

Texts of the Winning Poems and Honourable Mentions, Reuben Rose Competition 2011

First Prize – “Pardes” by Yakov Azriel

*Despite the winter's cold, do you believe?
Despite the blizzard winds, the hail, the sleet,
The snow, do you believe that summer's heat
Can melt the stubborn icicles which cleave*
 *To us like mourners' tears when mourners grieve?
Despite the growing numbness in our feet,
Do you believe the winter may retreat
If summer comes and grants us a reprieve?*
Although our eyes are scratched by ice, we see
The scrolls that Moses wrote, which stand like trees
Inside a verdant orchard spring conceives,
 Untouched by autumn's chill. Each leafy tree
 Bears fruit, to which we crawl on hands and knees,
 For anyone who eats their fruit — believes.

II

*Do you believe, despite the summer's heat
Which makes us pant like dogs, do you believe
That soothing coolness can return, retrieve
Lost memories of rain, and then defeat*
 *The sun? Despite the fact that we entreat
The clouds in vain, despite the fact we grieve
For green, do you believe we can achieve
A vision where the spring and autumn meet?*
Although our eyes are scorched and burned, we see
The scrolls that Moses wrote, which stand like trees
Inside a distant orchard spring perceives,
 For which the autumn waits. Each stately tree
 Bears fruit, to which we crawl on hands and knees,
 For anyone who eats their fruit — believes.

III

Despite the winter's cold and summer's heat,
The hidden orchard grows. Despite extremes
Of fluctuating temperatures, it seems
The orchard flourishes, lush and complete,
 While in the orchard's shade, small pebbles greet

Each other as the orchard's tranquil streams
Discreetly flow to irrigate our dreams,
In which we pluck the orchard's fruit and eat.
Although the weather changes constantly,
The orchard does not change. It will not freeze
In winter, nor will summer sear its leaves,
Its branches or its roots. But who can be
Its gardener, or claim he climbs its trees?
For he who boasts he owns its all — deceives.

Second Prize – “I Apologize” by Judith R. Robinson

to my precious elders;
the valuable ones,
those thick-fleshed
indestructible Jews
I have known,
those who
endured; those who
had the clenched tooth
grit to flee before
the ovens were lit,
those -bergs and -steins
and -skis
those tailors artists bakers
peddlers scholars music-makers
who did not become the incinerated trash of Europe:
My own people, once stalwart as the stars,
must now weep as we, their stunning progeny,
disappear like shadows into the cracked cement
of sweet America
our brainless heads sucked under the white foam,
merging, whistling, forgetting, drowning, dancing,
no lessons learned, refusing to keep anything.

Third Prize – “Bombing in Jerusalem” by Dina Yehuda

*for Mary Jane Gardner
“and you shall love the stranger”*

You had already traveled
far from your native Scotland
taught Bible in Africa for twenty years
but you wanted to get closer to the source
so you came here to study the Hebrew
teachings which come forth from Zion
and the word of God from Jerusalem

Did you hope we would welcome you?
because to us in earthly Jerusalem
carrying heavy bags
past stations of sorrow
you were invisible
with your foreign accent and assumptions
a stranger on a strange mission

And when the owner of the kiosk
ran out to warn the people
standing near the black duffel bag
perhaps you did not understand him
because it was not the Hebrew of divine Jerusalem
he was shouting
but the harsh language of our lives here.

Honourable Mentions

1. "In The Footsteps Of Seven Beggars" by Yakov Azriel

The beggar whom we thought was blind can see
Beyond the eye's façade, to where the key
Of faith lies hidden, concealed beneath the tree
Where eagles perch; we pray belief still reigns
As eagles sit us on their wings, when we
Request their help in setting beggars free.

The beggar who is deaf hears voices free
Of want, for in his garden grows a tree
With manna-fruit and manna-scents, which we
Have not yet touched nor smelled but which we see
In dreams; the butterfly of faith then reigns
As the garden's gate is opened by her key.

The third beggar's words, all garbled, are the key
To understanding how the endless sea
Of faith is now a spring, and how the rains
Of grace will water roots of the leafy tree
That shades the heart of the world; his speech is free
Of words that could dethrone the royal we.

