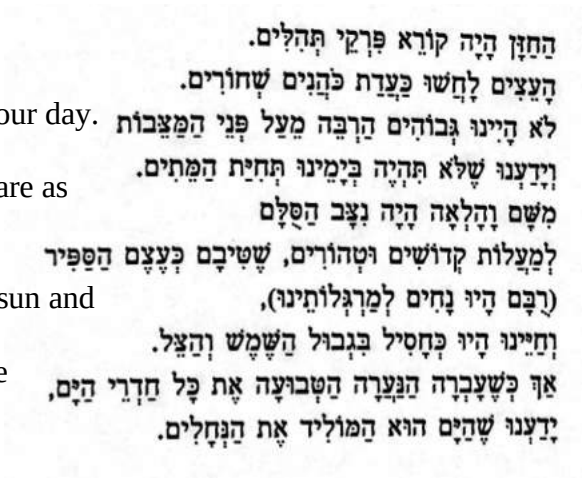
In their respective poetry about prayer, both Ravikovitch and Amichai quote from Jewish liturgy and challenge the meaningfulness of prayer. Neither poet rejects prayer entirely though both present secular understandings of prayer. Both use prayer as a background element of the greater story being told in their poems.

Ravikovitch opens her poem "Requiem after Seventeen Years" (1964) with a cantor chanting Psalms. The poetic voice moves quickly toward describing a graveyard. The poem describes a longing for resurrection and suggests the physical rise and fall of people and humanity. In "Yom Kippur in the Year of Forgetting," Amichai describes a man's alternative Yom Kippur activities. Comparing an open market stall and the open *aron hakodesh*, a man's memories and the way these memories connect to Yom Kippur, the poem suggests that man's experience is prayerful, despite the physical space in which he finds himself.

Both poets use liturgical phrasing in their poetry. In "Delight," Ravikovitch offers an alternative Yismechu, the Shabbat afternoon prayer that describes a moment of true delight. She includes a number of words that signal to the reader that she understands and plays with the prayer but does not follow the structure of the prayer or include God. Rather, she gives the reader an image of what it might look like to feel the results of Yismechu. In contrast, in "Eyn Keloheynu," Amichai provocatively challenges and converses with the prayer of the same name, which leaves me wondering what purpose prayer holds and what people expect written prayer to achieve.

Requiem after Seventeen Years (1964)
By: Dahlia Ravikovich

The cantor was reading psalms.*
The trees whispered like a flock of black priests.
We were not much taller than the gravestones
And we knew there would be no resurrection in our day.
At a distance, there stood a ladder
For the ascent of the *k'doshim ut'horim,*** who are as the very sapphire
(Most of them lay at our feet),
And our lives were like a locust at the border of sun and shade.
But when the drowned girl passed through all the chambers of the sea,
We knew it is the sea that fathers the river.


חַזָּן הָיָה קוֹרֵא פִּרְקֵי תְּהִלִּים.
הָעֵצִים לָחֲשׁוּ כַּעֲדַת כֹּהֲנִים שְׁחוֹרִים.
לֹא הָיִינוּ גְּבוֹהִים הַרְבֵּה מֵעַל פְּנֵי הַמַּצֵּבוֹת
וְיָדַעְנוּ שֶׁלֹּא תִּהְיֶה בְּיָמֵינוּ תְּחִיַּת הַמֵּתִים.
מִשָּׁם וְהָלְאָה הָיָה נִצָּב הַסֻּלָּם
לְמַעֲלוֹת קְדוֹשִׁים וּטְהוֹרִים, שֶׁטִּיבָם כְּעֶצֶם הַסַּפִּיר
(רֻבָּם הָיוּ נָחִים לְמַרְגְּלוֹתֵינוּ),
וְחַיֵּינוּ הָיוּ כְּחָסִיל בִּגְבוּל הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְהַצֵּל.
אַךְ כְּשֶׁעָבְרָה הַנַּעֲרָה הַטְּבוּעָה אֶת כָּל חַדְרֵי הַיָּם,
יָדַעְנוּ שֶׁהַיָּם הוּא הַמּוֹלִיד אֶת הַנְּחָלִים.

*lower-case per Bloch and Kronfeld's translation
**the holy and the pure

In the beginning of "Requiem after Seventeen Years" ("*T'filat Ashkavah L'achar Sh'va-esrei Shana*"), Ravikovitch laments the finality of death: "And we knew there would be no resurrection in our day." Her words acknowledge the gulf between the living and the dead and the great loss the living feel when a person dies. The poem concludes with hope by offering an alternative way to understand what it might mean to rise after death.

The poem opens with a cantor reading Psalms, a common funerary practice. Biblical and rabbinic Judaism teach that when a messiah comes, all will be judged, including those who have died.[35] In order for God to judge those who have died, they must first be resurrected, and so Jewish liturgy refers to God, among other descriptors, as *mchayei*

[35] Biblical sources for resurrection: Isaiah 24:21-23, Ezekiel 37, Daniel 12:2. Rabbinic source for resurrection: b. Talmud Sanhedrin 91b. The subject and recipient of resurrection varies from source to source.

hametim, the one who brings the dead to life.[36] While no Psalm explicitly refers to resurrection, many times the Psalmist asks God to raise him up either physically out of a pit or emotionally from a place of sadness.[37] Yet the poem's narrator makes it clear that "we knew there would be no resurrection in our day." This funeral marks finality for the grieving family and the person being buried.

The poem explores the relationship between the living and the dead via images of proximity and distance. The narrator notes the nearness of the living to the dead buried just beneath the ground and remarks pointing out that the people in the poem "were not much taller than the gravestones." This physical closeness emphasizes the metaphorical expanse that lies between the living and the dead. While the physical distance between those who live above and those who lie below ground is minimal, the gap between the two and the inability of the living to communicate and interact with the dead is insurmountable.

The presence of a ladder, a physical and symbolic bridge between two points, continues this theme by emphasizing the distance between the dead and their intended destination (Figure 8). The ladder stands "at a distance," while most of the holy and pure "lay at our feet." Despite the structure provided to help the holy and pure ascend, the dead remain firmly beneath the earth. In pointing out this contradiction, the poem suggests that the dead may not ever experience resurrection perhaps because they cannot reach the ladder.

[36] This idea appears specifically in *Gvurot*, the second prayer recited daily during the *Amidah*.
[37] Some examples of God lifting or raising include Psalms 30:4, 40:2, and 41:11.

The phrase *k'doshim ut'horim* comes from *El Malei Rachamim* (God Full of Compassion), a traditional funerary prayer that calls for God to shelter and protect a person in death. Ravikovitch brings this prayer into conversation in a number of her poems.[38] While the ladder is set up for the ascent of the *k'doshim ut'horim*, "most of them lay at our feet," that is, dead and buried in the graveyard. Either the ladder does not work or the holy and pure cannot reach it. The use of parentheses in the poem suggests a subversive meaning that could be read as a challenge to the holy and pure or to the ladder and its destination. Either way, no one is ascending.

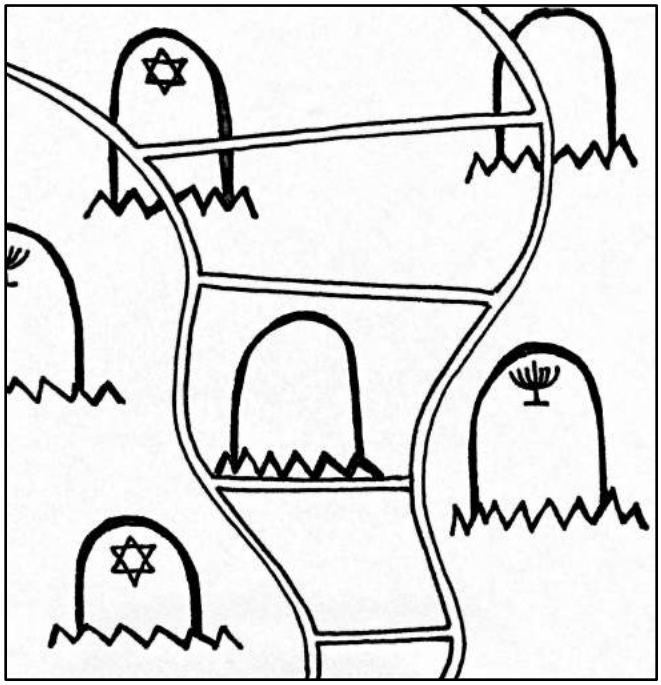


Figure 8

In the next line, the narrator compares people lives to locusts: "our lives were like a locust at the border of sun and shade." The life of cicadae (colloquially referred to as 17-year locusts) follows a sort of backwards resurrection path. Cicadas lay their eggs in trees. When the eggs hatch, the cicada nymphs fall to the ground and bury themselves, remaining there for years before reemerging as adults. But their ascent is short-lived; they spend 5-10 days above the earth, a blink of the eye in contrast to the years they spend below the soil.[39] As I read about this simile, I thought about how humans also hover between sun and shade, light and dark, life and death. In comparing people to locusts, Ravikovitch highlights the fleeting

[38] Ravikovitch uses "bonds of life," a different phrase from *El Malei Rachamim*, in "The Central Pillar."
[39] "Cicada 2016: Control of Periodical Cicada Insect." *The Gardner's Network.* Accessed November 15, 2015. http://www.gardenersnet.com/atoz/cicada.htm.

nature of people's time on earth. When viewed within the greater scope of the history of the universe, individual lives are mere blips on the radar. Compared to the time a person spends buried under the ground, one's life is short.

The last two lines of the poem begin with *ach*, a Hebrew word meaning "but" or "however." As in English, *ach* sets up an opposite, which alerts the reader of an upcoming counterstatement. In the last two lines, the tone of hopelessness in the poem shifts. "When the drowned girl passed through all the chambers of the sea / We knew it is the sea that fathers the river." According to Ecclesiastes 1:7, "all streams flow to the sea," and modern science would agree that rivers and streams feed into the parental ocean. When one follows water through its cycle, it becomes clear how the sea fathers the river: sea water evaporates, becomes vapor, and then returns to earth in the form of rain, which feeds the streams and rivers. After focusing mostly on the ways in which the dead and the living do not move between realms or interact with each other, evaporation offers a bit of hope. In this ambiguous recognition that water evaporates and then eventually returns to the earth to "father the river," the narrator acknowledges for the first time in the poem that the drowned girl, at least, does rise.

