

HANUKKAH
POEMS

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AND THOU SHALT LOVE

i

All I ever looked for was happiness:
Not for myself, only; also for mine.
Dumbstruck, I learned the futility of being good.

Tell me, how does one get pleasure out of life?
How, when so much engenders pain?
Only maudlin moments of forgetfulness
Unloose the tears that turn the blood to wine.

Simple Simon went into a wood,
Hoping to return his damaged wife.
A drunken druid drove him forth again,
Laughing like a god at his distress:
Take her, fool! For you she'll do just fine!

Longing comes easy in darkness. I should
Open my eyes, turn on the light. A knife,
Viciously twisting, argues for pain.
Eagerly I press on, in fear of nothingness.

ii

There! Do you see the light
High on that mountain?
Even here there is

Light! Do you see it?
Only darkness. You see
Reflections of dreams. Here
Darkness covers even

Tomorrow. Who can
Hope any longer for light?
Yet there it is! We must

Go towards it, or else—
Or be of those who love
Darkness, luminous darkness . . .

iii

Wealth isolates, hardship unites.
In darkness people hold hands.
Those only who cry out are comforted.
However we live, death is the same.

And so we come to know Thy name:
Lounging easy in our rights,
Loving only as need demands,

The grace most sought uncelebrated,
Happiness inextricable from shame.
Yet we, too, have known lidless nights.

Hope is not for one who understands.
Even blameless, we are rejected.
All are lost who win the game.
Reason renders only lights.
Those who fear know Thy commands.

BECAUSE ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTEEN GENERATIONS

Because one hundred and thirteen generations
Of Jews lit candles for eight days and prayed
(No doubt a miracle—flames in empty jars),
Nor could they, spangled abroad like lonely stars,
Inter their music, or cull their recitations,
Each cantillated word is death delayed.

Some memories are miracles: the jars
Empty yet dancing with light, the generations
Touched also by fire, burning like distant stars,
History twinkling in their recitations
Lest words be forgotten and the future die. They
 prayed
On their way naked to the ovens; they prayed
Resting by Babylon's stagnant waters; they delayed
Reeling into memory's end, the empty jars
Aflame with words, afire with recitations,
In words their mountains, their rivers, deserts, stars;
Nations flowing towards silence, the generations
Ebbing into darkness, with candles they delayed . . .

Granted they seem strange. Their recitations
Are as alien as Aztec chants. The empty jars
Burning in the temple, the scattered stars
Returning eagerly each night . . . Whose prayers
 delayed

Interment in darkness? Which sunless soul prayed
Earnestly enough to light the stars?
Long has this love been borne by their generations.

Memories need candles. The recitations
Of children are like black meadows of fragrant stars
Mirroring the eyes of generations.

Eventually memories end: the sightless stars
Like coal dust blown across the darkness, the jars
Like unattended stones . . . God once delayed
Eight days the death of light. The people prayed.
Now night awaits the last of their recitations.

BEGINNING THURSDAY, THERE WILL BE NO MORE REASONS

Beginning Thursday, there will be no more reasons.
Over the sun I'll cast a white shroud.
No further laws, no more revelations,
No sources of knowledge beyond one's sensations;
In the absence of oil, flames not allowed.
Each joy without awe, without hope in its seasons ...

BEING IS AN UNREQUITED PASSION

Being is an unrequited passion
Of which the object is eternity.
No answer is more salient than the question,
Not of why, but what it is to be.
In each of us there burns a fuel-less fire
Eternal in amazement and desire.

Meaning is the means by which desire
Alleviates the pain of pointless passion,
Revealing in the miracle of fire
Knowledge of a just eternity,
Unending love and paradise to be,
Sufficient to semanticize the question.

Let us de-semanticize the question,
Intent on separation from desire,
Letting be the wish to ever be.
In time alone we touch the ancient passion.
The moment is its own eternity,
Holding us forever in its fire.

Given that eight days a fuel-less fire
Answered for our ancestors the question,
Bearing embers of eternity.
Reason cannot overcome desire,
Insisting that the sense was merely passion

Embracing the demand to ever be,
Longing more than life to ever be.

Eight days we witnessed the untended fire
Lapping at the hollows of our passion,
Lighting the dark chambers of our question,
Entering the pith of our desire,
Noumenescence of eternity.

Stopped time does not describe eternity.
Each soul in time must also ever be
The infinite of its most dread desire,
Having been itself a fuel-less fire,
Each the answer to the wordless question,
Leaving all behind with bitter passion.
In that passion, too, we'll ever be
Zealous for eternity on fire,
Answering a question with desire.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO DOUBT THE WORD OF GOD

Blessed are those who doubt the word of God,
Opening their minds to what might be.
No literal truth is literally true,
Nor can one see unless one sees anew,
In lieu of faith observing faithfully
Each metaphor writ deep within each word.

