

KH Israel-Focused Poems 2026
with Dr. Herb Levine

1. Avigdor Hameiri (1890-1970)

מֵעַל פְּסַגַּת הַר הַצּוֹפִים
אֶשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָךְ אֲפִיּוֹם
מֵעַל פְּסַגַּת הַר הַצּוֹפִים
שְׁלוֹם לָךְ יְרוּשָׁלַיִם!
אֶלְפֵי דוֹרוֹת חִלְמָתִי עָלֶיךָ,
לְרֵאוֹת, לְזָכוֹת, בְּאוֹר פְּנִיֶיךָ,
יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, יְרוּשָׁלַיִם!
הַאִירִי פְּנִיֶיךָ לְבִנְךָ,
יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, יְרוּשָׁלַיִם!
מִתְרַבּוֹתֶיךָ אֶבְנֶךָ!
(1926)

Atop Mt. Scopus

From atop Mt. Scopus

I bow low to you,

From atop Mt. Scopus

Greetings, O Jerusalem!

Thousands of generations I dreamed of you

To merit seeing your light,

Jerusalem, Jerusalem!

Turn your face to your child,

Jerusalem, Jerusalem!

I will rebuild you from your ruins!

(HL translation of first stanza)

2. Rachel Blaustein (1890 – 1931)

רַחֵל
הִן דָּמָה בְּדַמִּי זֹרֵם,
– הִן קוֹלָהּ בִּי רֵן
רַחֵל הִרְוָעָה צֹאן לָבָן,
רַחֵל – אֵם הָאֵם.

וְעַל כֵּן הִבִּיתִי לִי צַר
וְהָעִיר – זָרָה
כִּי הָיָה מִתְנוּפֵף סוּדָרָה;
לְרוּחוֹת הַמְדַבֵּר

וְעַל כֵּן אֶת דְּרָכַי אֶחָז
בְּבִטְחָה כְּזֹאת,
כִּי שְׂמוֹרִים בְּרַגְלֵי זְכָרוֹנוֹת
מִנִּי אֲז, מִנִּי אֲז!

Rachel

It is her blood that streams in mine,
–her voice that sings in me
Rachel, shepherding Laban's sheep,
Rachel — mother of mothers.

Therefore is my house narrow
and the city strange,
because her scarf once fluttered
in the desert wind.

Therefore do I make my way
with such sureness,
because my feet remember
since then, since then.

(adapted from translation of R. Friend)

3. Avraham Shlonsky (1900 – 1973)

עמל

הלבִּישִׁינִי, אִמָּא כְּשֶׁרָה, כְּתַנְתְּ־פָסִים לְתַפְאֶרֶת
וְעַם שְׁחָרִית הוֹבִילִנִי אֵלַי עֲמַל.

עוֹטְפָה אֶרְצִי אוֹר כְּטַלִּית.
בְּתִים נִצְבוּ כְּטוֹטְפוֹת.
וְכַרְצוּעוֹת־תְּפִילִין גּוֹלְשִׁים כְּבִישִׁים, סָלְלוּ כְּפִים.

תְּפִלַּת שְׁחָרִית פֹּה תִתְפַּלֵּל קִרְיָה נֹאֶה אֵלַי בּוֹרְאָה.
וּבְבוֹרְאִים
בְּנֵי אֲבֹרָהִם,
פִּיטֹן סוֹלֵל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל.

וּבְעָרֵב בֵּין הַשְּׁמֵשׁוֹת יָשׁוּב אֲבָא מִסְבְּלוֹתַי
וְכַתְּפָלָה יִלְחֹשׁ נַחַת:
הִבּוּ יָקִיר לִי אֲבֹרָהִם,
עוֹר וְגִידִים וְעֵצְמוֹת.
הִלְלוּיָהּ.

הלבִּישִׁינִי, אִמָּא כְּשֶׁרָה, כְּתַנְתְּ־פָסִים לְתַפְאֶרֶת
וְעַם שְׁחָרִית הוֹבִילִנִי
אֵלַי עֲמַל.

Clothe me, goodly mother, in a splendrous coat of many colors,
Lead me with the dawn unto my toil

My land wraps itself in light as in a tallit
Houses stand like tefillin,
And like tefillin-straps the palm-paved highways tumble down.