I initially chose this poem for its liturgical phrasing (*k'doshim ut'horim*) and because the poem describes prayer in action. The presence of a prayer leader (the cantor) and the use of the first person plural ("we were not much taller," "we knew there would be no resurrection.") imply a service of some sort. The poem has much more to do with the distance between life and death, and the way that graveyards, and perhaps funerals, highlight that truth. The poem challenges biblical and liturgical images of ascent, suggesting that true ascent takes place not by use of a heavenly ladder but rather through the natural process of

evaporation. Nature's redemptive quality also comes into play in "Delight" ("*Chemda*"), the other Ravikovitch poem I chose for this section.

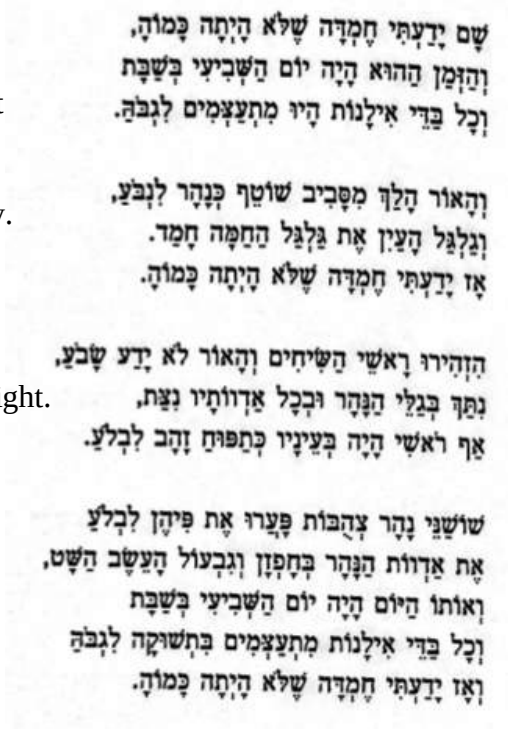
Delight (1959)
By: Dahlia Ravikovich

There did I know a delight beyond all delight
And it came to pass upon the Sabbath day
As tree boughs reached for the sky with all their might

Round and round like a river streamed the light,
And the wheel of the eye craved the sunwheel that day.
Then did I know a delight beyond all delight.

The heads of the bushes blazed, insatiable bright
Sunlight striking the waves, igniting the spray.
It would swallow my head like a golden orange, that light.

Water lilies were gaping their yellow bright
Mouths to swallow the ripples and reeds in their way.
And indeed it came to pass on the Sabbath day
As tree boughs lusted for the sky with all their might,
And then did I know a delight beyond all delight.


שָׁם יָדַעְתִּי חֶמְדָּה שֶׁלֹּא הָיְתָה כָּמוֹהָ,
וְהַזְּמַן הַהוּא הָיָה יוֹם הַשַּׁבְּיעִי בְּשַׁבָּת
וְכָל בַּדֵּי אִילָנוֹת הָיוּ מִתְעַצְּמִים לִגְבֹהַּ.

וְהָאוֹר הָלַךְ מְסָבִיב שׁוֹטֵף כְּנָהָר לִנְבֹּעַ,
וְגַלְגַּל הָעַיִן אֶת גַּלְגַּל הַחַמָּה חָמַד.
אָז יָדַעְתִּי חֶמְדָּה שֶׁלֹּא הָיְתָה כָּמוֹהָ.

הִזְהִירוּ רָאשֵׁי הַשִּׂיחִים וְהָאוֹר לֹא יָדַע שָׂבְעַ,
נִתַּךְ בְּגַלֵּי הַנָּהָר וּבְכָל אַדְוֹתָיו נִצַּת,
אַף רֹאשִׁי הָיָה בְּעֵינָיו כְּתַפּוּחַ זָהָב לִבְלֹעַ.

שׁוֹשַׁנֵּי נָהָר צָהֳבוֹת פָּעֲרוּ אֶת פִּיהֶן לִבְלֹעַ
אֶת אַדְוֹת הַנָּהָר בְּחָפְזָן וְגִבְעוֹל הָעֵשֶׂב הַשָּׁט,
וְאוֹתוֹ הַיּוֹם הָיָה יוֹם הַשַּׁבְּיעִי בְּשַׁבָּת
וְכָל בַּדֵּי אִילָנוֹת מִתְעַצְּמִים בְּתִשׁוּקָה לִגְבֹהַּ
וְאָז יָדַעְתִּי חֶמְדָּה שֶׁלֹּא הָיְתָה כָּמוֹהָ.

Bloch and Kronfeld describe "Delight" ("*Chemda*") as a "magical ecstatic" love poem and argue that "it is not the beloved but eros itself that is given presence and agency; desire is cosmic, though the speaker's pleasure is personal and embodied."[40] "Delight," a poem of cosmic desire indeed, describes a moment of ultimate Shabbat delight. The poem contains a number of allusions to Yismechu,[41] a prayer that originates in medieval Shabbat liturgy. In addition to the specific mention of Shabbat in the poem, the word *chemda* itself is also directly associated with Yismechu. The prayer connects Shabbat and the idea of delight, which suggests that those who call Shabbat a delight will in turn find delight in God's goodness. In the prayer, God calls Shabbat ***chemdat*** *yamim* ("most delightful of days").

[40] Bloch and Kronfeld, 20.
[41] Traditionally, *Yismechu* is inserted into the *Kedushat Hayom* portion of the Shabbat mussaf service. In Reform liturgy, it is found within the same prayer rubric but in the Shabbat morning service.

Many prayer books include alternative readings, poems and short pieces that offer interpretations of different prayers and, for me, Ravikovitch's "Delight" serves as an alternative reading for Yismechu. However, unlike Yismechu, "Delight" contains no mention of God, requiring worshippers to find the ways in which God exists implicitly within the poem. Additionally, the poem takes a step beyond Yismechu, which calls on people to call Shabbat a delight. In "Delight" Ravikovitch actually describes the moment of delight itself.

Nature provides the landscape in which the narrator experiences delight. As in "Requiem after Seventeen Years" trees play an active role in the scenery. The trees who pray in "Requiem" whisper like *kohanim* (priests), as is fitting for a funeral setting. In contrast, this poem's trees "reached for the sky with all their might," seeking ever more, as is fitting in moments of pleasure (Figure 9). Ravikovitch's description of the trees as reaching with all their might suggests that part of this moment of delight may be found in the act of stretching up while remaining firmly connected to the earth.

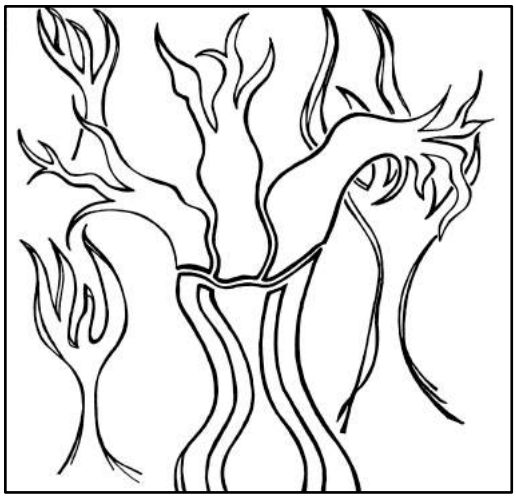


Figure 8

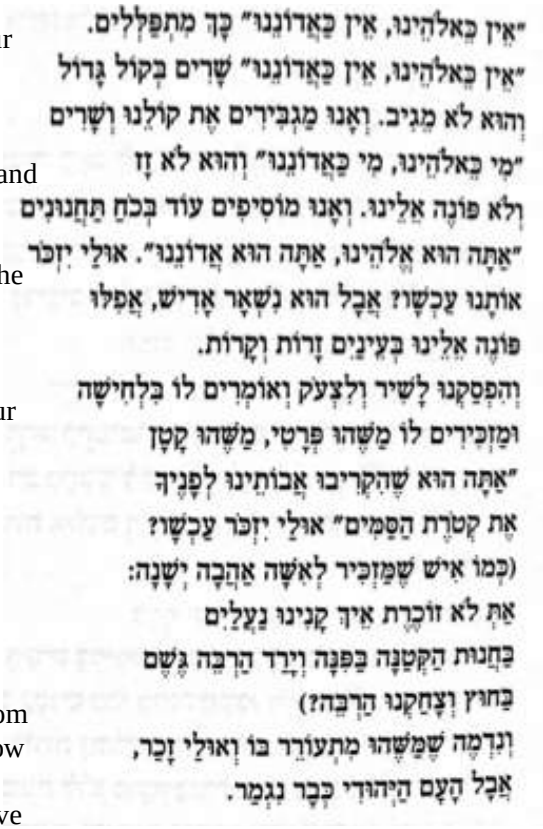
Throughout the poem, bushes "blaze, insatiable bright," eyes "crave," boughs "lust," water lilies "gape," and blazing light threatens to swallow the reader's head. These descriptive verbs connote deep intense desire for encompassment and a longing to consume the moment. To experience the full delight of Shabbat is to lust, to crave, to rush in with a hungry openness and desire to leap straight into the fire.

Like in "The Central Pillar," Ravikovitch uses a repeating refrain ("there/then I did I know a delight beyond all delight") to highlight the cyclical nature of the moment of delight and its importance. The narrator marks the sun's movement across the sky ("The wheel of the eye craved the sunwheel that day") and describes the way the light streamed "round and round."

Scholar Ilana Szobel uses "Delight" as an illustration of Ravikovitch's depiction of a clear separation between "the flawed nature of lived experience and the perfection that we can imagine but never realize …[in which] 'over there' is a space of desire and wish-fulfillment."[42] Ravkovitch describes an unreal world, a "magical" moment, and in this way "Delight" truly becomes a secular celebration of Shabbat. In contrast to the potentially impossible scene described by Ravikovitch, Talmud teaches (in b. Brachot 57b) that on Shabbat people experience 1/60 of the World to Come, a post-messianic time in which life, society and human experience reaches complete fulfillment. In "Delight," I find a clear image of a special, unique, "cosmic" moment of connection between humanity and the divine, a moment of Shabbat.