Murderers would worship every word,
A band of cutthroats in the name of God,
Reasoning unreason faithfully,
Knights of night, whose end cannot but be
Unholy, though the righteous reign anew,
Sure as angels of what words are true.

Let wit and wisdom wonder what is true.
Inside, we face the being of the word,
Light lost within its depths, condemned anew,
Immensities as infinite as God
Trapped within the confines of "to be,"
However we pursue them faithfully.

Grant faith its grace, but reason faithfully,
Always doubting what you know is true.
Being needs no temple fuel to be,
Resting on the reason of a word

In myth, with reason, uttered first by God.
Each mind must light the universe anew,
Letting being be in words anew.

Eight days we light the candles faithfully,
Lest we forget a miracle of God.
Let go the miracle, false or true,
Even as you venerate the word,
Nor do you need to know to fully be.

Sing, then, of words that wake the will to be,
Each generation ravishing anew!
The past and future mingle in a word
Hammered into gold, as faithfully,
Embracing in the beautiful the true,
Lamps alight, we thank an ancient God.
In such a God we find solace anew,
Zealous to be singing faithfully
A text as true in pitch as that first word.

BLITHE FINGERS KNOW THE PSALMS OF ADORATION

Blithe fingers know the psalms of adoration;
Often they play them on the flesh of light.
No hearing necessary, nor is sight
Needed to draw the lineaments of pleasure.
In despair only is there desecration:
Evil in pursuit of pain, not pleasure.

So may we not regret our loss of sight:
Eight days God gave the miracle of light.
Touch remains the road to adoration,
However much we miss the gift of light.

Grace is a slate-flat sea, a tranquil sight
After dense hills and fine-wrought pleasure:
Bleak and pure, too spare for desecration;
Rich as a thin dark line drawn with pleasure;
Intense as death, too immense for sight—
Even now, as love replaces light,
Loss of faith, not loss of adoration ...

Mysteries are not revealed by light:
Open to the darkness, not by sight
May they be known, but by love. And pain. And
pleasure.

Each tide leaves on our shores its desecration:
Limp latex gloves, syringes, sheathes of pleasure.
Love cannot feel through knowing, nor does sight
Equal touch for singing, nor does light
Need burn eight days to kindle adoration.

BY DAY EACH SOUL MUST WALK WITHIN ITS SHADOW

By day each soul must walk within its shadow.
Only night can make us whole again.
Nor joy nor pain can race across the meadow
Night seeds with stars, so vast it were in vain.
In each new day hope rises with the light.
Evening comes: we hunger for the night.

More truth, and vaster, can be seen at night.
All time unveiled gathers in a meadow
Resplendent with the history of light.
Know that in the darkness, free of shadow,
Unto the primal moment, not in vain,
Shines all that ever was, alive again.

So do all vanished moments live again:
Events are past before we see their light.
The star that shines upon the darkened meadow
Has long since moved on to another night.

Give, then, all due attention to the shadow
As thoughts reflect off surfaces in vain.
Bright thoughts shall give us surfaces in vain,
Refracted through the mysteries of night.
In words we see ourselves set forth again,
Each incandescent in the wash of light
Lingering across the golden meadow.

Light creates a double world of shadow.
In every thought and word a silent shadow
Says its nothingness, until again
All faith and doubt are swallowed up in night.

Most lust for the intelligence of light.
In wisdom what one sees, one sees in vain.
Deep darkness is a blessing on the meadow.
In time one finds one's way across that meadow.

Eight days the god-sent fire cast its shadow
Long and dark across the door of night.
Let in the cold, the Being without light,
Else all love and laughter be in vain.
No faith but dies that we may live again.

BY THE EIGHTH DAY THERE WAS NO LONGER NEED

By the eighth day there was no longer need
Of proof that love had superceded law.
Nor could one longer doubt the fuel-less flame,
Nor longer not revere the holy name.
In faith one finds the aperture of awe,
Each miracle a word that one might read.

Most come upon the truth of what they read
As music on the altar of their need,
Rhapsodic in the ecstasy of awe,
Knowing what they know of love and law:
Underneath some speculative name
Sufficient faith for an eternal flame.

Still, if you lack faith in such a flame
Etched against some words you'll never read,
There's an ocean opened in your name
Holding all the love you'll ever need.

Granted your experience of law:
A touch of grace turns fear to love and awe.
Being of itself engenders awe:
Radiant with talismanic flame,
Interred in language one must sing to read,
Each mystery consanguine with each law;
Lost in the cacophony of need,

A holiness unfettered by a name.
Nor need you be embarrassed by a name,
Determined not to Balkanize your awe:
Love chooses what will satisfy its need,
Intent not on the face but on the flame.
So may pleasure ravish what you read
And beauty be the sun to light the law.