The beggar with the crooked neck, and we
Who hunger for the bread of faith, must free
Two songbirds imprisoned beyond the sea,
Beyond our grasp. If only the beggar's key
Were found, the birds would nest in the garden's tree
And humbly sing of gentle, blessed rains.

The hunchbacked beggar surely holds the reins
And drives our wagon to the shore that we
Have longed to reach, for on this beach, the key
That beggars forged is found; their key will free
Locked hawks of faith from cages we can't see,
And let the hawks defend the beggars' tree.

The beggar with no hands takes wood from his tree
To carve the flute of faith before it rains;
Next to the surf, he plays his flute to free
The princess trapped below the waves, whom we
Had found but could not save; only his key
Of music heals her wounds, beneath the sea.

Beggar with no legs, who reigns unnoticed, free
Us now; we wait for you to turn our key;
Dance, dance, by your tree on the shore of our sea.

2. "Moon Over Tishrei" by Johnmichael Simon

This year
on the eve of *Yad Tishrei*
a full moon came up over Mount Hermon
perfect as it always is on festivals

A glowing coin of gold
that inched over the peaks

I thought that it would surely dislodge,
roll down into the Hula valley,
fill the gentle Jordan with a flood
of liquid fire, then flow on burning
into the sea of Galilee

Causing the waters to rise in radiant chorus
so that men returning from the prayers
to palm thatched Succoth in Tiberias and Safed
would rub their eyes and murmur –
The Messiah has arrived

But no, as I watched, the globe detached itself
from mountain top and floated higher,
higher, holding hands with the evening star

It looked down on crops of winking seven-day dwellings
with their scents of stretched sheets, dates and pomegranates
and seemed to say as it mounted higher in its bowl
Tonight we are all children admiring lulav fronds,
inhaling perfume of etrog as if for the very first time

A few days later we visited Nazareth and on our way
amidst the honking Christian and Moslem traffic
we saw the moon rise again over hilltop, dome and spire
almost as beautiful, almost as perfect

Could this be the same moon, the one that rose over Hermon?

Almost, we thought, almost but not quite—
a tiny fragment was missing, shaven from its edge

And that made all the difference.

3. "Nahal Alexander" by Helen Bar-Lev

Where stream meets sea
and blue becomes turquoise
fish swarm, turtles swim,
poppies and daisies
splash colour on the dunes,
pebbles strew the shore
and the sky shines sapphire,
birds sing and swoop,
kingfishers, plovers, crows, herons

Here in this place pastoral
the camera and I stroll,
in the distance a boat,
one sail white, the other orange,
a cool wind blows

When the photos are viewed
there, beyond the plovers, the wily crow,
(who has just stolen a fish from a heron)
is a grey shadow floating on the horizon,
almost invisible, a warship on patrol

The Guardian of Israel neither sleeps nor slumbers
nor is he deceived by a placid strip of nature
on the shores of the Mediterranean
on a pleasant day in April,
as I was, if for just a moment

4. "Road in the Jezreel Valley" by Zvi A. Sesling

There is a poorly paved road
that winds its way to your
door in the Jezreel Valley

A road that is paved over
another road which was
paved over a dirt road

That had been widened
from the path that traders
and travelers used

It was an ancient trail that
connected distant lands and
different people

Today it will connect us
will connect the past
and the future

5. "The Scarf I Didn't Buy" by Ricky Rapoport Friesem

It beckoned to me from a jumbled
pile of pale pastels and faded golds
its shimmering blue, a flash of daylight

in the darkened shop, thick with disorder
and a dust last stirred, it seemed ,
by ladies of the Raj or maybe maharinis

idly poking through the scattered bales
of silks and shelves of brass and
copper gods, gone green with patina,

and rows of elephants, lions and tigers,
carved from sandalwood, still fragrant,
ebony, and ivory yellowed with the years.

I reached out for the scarf
and then pulled back for fear I'd stir
the vengeance of those gods, those beasts

those years. Or maybe it was merely dust
I feared. I fled, but can't forget that scarf
or your bold eyes of unforgiving blue.

6. "What I Dreamed on the Night I Heard You Were Dead" by David Silverman

We are young again, racing on the beach to impress
some girl (Laurie, I think), who has made it
clear she does not care for either of us very much.

Yet the possibility she will change her mind and
look in my direction instead of yours has raised
the stakes, best friends notwithstanding.