[42] Szobel, 52-53.

***Eyn Keloheynu* (1998)**
By: Yehuda Amichai


"אֵין כֵּאלֹהֵינוּ, אֵין כַּאדוֹנֵנוּ" כָּךְ מִתְפַּלְלִים.
"אֵין כֵּאלֹהֵינוּ, אֵין כַּאדוֹנֵנוּ" שָׁרִים בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל
וְהוּא לֹא מֵגִיב. וְאָנוּ מַגְבִּירִים אֶת קוֹלֵנוּ וְשָׁרִים
"מִי כֵּאלֹהֵינוּ, מִי כַּאדוֹנֵנוּ" וְהוּא לֹא זָז
וְלֹא פּוֹנֶה אֵלֵינוּ. וְאָנוּ מוֹסִיפִים עוֹד בְּכֹחַ תַּחֲנוּנִים
"אַתָּה הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אַתָּה הוּא אֲדוֹנֵנוּ". אוּלַי יִזְכֹּר
אוֹתָנוּ עַכְשָׁו? אֲבָל הוּא נִשְׁאָר אָדִישׁ, אֲפִלּוּ
פּוֹנֶה אֵלֵינוּ בְּעֵינַיִם זָרוֹת וְקָרוֹת.
וְהִפְסַקְנוּ לָשִׁיר וְלִצְעֹק וְאוֹמְרִים לוֹ בְּלַחִישָׁה
וּמַזְכִּירִים לוֹ מַשֶּׁהוּ פְּרָטִי, מַשֶּׁהוּ קָטָן
"אַתָּה הוּא שֶׁהִקְרִיבוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ לְפָנֶיךָ
אֶת קְטֹרֶת הַסַּמִּים" אוּלַי יִזְכֹּר עַכְשָׁו?
(כְּמוֹ אִישׁ שֶׁמַּזְכִּיר לְאִשָּׁה אַהֲבָה יְשָׁנָה:
אַתְּ לֹא זוֹכֶרֶת אֵיךְ קָנִינוּ נַעֲלַיִם
בַּחֲנוּת הַקְּטַנָּה בַּפִּנָּה וְיָרַד הַרְבֵּה גֶּשֶׁם
בַּחוּץ וְצָחַקְנוּ הַרְבֵּה?)
וְנִדְמֶה שֶׁמַּשֶּׁהוּ מִתְעוֹרֵר בּוֹ וְאוּלַי זָכַר,
אֲבָל הָעָם הַיְּהוּדִי כְּבָר נִגְמַר.

Eyn ke-loheynu, Eyn ka-adoneynu,
"There is none like our God, There is none like our God,"
thus we pray.
Eyn ke-loheynu, Eyn ka-adoneynu, in a loud voice - no reaction from him. So we amp up our voices and sing,
Mi ke-loheynu, mi ka-adoneynu?
"Who is like our God, who is like our Lord," and he won't budge,
won't turn toward us. And again we redouble the force of our pleading,
Atah hu eloheynu, atah hu adoneynu, "Thou art our God, Thou art our Lord,"
Maybe now he'll remember us? But he remains unmoved, even
turns to us with cold, alien eyes.
So we stop singing and yelling, and in a whisper we remind him of something personal, something small.
Atah hu she-hikrivu avoteynu le-fanecha et ketoret ha-samim. "Thou art the one before whom our forefathers offered sweet incense" – maybe now he'll remember?
(Like a man who reminds a woman of their old love affair:
Don't you remember how we were buying shoes in that little shop on the corner, and it poured and poured
outside, and we laughed and laughed?)
And it seems as if something begins to wakes up in him, maybe he'll forget not his own,
but too late: The Jewish people is gone.

Amichai's poetic critique of Eyn Keloheynu --- which ends with the lament about Jewish inattentiveness and includes a critique of God or perhaps of the Jewish people --- begins with the words of the prayer itself. Unlike petitionary prayers, Eyn Keloheynu is made up of 21 short repetitive blessings of praise. According to rabbinic dictum, Jews should strive to offer 100 blessings a day: reciting Eyn Keloheynu helps to ensure the reachability of that

number.[43] In other words, Eyn Keloheynu does not jump out as a prayer to which one expects a response. Instead, it serves to affirm God's glory and splendor. But in Amichai's poem, the narrator takes note of God's silence. After those who pray recite each line of Eyn Keloheyn*u*, they pause in hopes that God will respond. But God provides "no reaction…he won't budge, won't turn to us…remains unmoved." As human prayer, Eyn Keloheynu does not explicitly require a response from God but "Eyn Keloheynu" criticizes Eyn Keloheynu to challenge the idea of the kind of prayer that merely affirms God's presence (Figure 10).

Figure 10

As a critique of God, the poem offers an ironic counter to the expectations of the prayer. The prayer exclaims: "There is none like our God!" and the poem responds, "no reaction." Amichai's commentary on God's lack of recognition between each of the 21 prayers reminds me of the challenge of working with Alzheimer's patients. The words of Eyn Keloheynu become the way the Jewish people helps God remember not just who they are but who God's self is: "There none like you!" "Thou art our God!" The ones praying, concerned, wonder amongst themselves. "Maybe now he'll remember." But God either cannot or will not acknowledge them and their words.

[43] b. Talmud Menachot 43b, Orach Chaim 46:3

In the middle of the poem, they change their tactics. The group offers the final line of Eyn Keloheynu in a whisper rather than shout. [44] They share "something personal, something small. (Like a man who reminds a woman of their old love affair)."[45] The parenthetical addition connects the mundane but intimate experience of one person looking back fondly at a former relationship with a similarly intimate conversation between Jews and God. As James Wood writes, "Amichai glides quickly between his own poetic suggestions, and this supple navigation credits his inventions with the otherness of their existence: he proceeds as if his own metaphors had the naturalness of found things, not the artifice of made things."[46] This poem suggests that the Jews' prayer to God is a fond remembrance of a past relationship. The final line of Eyn Keloheynu becomes a wistful memory of an ended love affair between God and the Jewish people.

That the relationship is over becomes clear in the conclusion of the poem in which something stirs and God may or may not acknowledge those praying. But the narration switches from the first person plural ("us," "we," "our,") to the third person and exposes loss the line "the Jewish people is gone." There is no more ownership of the connection between God and Jews. In their translation, Bloch and Kronfeld suggest reading the poem through the lens of the Holocaust, which turns the end of the poem into a prayer from a time of danger.[47]

---

[44] This line is omitted in Reform Jewish liturgy for its endorsement of sacrifice as a method for communicating with God: "the Reconstructionist *Kol Haneshama* (1996) succinctly summarizes the rationale for this deletion when it notes its 'nostalgic reference to Temple worship implies a longing for the reinstitution of sacrifices that we do not share.'" Lawrence Hoffman, ed., *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries, Volume 10: Shabbat Morning* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2011), 156.

[45] This parenthetical addition, comparing the Jews' prayer to God with a person's reminiscences to his former lover, is another example of the way in which Amichai brings mundane aspects of love into a conversation about the relationship between people and the divine.

[46] Wood, "Like a Prayer," *The New Yorker.*

[47] Their translation reads: "And it seems as if something begins to wakes up in him, maybe / he'll forget not his own, / but too late: The Jewish people is gone." (Amichai, *The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai,* 412*).* As mentioned in footnote 41, the basic meaning of the Hebrew is simple: "And it seems as if something begins to wakes up in him, maybe he'll remember. But the Jewish people is already gone."

By the time God remembers Jews, the window of opportunity has passed. According to this reading, Eyn Keloheynu fails the Jewish people and so does God. The poem paints a picture of a God who did not (perhaps could not) pay attention until it was too late. *Nigmar*, which means "finished," could also indicate a reaction on the part of the Jewish people. Exhausted from their attempts to garner a response from this uncommunicative God, Jews simply give up and stop praying.

Read an entirely different way, the poem could also describe a God who seeks to teach the Jewish people a lesson. God waits for the Jewish people to communicate in the way God finds effective; prayer in which words convey personal connection and a message only God will understand. Tragically, God takes the lesson too far and though the Jewish people do eventually properly communicate, God does not respond in time and they are gone.

"Eyn Keloheynu" is ambiguous enough to offer multifarious ways to interpret how God may or may not hear prayer and how Jewish people offer prayer. Amichai's intentional conversation with the text of Eyn Keloheynu suggests a comfort level both with the prayer itself and with a willingness to challenge it. In doing so, Amichai offers an example of how people could choose to grapple similarly with prayer and with the way God may or may not respond to prayer. In contrast, Amichai's "Yom Kippur in the Year of Forgetting," offers a vision of successful prayer.

Yom Kippur in the Year of Forgetting (1967)
By: Yehuda Amichai

On Yom Kippur in the year of forgetting, TaShKaH, I put on
Dark festive clothing and went to the Old City in Jerusalem.
I stood a long time before the niche of an old Arab store,
Not far from the Nablus Gate, a store
Of buttons and zippers and spools of thread
Of every color and snaps and buckles.
Dear light and many colors, like an open Ark of the Covenant.
In my heart I told him that my father too
Had such a store of threads and buttons.
In my heart I explained to him about all the dozens of years
And causes and accidents, that I am here now
And my father's store was burned there and he is buried here.
When I concluded it was closing time, the closing prayer.
He too put down the shutter and locked the gate
And I returned home with all the worshippers.


בְּיוֹם כִּפּוּר בִּשְׁנַת תַּשְׁכַּ"ח לָבַשְׁתִּי
בִּגְדֵי חַג כֵּהִים וְהָלַכְתִּי לָעִיר הָעַתִּיקָה בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם.
עָמַדְתִּי זְמַן רַב לִפְנֵי כּוֹךְ חֲנוּתוֹ שֶׁל עַרְבִי,
לֹא רָחוֹק מִשַּׁעַר שְׁכֶם, חֲנוּת
כַּפְתּוֹרִים וְרוֹכְסָנִים וּסְלִילֵי חוּטִים
בְּכָל צֶבַע וְלַחְצָנִיּוֹת וְאַבְזָמִים.
אוֹר יָקָר וּצְבָעִים רַבִּים, כְּמוֹ אֲרוֹן־קֹדֶשׁ פָּתוּחַ.