More sweet than miracles is common law.
In reason one finds God without the name.
Do, then, with sublime disinterest read,
In scrupulous indifference and in awe.

Even now there is a holy flame:
Love needs no cause to minister to need.
Life cries for causeless flame to feed its awe,
Even as the law is plain to read.
Nor does it need the blessing of a name.

CHANUKAH ITSELF'S THE MIRACLE

Chanukah itself's the miracle:
How could we remember all those years,
Aliens lost upon a shoreless sea,
Not only scattered–battered, shattered, tattered,
Unwelcome guests of hosts unmerciful,
Knowing well the wellsprings of our tears,
A life devoured by identity
Holding on to legacies that mattered?

EIGHT DAYS THE LIGHT CONTINUED ON ITS OWN

Eight days the light continued on its own:
A miracle, they say, but not more so
Than ordinary lives of flesh and bone,
Consuming wicks burned ashen long ago.
Within there is a mystic lake of fire,
Fuel-less energy, power uncelled,
Unmeasured fount of obstinate desire,
Hope burning, where no hope was ever held.
Invisible source of all that's seen or seeing,
Unseen light that animates the void;
Unlit spark of indivisible Being,
Shard of One that cannot be destroyed:
To be so vast a miracle till death
Is why we struggle fiercely for each breath.

GIVEN THE NATURE OF REALITY

Given the nature of reality
And the elusiveness of truth;
Being aware of ambiguity
Re: uncertainties of proof;
In the service of not seeming
Excessively uncouth:
Light a candle. Save a rabbi.

HOPE IS NOT THE CREATURE OF SENSATION

Hope is not the creature of sensation.
A miracle's the work of only days.
Nor can faith be founded on conviction
Unsustained by ritual and art.
Knowledge of the senses is creation
Kindled by a truth that sense betrays,
As faith emerges whole from ancient fiction,
Holding quiet commerce with the heart.

HOW CAN WE BELIEVE IN MIRACLES

How can we believe in miracles
After two millennia of none?
No intervention spared the Jews of Sorrow;
Under no temple roofs were wonders done.
Knowing who provided all those ashes,
Knowing well the secret of that flame,
As we light the candles of remembrance,
How can we bear to call upon your name?

HOW CAN WE BELIEVE THAT THE CREATOR

How can we believe that the Creator
Actually sustained those lamps eight days?
No doubt a masterful resort to theater,
Uniting Jews adrift from ancient ways.
Knowing God, we hunger to be known:
Kindness, love, compassion for our pain—
All shot through our dead universe of stone.
How can we not turn that way again?

HOW EXPLAIN THE MIRACLE OF LIGHT

How explain the miracle of light?
A lamp's a miracle, refueled or no.
Nor is there aught that ought be more than night,
Unless some unmade maker make it so.
Know that nothing is but miracles,
Kindled from the void we know not how;
And God, if God there be, the greatest miracle,
Here within the sepulcher of now.

HOW LONG CAN WE REMEMBER AN EVENT

How long can we remember an event,
A miracle long since become a story?
Nor can we see what it might represent
Unless we share a shadow of its glory.
Knowledge is no substitute for faith
Kindling in the heart what else is fashion.
A fuel-less flame is nothing but a wraith,
However wrought, if unsustained by passion.

HOW MIGHT ONE BE A HARBINGER OF LIGHT

How might one be a harbinger of light,
A messenger of miracles to come?
Now we are inhabitants of night,
Unaware that once there was a sun.
Knowledge is the flower of belief,
Kept by green-thumbed gardeners of mind,
As beauty finds its apogee in grief,
Hard by the stones the world has left behind.

SWINGING LOW IN CHARIOTS

Swinging low in chariots
Each band of angels holds its fire,
Thinking we poor fools below
Have all the pain that we require.

And the mountains in reply
Nod their drifty, rock-wreathed heads,
Drawing back bold deities,
Leaving us in anguished beds.

O, Mary, neither weep nor mourn
Remembering the fuel-less flame,
Remembering the love of God,
A thing we called "Ha-Shem," the Name.

In everyone there is a Name;
No ecstasies beyond our heads:
Each alone must tend the fire.

WHAT IS THERE IN THE DARKNESS TO RECEIVE

What is there in the darkness to receive
The gratitude that clearly is its due?
What if one's filled with awe but can't believe
That anything religion says is true?
It's clearly hogwash that the temple flame
Burned eight whole days on oil just for one;
Yet symbols drawn from tales are not the same
As knowing what the power of God has done.
The leap of faith strikes me as wishful thinking,
To believe in God because one sees one must;
I grant that life and death could use some linking,
But to yield to faith's like giving in to lust.
And yet I wish to celebrate the light
Which quite by chance was born of endless night.