And in my dream of this long-ago event, the ordinary
becomes epic. Laurie is prettier than she really was,
sunbathers put down their paperbacks to cheer us on,

and you and I are giants. The ground shakes each time
our feet hit the sand. Side by side, stride for stride, we are
glorious in our hard, healthy bodies, glorious in our youth.

Then, without a look or saying a word, we both know
the race is over. There is no finish line, the girl does not
matter. There is only the vast future, just beyond the horizon.

A silver dolphin bursts from the sea and hovers overhead.
Tilting his bottlenose, as if to point the way, he seems
to be smiling. Surely, we can run like this forever.

7. "rooted on that day" by Gretti Izak

her weeping on that day was different
than any she had ever known; it broke
to flush the earth with a radiance because
it was so undemanding; it lay in pools around her,
glistening with transparency, a sheen that never
touched a shadow, a sensation of whiteness
like snow before it blankets trees and roofs
of houses; her weeping cleared the apparition of
walls, her hands moved through space where
history is said to set boundaries
the sensation of transparency was everywhere
her body was delivered from heaps of dust
and she saw that this day could turn in any direction
so she turned it to the sky where a crown appeared
and everything swelled imperceptibly transforming
her tears of repentance to eggs of light

8. "Lullaby" by Thilde Fox

Hush beloved, don't you cry
My body's warm, I'll hold you tight
And I will sing our lullaby.

Here together still we lie
We'll put the shadows out of sight
Hush beloved, don't you cry.

We'll be at ease, we won't ask why
A hug, a kiss, our evening rite
And I will sing our lullaby.

A little cough, a little sigh
Take a sip, one small bite
Hush beloved don't you cry.

Soon the darkness will pass by
The doctors aren't always right
And I will sing our lullaby.

Now you're clean and softly dry
The pills will last you through the night
Hush beloved don't you cry
And I will sing our lullaby.

9. "Hungary, March 15, 1944 (4 days before the Nazi invasion)" by Andrea Moriah

Mother has had Ildi polishing the cherry wood
dining room table since early morning.
It will be covered with the ivory damask
Father brought home from his last trip to Antwerp,
but Mother says she likes the way the cloth slides
and settles in just the right place at the corners
when the table is polished just so.

Juliana is in charge of me and my sister.
We are to appear for supper dressed
in lace, wearing patent pumps and silk stockings,
be lovely and flushed, our hair ribboned in ringlets.
Then we are to take our leave
and go to eat in the kitchen with her.

Honored guests from the capital are to be at our table
for a grand feast of pheasant, figs and goose liver.
The cooks have been stuffing and basting and mashing,
swirling rich sauces with brandy and butter.

But the guests are not arriving.
I drape myself over Father's armchair;
my sister warns me to stand
upright and mind my petticoat.

In the salon, I draw open the front curtains
on a lawn strewn with petals from new yellow crocuses.
The lead-framed window diamonds cut the lawn into pieces.

I unlatch and push open one of the windows.
A scrim of warm dampness cannot cover the cold wind.
Mother screams at me to close it, immediately.

10. "And Sometimes, Too, The Moon" by Anne Ranasinghe

Every morning
they wash him and comb
his thin white hair into a bun
and then support him, stooping,
to his chair –
a *hansi putuwa* with sagging rattan seat –
which stands in the verandah of his house
above the fields of paddy. And beyond
are groves of coconut against the sky.

All day long he sits
while the high sun
passes from East to West,
sits
between that which is past
and remembered
and what is to come. He hopes
for no surprises, watching from his precipice
of time.
At noon they feed him rice, again
at night –
then bring him in to sleep.
From his string bed
he can just see the trees,
and sometimes, too, the moon.

11. "Honi Ha'me'aggel" by Thilde Fox

Honi ha'Me'aggel scratched a circle in the dry soil,
stood inside
and prayed for rain.

The circle kept out the rushing wind,
the click of pebbles,
the buzzing flies.

He spoke into the silence:
Lord God,
send us rain.

Should I change the natural order just for you?

Look at Your brown hills,
Your empty lakes,
Your trees, blackened by a sudden flame.

Nature will renew herself.

Look at the cattle dying,
women dried up,
children wailing.

*You should have planned better,
didn't I send Joseph to teach you?*

Lord God, the almond trees don't bloom,
the olives wither,
the cyclamen shrivel underground.