אָמַרְתִּי לוֹ בְּלִבִּי שֶׁגַּם לְאָבִי
הָיְתָה חֲנוּת כָּזֹאת שֶׁל חוּטִים וְכַפְתּוֹרִים.
הִסְבַּרְתִּי לוֹ בְּלִבִּי עַל כָּל עֶשְׂרוֹת הַשָּׁנִים
וְהַגּוֹרָמִים וְהַמִּקְרִים, שֶׁאֲנִי עַכְשָׁו פֹּה
וַחֲנוּת אָבִי שְׂרוּפָה שָׁם וְהוּא קָבוּר פֹּה.

כְּשֶׁסִּיַּמְתִּי הָיְתָה שָׁעַת נְעִילָה.
גַּם הוּא הוֹרִיד אֶת הַתְּרִיס וְנָעַל אֶת הַשַּׁעַר
וַאֲנִי חָזַרְתִּי עִם כָּל הַמִּתְפַּלְּלִים הַבַּיְתָה.

"Yom Kippur in the Year of Forgetting" ("*B'Yom Kippur Bishnat Tashkach*"), written in the months immediately following the 1967 War, reminisces, at least in part, about Amichai's own return to the Old City, a piece of Jerusalem newly accessible to Israelis after the conclusion of the war.[48] This additional access included the *Kotel*, the last remaining piece of the ancient Temple and a popular prayer space, as well as the Arab quarter of the Old City. The poem's speaker heads off to the Old City in his festive clothes, though the clothes are also dark and Yom Kippur traditionally calls for all-white attire. Perhaps he is heading to the wall or perhaps the Arab shop is his destination.

[48] Amichai chose to use the Hebrew calendar year (5727- *tav shin kaf chet*) rather than spell out the Gregorian calendar year (1967 – *elef tcha-m'ot shishim v'sheva*). The root for "forget," *shin kaf chet*, present in the Hebrew calendar year, has given translators multiple options for translation.

On Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, the day on which even some secular Jews make their way into a synagogue, the poem's speaker finds himself deep in prayer. Amichai compares the open ark and the open shop directly: "I stood for quite a while in front of the kiosk shop of an Arab...brightly lit and many colored like the open Holy Ark." The narrator standing in front of that shop/ark speaking words in his heart: "I said to him in my heart that my father too/ Owned a shop just like this of buttons and thread. / I explained to him in my heart about all the decades / And the reasons and the events…." He creates a connection with the Arab shopkeeper, a connection drawn up in his heart, from the emotional center of his self, yet he does not speak a single word out loud. If "Eyn Keloheynu" offers contempt for rote prayer, "Yom Kippur in the Year of Forgetting" suggests that true prayer need not be (and perhaps should not be) spoken aloud.

In "Yom Kippur in the Year of Forgetting," I believe Amichai describes a secular version of *yizkor*. *Yizkor* ("may he remember") is a prayer service recited four times a year (on Yom Kippur, Shemini Atzeret, Passover, and Shavuot). It provides mourners with a number of opportunities to remember publically those family members and others who have died. As the poem's speaker "concludes," it is time for the *neilah* service, the final set of prayers on Yom Kippur. Here Amichai plays with the double meaning of *neilah*; the plain Hebrew meaning of the word is "closing time," but in relation to Yom Kippur, it also marks the final moments of the holiday when the metaphor of the closing of the gates of heaven is most prominent. Over and over again the character's actions match those of a Yom Kippur worshipper, culminating in the final lines of the poem as he "returned home with all the worshippers."

The character in the poem finishes his heart-speech just at the time of *neilah*. However long he stood there across from the shop, it was exactly the same amount of time it took others to pray. The poem does not read, "the gates started closing and I wasn't finished yet," nor does it say that he remained after he had finished speaking. In other words, he is in sync with all of the other men and women who had spent the day in prayer. His prayers fit into the Yom Kippur time frame. When he left and joined the other worshippers, having remembered his father in his own private, silent *yizkor* service, he too is a worshipper. The location and content of his prayer cease to matter.

The interplay between remembering and forgetting plays an important role in this poem. The poem's speaker, on the cusp of the "Year of Forgetting," spends Yom Kippur defying that title by actively remembering his father. Various Jewish liturgical pieces (the *yizkor* liturgy mentioned above, along with the mourner's *kaddish*) serve as methods for remembrance, but these prayers rarely speak of remembering or forgetting: most praise God's glory. Unlike "*Eyn Keloheynu*" in which the Jewish people try desperately to gain God's attention via traditional text, here Amichai's character forgoes the liturgy. His prayers come from the heart and speak directly in remembrance, contrasting the title of the poem which calls 5727 the year "of forgetting."

Amichai's description of prayer in "Yom Kippur in the Year of Forgetting" has altered my perspective on how secular prayer can connect to synagogue-based prayer. A reverent man stands on the street before an open Arab shop on Yom Kippur actively remembering his father. Amichai's word choices (the use of *neilah* as a word for closing both of the shop and also the Gates of Heaven) and references (connecting the shop's open doors to those of the ark of the covenant) connect this man's experience to that of the Jewish men

and women who stand as he stands. The difference is that they stand in synagogues before an open ark and recite written prayers of remembrance. In “Yom Kippur in the Year of Forgetting,” Amichai encourages people to consider anew what counts as prayer.

For Amichai, liturgy is separate from prayer as a method for reflection and interaction with the divine. “Yom Kippur in the Year of Forgetting” offers one such example of the way Amichai legitimates non-liturgical prayer. While Ravikovitch does not speak much about prayer in her poetry, she often uses liturgical phrases in her poetry to allude to the greater theme of the liturgical pieces from which she pulls. As in “Delight,” these allusions can lead to prayer experiences themselves.

Section 3: Love
Tragic, All-consuming, Unavoidable

Amichai and Ravikovitch explore love extensively in their poetry.[49] Their respective work speaks to the various love relationships people have: love between fathers and sons, mothers and sons, fathers and daughters, romantic love, unrequited love, the ways love changes over the course of a relationship, etcetera. The narrators within their poetry speak as child and of parent, as lover and as beloved. The poems I chose for this section offer insight into love more generally and contain lessons about love as an entity itself, untethered to a certain type of relationship.

Both poets speak to the role proximity plays in love. In "Love" Ravikovitch tells a tale of two fishes[50] whose love deepens in direct proportion to the literal depths into which the fishes dive. Their closeness to each other and their distance from the rest of the world creates a profound love, so profound and so far away from community that "no mouth was able to speak of the depths of their love." In "Advice for Good Love," Amichai suggests that one finds good love by looking close to home and searching for someone "the way a sensible house will choose local stones / that have frozen in the same cold and baked / in the same scalding sun." This someone has lived through similar joys and pains. Both of these poems tell us that proximity plays an decisive role in love. According to Ravikovitch and Amichai, love requires nearness.

Directionality also plays a role in both Amichai and Ravikovitch's poetic conversations with love. In "The Love of An Orange," Ravikovitch describes the love an orange has for the one who eats it. In doing so, she reverses love's direction (from subject to

[49] Amichai published an entire collection titled *Love Poems: A Bilingual Edition* (1977) and Ravikovitch was "cherished for her love poems." Bloch and Kronfeld, 20.
[50] Pluralizing of fish as "fishes" per Bloch and Kronfeld's translation. *Hovering at a Low Altitude*, 70.

object), offering a look into what love might look like when the object (the orange) becomes the subject. The fishes in “Love” also offer opinions about directionality, for Ravikovitch’s words never clarify whether the love that increases for the two fishes is directed at each other or could perhaps be a deepening of a mutual love for the depths of the sea itself. Amichai’s “Advice for Good Love” speaks also to bad love, warning readers that the recipe for bad love results when people attempt to redirect old love into new relationships.

Overwhelmingly, Ravikovitch and Amichai’s poetry describes love as deeply, unavoidably painful. In the four poems included in this section, love is an all-consuming, tragic project. Love causes people to let down their guard as in Amichai’s “Love Song.” The first half of the poem compares love to the way a person’s shoelaces loosen slowly so that only once they have untied does the person notice. By the end of the poem, the narrator is “full of terrible loves.” Love endangers, as in Ravikovitch’s “The Love of an Orange,” when an orange loves with all its being. It allows and even invites its lover to devour it, which is the end of the orange.

Neither Amichai nor Ravikovitch present the utter tragedy of love apologetically or even particularly emotionally. The way pain intertwines thickly with love seems to be a matter-of-fact component of Amichai and Ravikovitch’s understanding of the values, experiences and benefit of loving.

The Love of an Orange (1959)
Dahlia Ravikovitch

תַּפּוּחַ זָהָב
אָהַב אֶת אוֹכְלֵהוּ,
טוּבוּ מַרְאָיו
לְמַאֲכָלֵהוּ,
שָׁם אֶל לִבּוֹ
כִּי הוּא הָרוֹאֵהוּ.

אֶתְרוֹג בּוֹ יִרְהַב:
חָכַמְתִּי מִמֶּנּוּ,
אִילָן הִתְעַצֵּב:
יָמוּת וְאֵינֶנּוּ.
פִּקַּח נָחָשַׁב,
מִי יְשִׁיבֶנּוּ?

אֶתְרוֹג בּוֹ סָרְהַב:
הִבּוֹנָה הַפֶּתִי!
אִילָן הִתְקַצֵּף:
סָרָה הִיא וְחַטָּא הִיא,
חֲזוֹר בָּהּ הֵיטֵב
כִּי כֶסֶל שָׂנֵאתִי.

תַּפּוּחַ זָהָב
אָהַב אֶת אוֹכְלֵהוּ,
אָהַב אֶת מַכֵּהוּ
בְּכָל אֲבָרָיו.

