

WRITING A POEM

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When the Savior ministered on the earth, he held up doctrinal abstractions and helped his followers see them anew. Consider the following statements: “Ye are the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13); “I am the door” (John 10:9); “Neither do men put wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved” (Matthew 9:17). His teachings resound with poetry—metaphor and simile, analogy and parable, parallelism and symbol. These figures of speech convey the spiritual world to our senses.

When I write poetry I attempt to make tangible my beliefs and experiences. The spiritual life evokes within me a host of feelings: peace, confusion, humility, intimacy, guilt, exultation. While these terms are abstract, there is nothing abstract about *experiencing* these emotions. A story, an image, a comparison often rests behind each of them. Poetry then becomes my outlet to transform heartfelt abstractions into lyrics, narratives, and images that can resonate with others. ∞

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TEMPLE

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Curelom and *cumom*,¹
Urim and thummim.
Brazen.

Sierra in the vast shadows.

At war—the unknown fortress
and untouched fortune at the bottom of the sea.

At rest you are the lamp
of multiplication, house of the *jam*.²
Parable for each soldier, servant, and queen.

Palmettes³ white glaze. Lighter
of wick and wicked. Hade⁴
for the cast down. Your presence
in the terebinth,⁵
your stillness
beheld above the fork of the trunk.
Roots hulked with water
deep beneath the earth.

Rearguard.
Wharf and inlet.
Cascade during the driest months.
Tiller and tillage.
Olive grove in the thousandth year.
Newborn and carved wood.
Potter. Parapet. Exchanger
of blatant and subtle walls.
Flax grower. Manioc⁶ flour.
Permanent spring.

Patriarchal advent.
Matriarchal throne.
Tachash.⁷ Water on the back.

Exiler and the exiled ark. Nitre.
Covert for the exposed foot. Shewbread.
Render of –ites.

Threshold of the double mirrors.
Basalt chamber dismissed
in the corner
of the labyrinth. Carbuncle,
sconce, oryx.

Agate and *mechonot*.⁸
Hewer of the tepid shrine.
Desolation's thorn. Visible
yet forgotten as homeland.
Probing daughters
and dead aunts
continue on with anise,
*challah*⁹ or onyx.

Immovable proxy.
Loading pier in the cloudless night.
Shipping bridge.
Locus and locusts.
Three fathoms of ice,
vicarious reaper of soul,
welder of flesh.
Slow plume
wafting
out of the burning
bush.

NOTES

- 1 *Curelom* and *cumom*—animals mentioned as being especially “useful unto man.” (See Ether 9: 19).
- 2 *Yam*—a large basin or tub of water, also called a “great bronze sea,” found outside the portico of Solomon’s temple.
- 3 *Palmettes*—stylized palm leaf as decorative element.
- 4 *Hade*—angle of inclination from the vertical of a vein, fault, or lode.
- 5 *Terebinth*—small Mediterranean tree, source of tarring material and turpentine.
- 6 *Manioc*—shrubby tropical plant with tuberous, starchy root.
- 7 *Tachash*—a multi-colored beast whose hide was used by the Israelites for the Tabernacle’s outward covering, translated in the Old Testament as “badger.”
- 8 *Mechonot*—wheeled stands.
- 9 *Challah*—a bread made by Jews, sometimes called egg bread, often enjoyed on Sabbath eve.

CONSOLATION

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And it came to pass
after I had lived to the age of stone;
after lifting my heart from the depths
of the dirt, of taking back
and arranging fractured secrets,
their pieces strewn through the grass
and sand; after yearning to rear
sons and daughters, to imagine them
raised up, turned out,
struggling, meditative, poor,
tempted, tumultuous, humble;
and after the purge and crush
of Roman weapons, their crosses
dotting the land like trees,
their intoxication like stale
perfume in the rookeries, our arches
weighed down in the temple
and the remote synagogues
of Beersheva and Galilee;
after the chimeras and envisionings,
the sunsets covered by the diffident
clouds, the appointed moon
never showing up; after the length
of each night brimmed over
the lids of my jars, pots, and cups;
and after the hearth-fires tossed
and weaved, simmering down
to the blue flicker before cold;

And though I've known the law,
reviving my days through the words
of Moses, the opposites of Abraham,
the shifting landscapes of Isaiah,
their predictions like lamb brisket
on my tongue; and though I witnessed
the silence of Zacharias and the noise
that swept through the hilltops
following the birth of his son;
though I believed

(no stanza break)

in the endowed disk of scholars,
their book knowledge iridescent
their analysis near mystery
and decision their hiss;
though I worried for those widows
who didn't know the word;
and though I broke through
to the scouring end of every fasting,
and threaded prayer from the outer end
of the courtyard walls;
though I worshipped
on each rollicking holy day
and carried the sick
on the small of my back;
though their diseases warned me,
sinking their coughs into my heart and lungs.

Nothing prepared me for the arrival
of that amber light, sheltered
and swaddled in a ray of immanence.
Our most holy One, like mist
from a desert fountain, or a tapestry
from the forests of Lebanon,
this oil, this leaven of Bethlehem,
had finally come.