Thus a beautiful new city lifts a morning prayer to her Maker,
And among all Makers,
Abraham your Son

Is the hymnal poet-paver
Of the roads of Israel.

In the twilight of the evening, Father will return from labors,
Warmly whisper like a prayer:
Dearest son, my Abraham
Flesh and bones and veins and sinews:
Hallelujah

Clothe me, goodly mother in a splendrous coat of many colors,
Lead me with the dawn
Unto my toil.

(Trans. A. Z. Foreman)

4. Natan Alterman (1910-1970)

A Silver Platter

“אין מדינה נתנת לעם על מגש כסף”

“A State is not given to the nation on a silver platter.” - Chaim Weizmann

And the land grows still, the red eye of the sky
Slowly dimming over smoking frontiers
As the nation arises,
Torn at heart but breathing,
To receive its miracle, the only miracle
As the ceremony draws near,
It will rise, standing erect in the moonlight in terror and joy
When across from it will step out a youth and a lass and slowly march toward the
nation
Dressed in battle gear, dirty,
Shoes heavy with grime, they ascend the path quietly
To change garb, to wipe their brow
They have not yet found time.
Still bone weary from days and from nights in the field
Full of endless fatigue and unrested,
Yet the dew of their youth.
Is still seen on their head
Thus they stand at attention, giving no sign of life or death
Then a nation in tears and amazement will ask: "Who are you?"
And they will answer quietly,
"We Are the silver platter on which the Jewish state was given."
Thus they will say and fall back in shadows
And the rest will be told
In the chronicles of Israel.

(1947 – Website: theicenter.org)

5. Dahlia Ravikovich (1936-2005)

Two Isles Hath New Zealand

Africa's not the place to go right now.
Plagues, famine — the human body can't bear it.
Brutality. They flog human beings with bullwhips.
Asia — it would make your hair stand on end.
Trapped in the mountains, trapped in the swamps.
The human body can't bear it,
there are limits to the life force, after all.

As for me,
He shall make me to lie down in green pastures
in New Zealand.

Over there, sheep with soft wool,
the softest of wools,
graze in the meadow.
Truehearted folk herd their flocks,
on Sundays they pay a visit to church
dressed in sedate attire.

No point hiding it any longer:
We're an experiment that went awry,
a plan that misfired,
tied up with so much murderousness.
Why should I care about this camp or that,
screaming 'til their throats are raw,
splitting fine hairs.
In any case, too much murderousness,
To Africa, I'm not going
And not to Asia, either.
I'm not going anyplace.

In New Zealand
in green pastures, beside the still waters
kindhearted folk
will share their bread with me.

(Translation by Chanah Bloch and Chana Kronfeld)

6. Herbert J. Levine (1950 -)

Family Plot: For Independence Day

1.

We sat, my brother and I, in the backseat
And quarreled unceasingly,
Until our mother, may she rest in peace, asked,
'How will there be peace in the world,
If two brothers cannot live together in peace?'
We knew from the Torah stories she taught us
That Cain killed his brother Hevel out of jealousy,
That Jacob stole and Esav was ready to murder
To receive what he could never get,
The one indivisible blessing.

Nowadays my brother and I
Meet for meals on our birthdays,
Talk of our cholesterol levels and sleep apnea,
Of the kids' jobs
And of the Israelis and Palestinians,
He, embarrassed, like a diaspora Jew,
And I, shaken by this quarrel of brothers
Who rise from their graves like ghosts
To deceive and to fight, to die and to kill,
United only by their family plot
Where they pause
To bury their dead.

2.

The Palestinians commemorate
Their tragic Naqba,
A holy day of remembering
And mourning the loss of their nation.
When the day comes that they celebrate
The beginning of their state, I suggest
That they celebrate a Palestinian Purim,
With costumes, masks, and hashish
(The Muslims won't be drinking alcohol),
When they'll wipe out
The name of Israel once a year,
And they'll say what Jews say
On Hanukah, Passover, and Purim:
They tried to kill us but failed,
So let's eat delicacies and tell funny stories
To keep living well,
Lest we sink to the bottom of memory's
Black hole of tears
And shame
And fury.

3.

Let's be like dreamers again.
In days to come,
When Israelis and Palestinians
Join their two states,
We will look back at the children who learned
Both Arabic and Hebrew,
For in the supple and sinuous letters,
They saw the face of one land
That two peoples love.