תַּפּוּחַ זָהָב
אָהַב אֶת אוֹכְלֵהוּ,
הָלַךְ אֶל מַכֵּהוּ
בָּרוֹת לְשִׁנָּיו

תַּפּוּחַ זָהָב
נִבְלַע בְּאוֹכְלֵהוּ,
בָּא בְּעוֹרֵהוּ,
אַף בִּבְשָׂרָיו.

An orange did love
The man who ate it.
A feast for the eyes
Is a fine repast;
Its heart held fast
His greedy gaze.

A citron did scold:
I am wiser than thou.
A cedar condoled:
Indeed thou shalt die!
And who can revive
A withered bough?

The citron did urge:
O fool, be wise.
The cedar did rage:
Slander and sin!
Repent of thy ways
For a fool I despise.

An orange did love
With life and limb
The man who ate it,
The man who flayed it.

An orange did love
The man who ate it,
To its flayer it brought
Flesh for the teeth.

An orange, consumed
By the man who ate it,
Invaded his skin
To the flesh beneath.

Structurally, Hebrew readers immediately notice the concise, tight, rhyming in "The Love of an Orange" ("*Ahavat Tapuach Hazahav*"). Ravikovitch uses just a few carefully

chosen words to convey a great deal of content. The words in the original Hebrew follow a distinct rhyming pattern: Stanza 1: ABABCB, Stanza 2: ABABAB, Stanza 3: ADADAD, Stanza 4: ABBA, Stanza 5: ABBA, Stanza 6: ABBA. Each stanza feels almost like its own individual section of orange. In the same way orange sections, full of juicy pulp, are held together by tightly stretched membranes, so too Ravikovitch crafts a poem that bursts at its tightly controlled seams.

The title of Ravikovitch's "The Love of an Orange" was inspired by Sergei Prokofiev's opera, "The Love for Three Oranges."[51] In the poem, Ravikovitch brings components of the opera into conversation with the topic of love. The entire thrust of the poem plays with the dual directionality of the word "of." "Des" in the French title of the opera, "L'amour **des** trois oranges," can be translated as "of" or "for." Ravikovitch uses this ambiguity to imagine what it might mean for an orange to be the subject of love (the lover) rather than the object. The oranges in the opera contain fairy princesses; one could see this directional reorientation as an opportunity for the woman (the orange princess) to be the subject (the lover) rather than the object (the one who is loved). "The Love of an Orange" flips the idea of lover as subject (i.e., the actor or active partner) and beloved as object (i.e., the grammatically passive partner). Ravikovitch's subject, the orange, actively loves the one who eats it, but the object of the orange's affection also acts and his actions destroy the orange.

Ravikovitch's reassignment of roles presents love as a desire to be consumed. The orange's love for its eater allows it to be eaten which, in essence, kills it. The citron (in

[51] Bloch and Kronfeld, *Hovering at a Low Altitude*, 49.

Hebrew, *etrog*) and the cedar come to judge this type of love.[52] Bloch and Kronfeld compare them to Job's friends, who call on him in his darkest hour to "be a comfort to him"[53] but whose words do the opposite, condemning Job as "a sinner, deserving of his punishment."[54] The citron and cedar's words similarly challenge the orange's love for the one who will eat it. The citron argues, "I am wiser than thou…be wise!" The citron does not explain in what way it is wiser than the orange or how the orange might become wiser. One hypothesis is that the citron's judgment is based on the orange's status as a positively edible versus the citron's (*etrog's*) status as a Jewish ritual object.[55] According to this reading, the citron disapproves of the way the orange's love makes it willing to be temporal and urges it to make itself less willing - and less edible. The cedar's words, "Indeed thou shalt die," explicitly name the danger of the orange's love: this love results in death, for the one who the orange loves "with life and limb" will inevitably "flay" the orange.

The conclusion of the poem describes action on the lover's part that the rest of the poem omits. While most of the poem describes the orange as loving, readers do not see the actions the orange takes in its love. Rather, the poem expounds upon the destructive ways in which the orange's beloved acts toward it. The final two lines present the orange's own action: "An orange, consumed / By the man who ate it, / Invaded his skin / To the flesh beneath." After the orange ceases to exist in orange form, it becomes – as all food does – part of the person who eats it, forever tied to its beloved.

---

[52] Recall the parable of the trees in Judges 9:8-15 and the conversation between the thistle and the cedar in 2 Kings 14:9. See Bloch and Kronfeld, 49. These are the same trees Amichai alludes to in "And This is Your Glory," which I discuss on page 28.
[53] Job 2:11
[54] Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1500.
[55] While I recognize that in recent years, Israeli cuisine has begun to play with *etrog* as an ingredient, I also believe that its extreme sourness and status as a symbol for use during Sukkot has prevented it from becoming a mainstream food item in a way similar to an orange.

For me, this poem describes a love that is complete (“an orange did love / with life and limb”), self-destructive (“the man who ate it / the man who flayed it”), and mostly one-sided. The man who loves the orange in return remains silent though also determined and desirous (“A feast for the eyes / Is a fine repast”). After being eaten, the orange does, in fact, become one with the man who eats it, which changes the relationship. I understand “The Love of An Orange” as both cautionary and instructive in regards to love. Ravikovitch makes one thing clear: love consumes. It is up to readers to determine whether they are willing to fall in love and be consumed.

Love (1959)
By: Dahlia Ravikovich

Two fishes hurried
down to the depths of the sea
to tell, each to the other
how great was their love.

Two fishes dove
and tarried in the depths of the sea
and the more they distanced themselves
the greater grew their love.

And they never returned to the surface
these deep sea lovers.
No mouth was able to speak
of the greatness of their love.

שְׁנֵי דָגִים נֶחְפְּזוּ,
וְיָרְדוּ לִמְצוּלוֹת הַיָּם
לְסַפֵּר אִישׁ לְרֵעוּתוֹ
מַה גְּדָלָה אַהֲבָתָם.

שְׁנֵי דָגִים צָלְלוּ
וְשָׁהוּ בִּמְצוּלוֹת הַיָּם
וּכְכָל שֶׁהִרְחִיקוּ הָלוֹךְ
כֵּן גָּדְלָה אַהֲבָתָם.

וְלֹא עוֹד עָלוּ אֶל הַחוֹף
אוֹהֲבֵי־מְצוּלוֹת־הַיָּם.
יֶלֶא הַפֶּה מְסַפֵּר
מַה גְּדָלָה אַהֲבָתָם.

"Love" ("*Ahava*") tells a tale of two fishes, whose love leads them deep into the ocean, never again to return to the surface (Figure 11). The further into the depths they dive the more their love grows and the harder it becomes for them to tell their story, until finally they travel so far that no one can tell their tale: "No mouth was able to speak / of the greatness of their love." Isolation

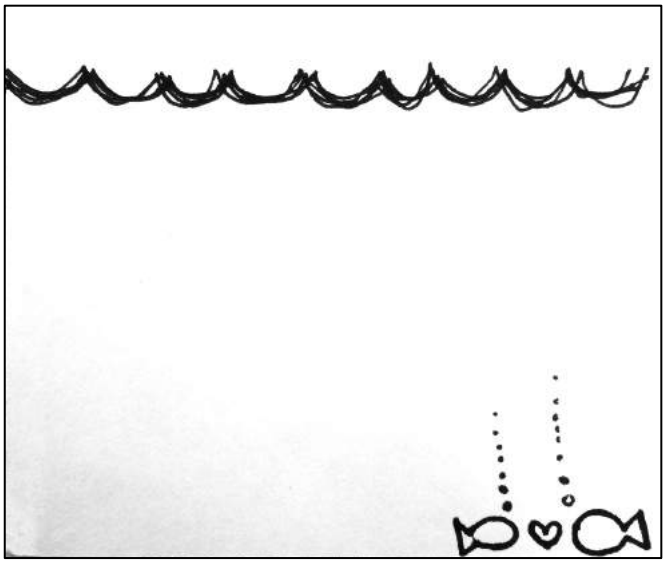


Figure 11

and the act of distancing permeate this poem.

The focus on depth throughout the poem could suggest a number of messages. First, the ever-increasing depth results in ever-increasing love, which suggests that the fishes' love is at its strongest in this deep, removed place. In the second stanza, the two have reached the depths and they "dally" or tarry; they intentionally remain deep below the surface. The word *hirchiku*, which I translate as "they distanced themselves," from the Hebrew root *resh-chet-kuf*, meaning "far away," highlights one consequence of this purposeful delay. The act of tarrying in the depths distances the lovers from life outside of each other.

Second, the way in which depth connotes distance from the surface calls attention not only to the physical distinction but also the metaphorical differentiation between surface and depth. The surface level is "the external or superficial aspect of something."[56] People seeking understanding often endeavor to go deeper in order to find more complex truths that exist beneath that superficiality. Love, too can be experienced on both surface and deep levels. In "Love," the fishes prefer and grow in choosing depth.

I pictured this idea in two different ways. Either the fishes escape a sort of cookie-cutter surface-level love by diving into the depths together, creating and building up on their own more complex love (Figure 12). Or perhaps the fishes dive together in a mutual love for a third object, that is, the sea itself (or a concept they study together). Having plumbed the depths of that love, they move so far beyond surface level understanding that they become unable to articulate their findings to the world above.

[56] Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition of surface. (Accessed January 15th, 2016) http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/surface

They become untranslatable (Figure 13) and disappear from any communal conversations about their discoveries in the deep. This depiction of disappearance into love might thrill lovers, but it is a loss to those who knew them prior to their diving adventures.