Ah, the cyclamen.
The rains came.

12. "Heart" by Johnmichael Simon

is an almost invisible
pulsating
spot on an ultrasound

is a drum-skin-taut
belly with an ear
attached, listening

like a terrier to a phonograph

is graffiti
scratched in playground
sand

strawberry-stitched on panties,
marzipan figures on a cake

heart is the courage
never to admit defeat

the joy of throbbing
together half
a century or more
still finding new
ways to say
I love you

it is the almost
inaudible whisper
of a tiny clock
suspended
between somewhere
and nothing

13. "The Structure of the Whole" by Kaila Shabat

To fathom the concept
'structure of the whole,'
is the prelude towards world peace
and universal redemption.

Only a 'whole' man
is able to grasp this abstract:
a man at one with the four elements
and possessed of four personas.

I

Rooted in earth, a pure politician
neither money nor power can corrupt,
his one quest to infuse in humanity
the Glory of the Lord.

II

Striving to unite with the universal spirit
in the ancient, eastern dance:
limbs liquefied, love flowing
like streams of life-giving water .

III

Flames crackle and ignite the Muse.
The artist expresses his joy and praise
in every medium: in colours, melody
and through the written Word.

IV

This man of science, of learning
coupled with imagination,
extracts from the very air
the certainty of creation's totality.

How will we know this complex man?
Will he recognize himself?
Are we deserving of his Kingdom?

14. "With Words" by Anne Ranasinghe

Yesterday, today and tomorrow -
Only a fragrance in the night's breath
Three shades of blossom
On one tree
With roots that search
Past present future

With words
We write our lives
Resurrect the dead and
Reopen the lips.
Of their black night's wound
That the blood may not congeal;
Light the white candle
At their futile tomb
Let the flame rise

Sing of the fragrance
Of the three-blossomed tree
Sing the strange fire
Of the nearing star
Words are the blood
Words are the flame
Words are the fragrance
Of the three colour tree

Words are the knife
That strips off the bark
Words are the earth
That burns beneath my feet
Words are the spark
Igniting the dream
And words are the threshold
Between life and
Death.

15. "Ima Foferet ('Peg-Top Mom') by Miriam Green

They wrap themselves around me like a tight string
as if they need me
then *whoosh*
I am spinning in place
watching them go
the invisible umbilicus
pulling pulling pulling
in all directions as they stumble into the future
with their false starts and half-formed selves.
Where are they now? What is the color of their mood?
I seek their shadows in the empty house,
call their names with my bare voice.
When I right myself
I extend my arms
to receive them
again.

Note: Ima is the Hebrew word for mother or mom. A Foferet is Hebrew for a peg top.

16. "The Cleft in the Rock" by Joanna Chen

There is a cleft in a rock out in the
wedged inside that cleft. We both
the rocks. We've been living here
the same perspective, the same way
at others who are looking at us. It's
Unholy angels hover above that
paying attention, then (as I read on)
Righteous another twenty-three years
alive who want to die and they cut short
smiles. It's dark, lodged as we are here
used to that and we can make out the

desert where very little grows. It's dry,
hide and are hidden in this cleft between
for a long time and we've grown used to
of looking through a narrow chink in the rock
dry, it's dark. It feels safe most of the time.
rock. Sometimes they accuse God of not
they go right ahead and add Shimon the
to his miserable life. They keep old men
the lives of boys with soft curls and shy
between the rocks but we've grown
shadows pretty well.

17. "Love is Stronger Than Death" by David Silverman

*For the sake of my love, place me as a seal upon your heart...
because love is stronger than death... Song of Songs 8:6*

I want to believe my love
will protect you, after I
am gone. That it will fill
the cracks in the windowsills
to keep you warm and bolt
the door shut every night
before you go to sleep.

Which is funny, in a way,
because I am too lazy to
caulk those windows and
often forget to check the
door before we go to sleep.

But when you are cold,
you place your body
next to mine and steal
my warmth. And, if
anyone breaks in, you
know I will sacrifice
myself and tell you to
run, which, of course, you
will not do (God forbid
I tell you anything).

So, I will believe this: love
is stronger than the cold
night air and love is stronger
than a midnight intruder.
As for love and death, I
am content to wait a while
to find out. With you. In
our drafty, open-doored home.