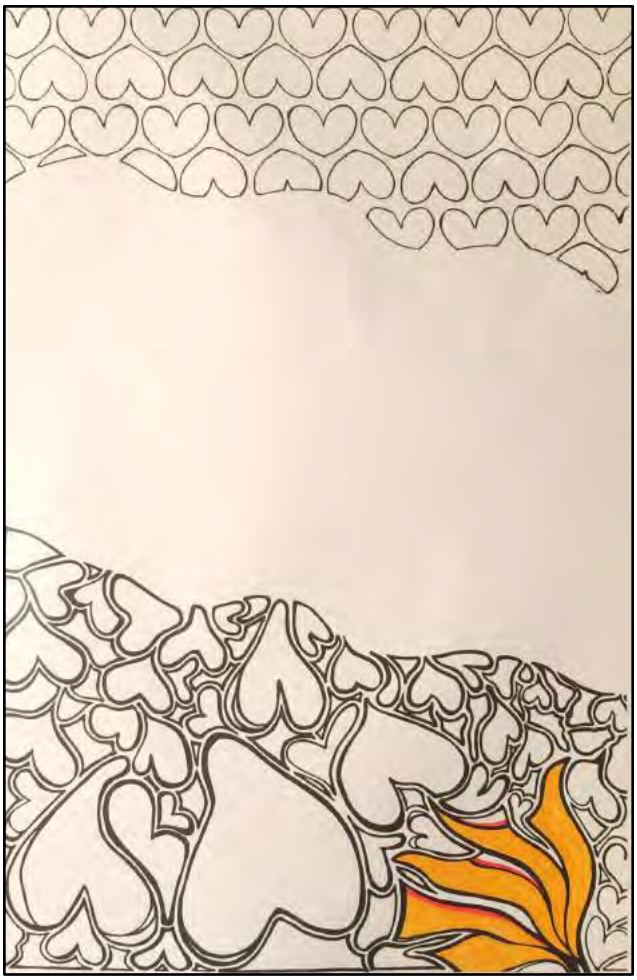


Figure 12

The deceptive simplicity of "Love" and the use of two fishes as the subject rather than humans allow readers to find entirely different meanings based on their own experience in love. One may come away with the message that true love can only exist in a bubble, far away from the surface. In such a reading, love looks like a bond between two creatures whose strength provides all the sustenance needed so that "real" lovers need no one but each other.

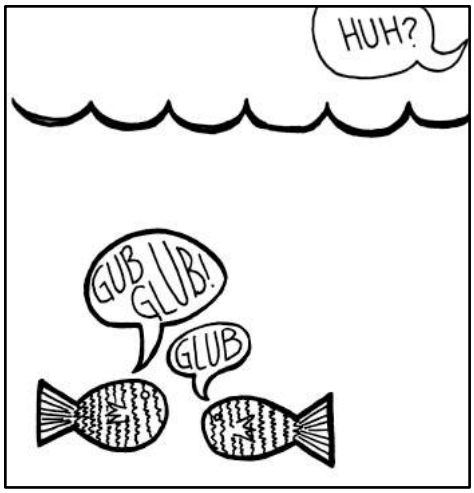


Figure 13

I am inclined, based on Ravikovitch's tendency toward the melancholy, to read the message in a more frank and negative tone. With too much distance, lovers risk loss of self. Those who fall too deep in love lose the ability, or perhaps the desire, to resurface. They disappear from the world, for "No mouth was able to speak / of the

greatness of their love." They remain unknown and anonymous because they have chosen to remove themselves from their world. This privacy and distance from the world may be the goal of many lovers. After all, lovers in love share many private moments not for public consumption. Perhaps two fishes' love is none of the world's business. That being said, as a person who believes strongly in the power of community, I am saddened by the poem's description of complete isolation and I wonder if the gain offered by deep love outweighs the loss of community. In "Love Song," Yehuda Amichai also speaks to the dangers of love.

Love Song (1976)
By: Yehuda Amichai

This is how it started: suddenly it felt
loose and light and happy inside,
like when you feel your shoelaces
loosening a bit
and you bend down.

Then came other days.

And now I'm like a Trojan horse
Filled with terrible loves.
Every night they break out and run wild
and at dawn they come back
into my dark belly.

זֶה הִתְחִיל כָּךְ: בַּלֵּב פִּתְאוֹם
נַעֲשָׂה רָפֶה וְקַל וּמְאֻשָּׁר, כְּמוֹ
כְּשֶׁאָדָם חָשׁ שְׁשׂרוֹךְ נַעֲלוֹ נִפְתָּח קְצָת,
וּמִתְכּוֹפֵף.

אַחַר־כָּךְ בָּאוּ יָמִים אֲחֵרִים.

וְעַכְשָׁו אֲנִי כְּמוֹ סוּס טְרוֹיָנִי
שֶׁל אַהֲבוֹת נוֹרָאוֹת,
כָּל לַיְלָה הֵן יוֹצְאוֹת וּמִשְׁתּוֹלְלוֹת,
וּבַשַּׁחַר חוֹזְרוֹת לְתוֹךְ הַבֶּטֶן הָאֲפֵלָה.

"Love Song" ("*Shir Ahava*"), marks the ways in which love changes over time. The first half of the poem describes the way love starts: "suddenly it felt / loose and light and happy inside / like when you feel your shoelaces / loosening a bit / and you bend down." Love begins as a sudden, surprising positive feeling like the unexpected loosening --- but not untying --- of shoelaces (Figure 14). This simile suggests that love is an interruption in which a necessary refocusing may be required. When one notices the loosened shoelace, the foot feels freer and not as constrained. One bends down to keep it from unraveling, which would make that liberation dangerous and slippery. Movement stops as the wearer bends to retie. Love stops in its

Figure 14

ability to liven and lighten a journey. Not bending down could imply a retying of the shoe, which suggests that love can be avoided if it is recognized soon enough.

The last word of the first stanza *mitkofef,* "and you bend down," comes from a root which alludes to bending and straightening and it carries it the meaning not only of "to bend down" but also "to surrender." Falling in love is also a surrender of self; one gives oneself over to the happy feelings. A person in the early stages of love feels one's heartstrings loosening and goes to retie them like one would shoelaces. Surrender requires acknowledgement of the "loose, light happy" feelings that causes the pause in movement and the shift in focus toward retying.

An ominous one-liner splits the poem directly in half: "Then came other days," after which the poem catapults the reader from a place of "loose and light and happy" into a place of darkness: "And now I'm like a Trojan horse / Filled with terrible loves. / Every night they break out and run wild / and at dawn they come back/ into my dark belly." In the second half of the poem, the nature of love has changed. It has multiplied and become "terrible" and unruly.

The poem's speaker describes himself as a Trojan horse and in doing so becomes both the betrayer and the betrayed. On the one hand, he has himself become the Trojan horse, that mythological vehicle for betrayal. On the other hand, he has been betrayed by seemingly "loose, light happy" love which bursts from him unwarranted and which he cannot control (Figure 15). Love permeated this

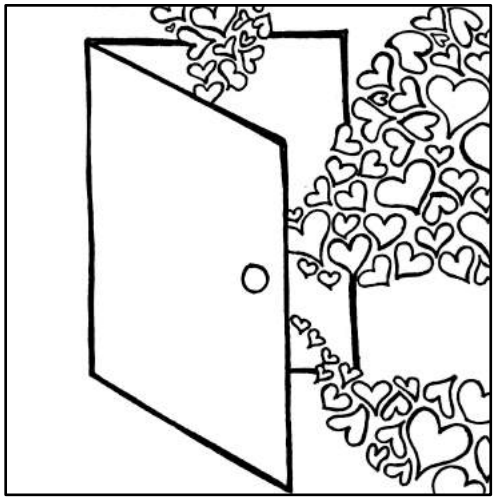


Figure 15

person's interior. In the first stanza's "sudden opening," he/she let in love and that love has now multiplied and turned on him/her, transforming him/her into a vessel or a a holding tank for "terrible loves." I am reminded of Pandora's box, another mythological container that hides enemies and destruction. The Trojan horse represents the unintended consequences of opening a vessel whose contents one cannot anticipate.

When read through the lens of Amichai as an "extravagantly playful poet"[57] with a penchant for erotic imagery,[58] this poem can also be read as a tale of lovemaking. According to this reading, love begins innocently and almost accidentally but ends up taking over the narrator's "dark belly" and runs rampant every night. The second half of the poem could be a nod to the insatiable nature of love at night, almost as if to say, "I can't help it, it's the 'terrible loves' inside my belly." Amichai could be playing on the double meaning of *noraot* ("terrible") here. While the word most commonly translates to "terrible" or "awful," it can also be translated, usually when talking about God, as "awesome" or "awe-filled," as in the *Yamim Nora'im*, the Days of Awe. In this alternative, sexualized reading, the narrator discovers lovemaking in the first half of the poem and then in the second half, lovemaking takes over his nighttime hours. The "terrible" --- or "awesome" --- loves only come out at night, returning to the darkness of the narrator's belly during the waking hours.

The contrast between light and dark (in the beginning, love is "loose and light and happy," by the end it dwells in darkness) could suggest a value judgment: love (or lovemaking)'s beginnings are pleasant but then they turn dangerous. However, dark does not

[57] Alter, xxiii.
[58] Adam Kirsch argues, "Various love affairs, and the different stages of those affairs, are reflected in poem after poem, but always with a frank emphasis on the bodily and the physical, and with an undisguised joy in sexuality." – Adam Kirsch, "Amichai: The Tolerant Irony of Israel's National Poet" *Tablet*, December 21, 2015, accessed January 8, 2016, http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/books/195955/amichai-israels-national-poet

always connote evil or danger. Most basically, dark is the lack of light. Light offers a different kind of discomfort – people do not always want to see or come to terms with that which is visible in the light of day.

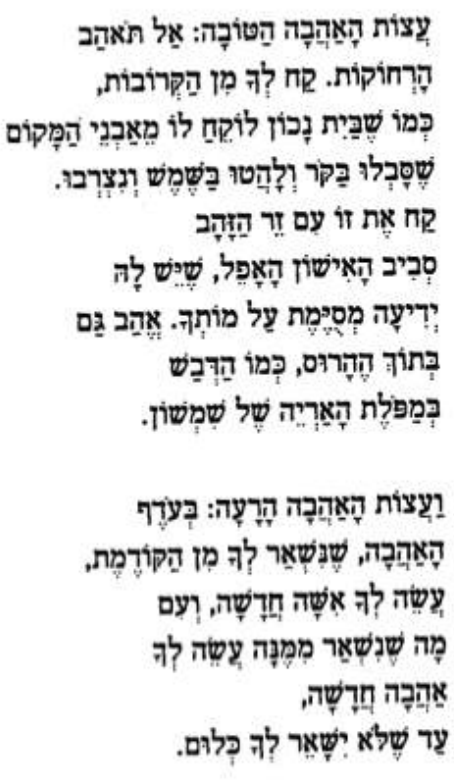
The beginning of Amichai's "Love Song" describes love as unexpected and pleasant. The conclusion of the poem describes love as chaotic and overwhelming. Amichai offers no further stanzas in which love might settle down or become something else. This poem stops short of offering an image of the end of love. Read in one way, the poem offers warning: love cannot be controlled. It is deceptively scary and destructive. Read another way, the poem suggests the same uncontrollability without the dangerous connotation: love cannot be controlled. It has a mind of its own and prefers to explore dark spaces. I am left wondering whether all love eventually becomes "terrible," or whether the overarching message is one of surrender: love cannot be controlled --- brace yourself.

Advice for Good Love (1978)
Yehuda Amichai

Advice for good love: don't love a woman
from far away. Choose one from nearby
the way a sensible house will choose local stones
that have frozen in the same cold and baked
in the same scalding sun.

Take the one with the golden wreath around
the dark pupil of her eye, she has some
knowledge about your death. And love her also
in the midst of ruin
the way Samson took honey from the lion's carcass.

And advice for bad love: with the love
left over from the one before
make a new woman for yourself, and then with
what's left of her
make yourself a new love,
and go on that way
till in the end you are left with
nothing at all.


עֲצוֹת הָאַהֲבָה הַטּוֹבָה: אַל תֹּאהַב
הָרְחוֹקוֹת. קַח לְךָ מִן הַקְּרוֹבוֹת,
כְּמוֹ שֶׁבַּיִת נָכוֹן לוֹקֵחַ לוֹ מֵאֲבְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם
שֶׁסָּבְלוּ בַּקֹּר וְלָהֲטוּ בַּשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְנִצְרְבוּ.
קַח אֶת זוֹ עִם זֵר הַזָּהָב
סְבִיב הָאִישׁוֹן הָאָפֵל, שֶׁיֵּשׁ לָהּ
יְדִיעָה מְסֻיֶּמֶת עַל מוֹתְךָ. אֱהַב גַּם
בְּתוֹךְ הֶהָרוֹס, כְּמוֹ הַדְּבַשׁ
בְּמַפֶּלֶת הָאַרְיֵה שֶׁל שִׁמְשׁוֹן.

וַעֲצוֹת הָאַהֲבָה הָרָעָה: בְּעֹדֶף
הָאַהֲבָה, שֶׁנִּשְׁאַר לְךָ מִן הַקּוֹדֶמֶת,
עֲשֵׂה לְךָ אִשָּׁה חֲדָשָׁה, וְעִם
מָה שֶׁנִּשְׁאַר מִמֶּנָּה עֲשֵׂה לְךָ
אַהֲבָה חֲדָשָׁה,
עַד שֶׁלֹּא יִשָּׁאֵר לְךָ כְּלוּם.

The beginning of "Advice for Good Love" ("*Atzot Haahavah Hatova*") speaks to the role proximity plays in love. Good love, Amichai says, is found when one searches "the way a sensible house will choose local stones / that have frozen in the same cold and baked / in the same scalding sun." In other words, people find good love amidst those who have been through similar ups and downs and who come from within their cultural milieu.

In the second stanza, Amichai charges readers to "love her in the midst of ruin/ the way Samson took honey from the lion's carcass." Sweetness --- and reward --- come from hard, arduous and dangerous encounters. This reference to Samson comes from Judges 14, in which Samson kills a lion and later finds honeycomb within its carcass. He then presents a riddle to the Philistines: "Mehaochel yatza maachal, u'meaz yatza matok - from the eater

came forth food and from strength came forth sweetness." The riddle parallels Samson's experience: from the eater (the lion) came forth food (honey). In modern Hebrew parlance, the phrase "meaz yatza matok," "from strength comes sweetness" has become an idiom to remind people that good can come out of bad and that people must not write off negative experiences, for somewhere within each, there lies a honeycomb.[59] Amichai makes the same case in "Advice for Good Love" when he charges the reader to love her "in the midst of ruin" (Figure 16). Good love can be found even within the worst of places.

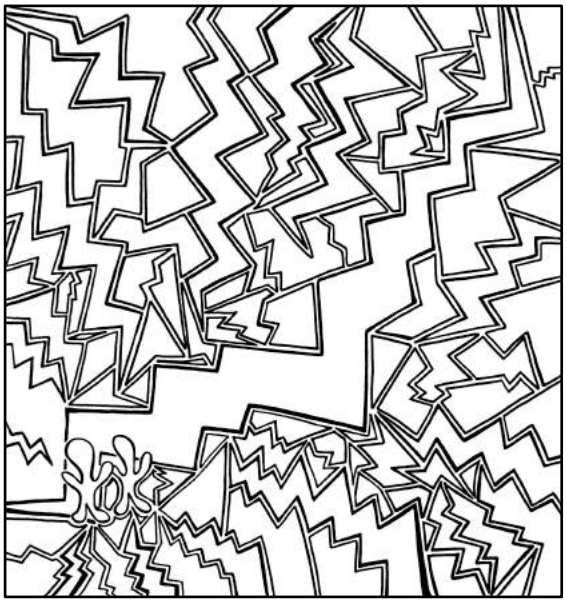


Figure 16

In the third stanza, Amichai offers a different type of advice, advice for bad love. According to Amichai, bad love occurs when people reuse leftover love to create their new loves. The idea of "leftover love" gives me an image of love as a finite substance, something that can be measured and weighed, and eventually, according to Amichai, used up. The poem asserts that using leftover love leads to bad love, that when one integrates love from past relationships into new relationships, the results are negative.

"Advice for Good Love" does not actually define "bad love" or "good love," but rather explains how to find it. Yet readers may glean some components of each via the given advice. The poem suggests that good love is resilient, in that it can be found "in the midst of ruin" and based on a mutual understanding of the other person's world, in that it exists between people who exist "nearby" each other. Bad love, on the other hand, is misplaced and

[59] Dr. William Cutter, one-on-one conversation, December 18, 2015.

thus harmful, as it involves reusing love from another relationship, over and over again until there is no more love. Moreover, in differentiating between good and bad love, Amichai suggests that there are clear definable lines between good love and bad love and that one can avoid bad love and specifically seek out good love if one takes the advice this poem presents.

Ravikovitch's love poems teach that love consumes ("The Love of an Orange") and isolates ("Love). Amichai's poems teach that love has the capacity to be good or bad ("Advice for Good Love"). Both teach that the feelings associated with being in love changes significantly over time (in "Love," it grows ever greater and in "Love Song" it becomes perhaps more dangerous and at least less controllable). Despite the potential for pitfalls and the inherent dangers love presents, neither poet wishes to caution people away from love. Rather, their poems state unavoidable facts. "Given that people love," they seem to say, "here are some truths: 1) love can grow and deepen forever. Consequentially, love between two people results in isolation. 2) To love with all one's being is to be devoured by that love. 3) People have a say in the type of love they choose to engage with. 4) Love transforms over time into something far less controllable. I appreciate the frankness with which Amichai and Ravikovitch express painful realities of love without suggesting that love should not be sought. Their words give expression to the difficulties love presents, difficulties people may well need help expressing.

Conclusion

So many factors come together in the analysis of a poem. In addition to the plain sense of the words, one must take into account the poet's background and the way it informs his/her work, the message he/she intends to convey through his/her words, the way the poem is structured, and the layers brought into the narrative by the way words or phrases reference stories, events, or other pieces of literature. The reading of the poem only adds to this list, for each reader brings his/her own life experiences, connections to specific words, and prior knowledge (or ignorance) of the poem's topic.

Each of these perspectives offers the reader a different message and each reader has the opportunity to find his/her own ultimate meaning in the poem. In my work in Reform congregations, I have used the poem as a prayer tool on three different occasions, each time offering congregants the opportunity to explore a different way in which "Love" can enhance or challenge prayers that speak to the love between God and Israel. [60] And each time, the group pointed out something new, offered an insight I would never have discovered on my own.

That these poems are written in Hebrew only increases my opportunity to interpret them anew. In its ability to conflate biblical and liturgical texts with contemporary language, Hebrew brings sacred text into conversation with today's messy modern world and forces readers to grapple with both, each in light of the other. When Amichai and Ravikovitch reference, allude to, or challenge sacred texts, they encourage us to do the same, to breathe new life and new challenge into these ancient texts. Rather than separating sacred and

[60] I find this case to be particularly true with in Ahavah Raba and V'ahavta, both of which are connected to the central prayer expressing Israel's love for God.

secular, these poems intermingle the sacred with the secular and invite them to converse with each other.

In a world that so often requires people to choose yes or no, poetry offers an alternative. Poetry's polyphonic nature embraces and even demands multiple interpretations. Poetry encourages people to allow for and accept the possibility of multiple right answers. It gives people permission to explore the various ways in which an idea may or may not manifest itself in their world. Poetry offers suggestions, ways to express the inexpressible and ask the unaskable. It challenges the unchallengable while allowing the possibility that in the end, many correct understandings can coexist together. In other words, poetry matters.

In Ravikovitch's poetry, God comforts. Her poems offer images of God as the one to which all souls connect. God bears witness to those souls not only during life but also at the moment of death. For Ravikovitch, God acts as the ultimate non-anxious presence. Bringing Amichai into conversation with Ravikovitch provides nuance to that image: God comforts…as long as one can find God! In Amichai's poetry, mysteriousness colors people's relationship with the divine. God hides in various ways and the characters in Amichai's poems constantly search and seek out God: surprisingly, they find God in places not often considered sacred. People do interact with God in Amichai's poetry but his poems describe a lack of divine comfort.

I appreciate the contrasts between Amichai and Ravikovitch's varying understandings of God. She gives me permission to seek comfort from God in a realistic way, while he forces me not to place blind faith in God's ability or willingness to comfort. These poems suggest a God who cares, remains connected to each soul, and yet cannot always respond

when people cry out "*Ayeka*, where are you?" For God must also spend a great deal of time "on his back under the world."[61]

Prayer serves as the main main way people cry out to God and is an experience that Amichai and Ravikovitch disconnect from traditional, rabbinic liturgy. Instead, they utilize liturgical phrases to force to review the intentions of prayer. Ravikovitch's poetry does not explicitly connect with described moments of prayer. Amichai brings liturgy into conversation in order to challenge and criticize it.

Despite the secular nature of the poets' lives and poetry, both Amichai and Ravikovitch describe the act of prayer itself as a positive interaction between God and people. For Ravikovitch, this interaction takes place deep in the heart of nature, surrounded by beauty and sunlight, and requires those who pray to drink deeply of their environment and find joy. Amichai too offers an image of prayer outside of the synagogue as effective and meaningful.

Having spent the last six years studying liturgy, prayer rubrics, and various prayer books, I am simultaneously freed and stymied by these assertions that prayer need not include any set words, order, or particular location. In fact, I am in the business of leading prayer that often uses set words, recited each week in the same order in the same location. These poems challenge me to acknowledge those wordless moments of prayer that transcend space and repetition.

The nature of love often leaves people wordless and unable to describe the various ways in which love manifests itself. Amichai and Ravikovitch's love poems do not offer rosy-colored images of easy, simple love. Rather, they deal with love's hard truths: it hurts, it creates distance, it changes people. And yet despite it all, love is the greatest gift for which

[61] Amichai, "And this is Your Glory," *A Life of Poetry*, 32.

one longs. Another way to understand the all-consuming and isolating nature of love is as an escape from an existential loneliness of being. When the orange, having been eaten by the man, becomes part of him, it never again will be alone. As the fishes dive deeper and deeper away from the rest of the world, they are brought closer and closer together in their ever-increasing love.

This desire to be in relationship, to win out against loneliness, permeates all three topics I focused on in this project. Both poets grapple with the relationship between God and people. This intense desire to avoid loneliness makes Amichai's portrayal of God as unresponsive to those who pray in "*Eyn Keloheynu*" all the more heartbreaking. If people cannot count on God to respond, they cannot be sure God is truly present. Ravikovitch responds to Amichai's challenge in her description of God in "The End of the Fall," in which God's caring presence in the moment of death reassures people that in those most vulnerable moment just after death no one is alone.

These poems teach me that proximity enhances relationships. Nearness really does strengthen connections both between God and people and among people. In "And This is Your Glory" Amichai suggests that people look for God in the light of the refrigerator, and in his "Advice for Good Love," he advises that good love is found close to home. Ravikovitch contrasts proximity and distance in both "Requiem after Seventeen Years" and "Love" by highlighting the ways in which nearness and distance effect those in relationship and those outside of that relationship. The unused ladder in "Requiem" reminds us how difficult it can be to bridge the gap between two distant points.

On a last note, I feel empowered by the frank way in which Amichai and Ravikovitch grapple with God, prayer and love. Neither poet gives up or writes apathetically. While they

challenge the way in which God is or is not present, argue against prayer, and caution readers about the dangers of love, both poets take each topic, raise it up, and offer something hard and meaningful. This is perhaps the greatest lesson I have learned through my study of poetry: one must commit to grappling with hard, amorphous topics, and to acknowledge their multiplicity without using that multiplicity as a reason to avoid offering real conclusions about them.

Bibliography

Abramson, Glenda. *The Writing of Yehuda Amichai: A Thematic Approach.* New York: State University of New York Press, 1989.

Alter, Robert. Introduction to *The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai,* Edited by Robert Alter. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015.

Amichai, Yehuda. *Shirei Yehuda Amichai, Volumes 1-5.* Tel Aviv: Schocken Publishing House, 2002.

Amichai, Yehuda. *Open Closed Open,* trans. Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld. Orlando: Harcourt, 2000.

Amichai, Yehuda. *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai,* trans. Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell. Oakland: University of California Press, 1996.

Amichai, Yehuda. *Yehuda Amichai: A Life of Poetry 1948-1994,* trans. Benjamin and Barbara Harshav. New York: HarperCollins, 1994.

Berlin, Adele, and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. *The Jewish Study Bible.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

"Cicada 2016: Control of Periodical Cicada Insect." *The Gardner's Network.* Accessed November 15, 2015. http://www.gardenersnet.com/atoz/cicada.htm

The Complete Artscroll Siddur: *Nusach Ashkenaz.* Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1990.

Frishman, Elyse, ed. *Mishkan T'filah*. New York: CCAR Press, 2007.

Hendel, Ronald. "The Nephilim were on the Earth: Genesis 6:1-4 and its Ancient Near Eastern Context," in *The Fall of the Angels,* eds. Cristoph Auffarth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Hoffman, Lawrence ed. *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries, Volume 10: Shabbat Morning*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2011.

Kirsch, Adam. "Amichai: The Tolerant Irony of Israel's National Poet" *Tablet*, December 21, 2015, accessed January 8, 2016, http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/books/195955/amichai-israels-national-poet

Levy, Richard, ed. *On Wings of Awe: A Fully Transliterated Machzor for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur*. Jersey City: KTAV Publishing House, 2011.

Ravikovitch, Dahlia. *Hovering at a Low Altitude: The Collected Poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch.* Translated by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009.

Ravikovitch, Dahlia. *Kol HaShirim.* Israel: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2010.

Szobel, Ilana. *A Poetics of Trauma: The Work of Dahlia Ravikovitch.* Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2013.

Wood, James. "Like a Prayer: The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai," *The New Yorker*, January 4, 2016, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/01/04/like-a-prayer.

Appendix A: Poems
Listed in order of appearance

"The Central Pillar" ("*Amud HaTichon*")
The Love of an Orange, 1959
Poet: Dahlia Ravikovitch
Translation: Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld
Hebrew: *Kol HaShirim, 13.*
English: *Hovering at a Low Altitude, 51.*

"The End of the Fall" ("*Sof HaNefilah*")
The Third Book, 1969
Poet: Dahlia Ravikovitch
Translation: Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld
Hebrew: *Kol HaShirim,* 99.
English: *Hovering at a Low Altitude,* 119.

"And this is Your Glory" ("*V'hi Tehilatecha*")
Two Hopes Away, 1960
Poet: Yehuda Amichai
Translation: Benjamin and Barbara Harshav
Hebrew: *Shirei Yehuda Amichai, Vol. 1,* 88.
English: *Yehuda Amichai: A Life of Poetry,* 32.

"Oh the Names of God" ("*Ho Shemot HaElohim*")
Poem #16, "Names Names, in Other Days and in Our Time," *Open Closed Open,* 1998
Poet: Yehuda Amichai
Translation: Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld
Hebrew: *Shirei Yehuda Amichai, Vol. 5,* 274.
English: *The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai,* 499.

"Requiem after Seventeen Years" ("*T'filat Ashkavah L'achar Sh'va-esrei Shana*")
Hard Winter, 1964
Poet: Dahlia Ravikovitch
Translation: Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld
Hebrew: *Kol HaShirim,* 58.
English: *Hovering at a Low Altitude,* 89.

"Delight" ("Chemda")
The Love of an Orange, 1959
Poet: Dahlia Ravikovitch
Translation: Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld
Hebrew: *Kol HaShirim,* 35.
English: *Hovering at a Low Altitude,* 69.

"Eyn keloheynu"
Poem #11, "Gods Change, Prayers are Here to Stay," *Open Closed Open*, 1998
Poet: Yehuda Amichai
Translation: Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld
Hebrew: *Shirei Yehuda Amichai, Vol. 5,* 151.
English: *The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai,* 412.

"Yom Kippur in the Year of Forgetting" (*"B'Yom Kippur Bishnat Tashkach")*
Poem #5 in "Poems of Jerusalem" in *Now in the Din Before the Silence*, 1967
Poet: Yehuda Amichai
Translation: Benjamin and Barbara Harshav
Hebrew: *Shirei Yehuda Amichai, Vol. 2,* 13.
English: *Yehuda Amichai: A Life of Poetry*, 81.

"The Love of An Orange" (*"Ahavat Tapuach HaZahav"*)
The Love of an Orange, 1959
Poet: Dahlia Ravikovitch
Translation: Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld
Hebrew: *Kol HaShirim,* 11.
English: *Hovering at a Low Altitude,* 49.

"Love" (*"Ahava"*)
The Love of an Orange, 1959
Poet: Dahlia Ravikovitch
Translation: Dusty Klass
Hebrew: *Kol HaShirim,* 37.
English: Kronfeld and Bloch translation can be found in *Hovering at a Low Altitude,* 70.

"Love Song" (*"Shir Ahava"*)
Behind All This a Great Happiness is Hiding, 1976
Poet: Yehuda Amichai
Translation: Chana Bloch
Hebrew: *Shirei Yehuda Amichai, Vol. 3,* 59.
English: *The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai,* 216.

"Advice for Good Love" (*"Atzot HaAhava HaTova"*)
Poem #12 in *Time*, 1978
Poet: Yehuda Amichai
Translation: Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell
Hebrew: *Shirei Yehuda Amichai, Vol. 3,* 194.
English: *The Selected Poetry Of Yehuda Amichai,* 119-120.

Appendix B: Art
Listed in connection to the poem they illustrate or interpret

"The Central Pillar" ("*Amud HaTichon*")

Figure 1: Page 15
Figure 2: Page 17

"The End of the Fall" ("*Sof HaNefilah*")

Figure 3: Page 23
Figure 4: Page 23

"And This is Your Glory" ("*V'hi Tehilatecha*")

Figure 5: Page 28

"Oh the Names of God" ("*Ho Shemot HaElohim*")

Figure 6: Page 32
Figure 7: Page 32

"Requiem after Seventeen Years" ("*T'filat Ashkavah L'achar Sh'va-esrei Shana*")

Figure 8: Page 37

"Delight" ("Chemda")

Figure 9: Page 41

"Eyn keloheynu"

Figure 10: Page 49

"Love" ("*Ahava*")

Figure 11: Page 57
Figure 12: Page 59
Figure 13: Page 59

"Love Song" ("*Shir Ahava*")

Figure 14: 61
Figure 15: 62

"Advice for Good Love" ("*Atzot HaAhava HaTova*")

Figure 16: 66