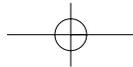
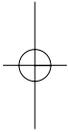




# ***The Simple Dream***

***1947***

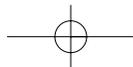
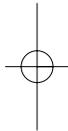
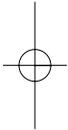






*In memory of you,  
**Leibel Shapiro**  
my dear friend,  
who lived for  
*The Simple Dream*  
of a better Yiddish school in America*





## *The Simple Dream*

### I

#### A Dream of Peace

Harbors resound with the laughter of windborne sailors.  
Fires of glorious battles shimmer in the sunset.  
The Germans are afraid, under trampled grass.  
The ships are anchored in Isaiah's dream,  
The anchors like plows reminding  
Of peace and plenty of plowed fields.  
Weary submarines rest at the shores,  
They turn gray with the dangers of long years of night.  
The harbors blow with legends from the sea's phantoms.

Joy rustles, overflowing every grief.  
From blind abysses to festive heights,  
Over lazy clouds, under water paths —  
Victory flutters — a triumphant hero.  
It plucks out the death of the Treblinkas.  
Where there was sick fear, backs straighten.  
Where there was a thorn, a rose is blooming.  
Where there was weeping — light and song.

Over adorned villages, over striding cities,  
Mischievous airplanes play a play of dream and reality.  
Now they are steel angels, now fantastic children,  
Now they dig a cave in a cloud,  
Now they want to tell us tales  
Of flying forests, of bears — pilots,  
Of heavenly fields sown with star-bread.  
Now they link up — a train through the planets,  
Now they form a bridge from world to world.

*MENKE*

Over adorned villages, over striding cities,  
Mischievous airplanes play a play of dream and reality.  
A false somersault —  
And everything becomes mournful nothing.  
Now they tumble from abyss to abyss.  
Now they fall — a hail of stars,  
And disappear in outer space — blind wastelands.

But today it is easy to give death the finger.  
Today it is easy to change a wolf into a sheep.  
Today drunken butchers don't rave in Maidanek.  
Today airplanes don't carry the rage of atoms,  
And bombers don't hurl mountains under valleys.  
Now they dismantle the wind in bursting laughter.  
Now they circle around a word — a giant of silver and smoke:  
"P—e—a—c—e!"

Peace — a dream that brides have clutched  
Through lusty nights on lonely beds,  
And the quiet lover appears  
In roaring distance, a nimble hunter,  
Who rips up an evil beast with his righteous spear —  
A slim Tarzan donning steel and fire.

Peace — a ray of the End of Days: Isaiah's eternal dawn.  
O such a word yearned out of my mother's eyes —  
O eyes full of emptiness of bare larders!  
In every rustle in the street, in the steps of a shadow,  
She heard her Elinke from the end of the world —  
Elinke in every creak of a door, heralding desolate tidings.  
At dusk, alone with her grief, she banked the fires of evening.



*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

O Elinke remained, with eighteen brand new years,  
A green youth in the hatred of thorny fields.  
Elinke, trembling in the heart of my mother,  
Will love the flowers, the wind, and the stars forever,  
And will entrust to them his lost yearnings.  
O my mother, bent over the living image of Elinke,  
Saw Elinke's sky, blue in every corner.



MENKE

Alas, my mother is no more in the dancing circles of light.  
 My mother would have cooked potato *kneidlach* and Esau's lentils,  
 And dressed up in her Sabbath garb to greet the parades.  
 O my mama would have baked Michaleshik Strudel.  
 For the sake of her good children, my mother left  
 With the restless clouds, the longing wanderers.  
 In the suspect autumns she watches their every turn,  
 Lest the clouds, God forbid, be a disguised gang,  
 Loaded with gunpowder rain against her Elinke.

My mother would have said now:  
 "Alas alack,  
 What doctor can heal a mother's wounds?  
 What victory is stronger than the tear of a mother  
 Who gave up her son to the sun of the world?  
 What babbler can tell a mother  
 That somewhere he blossoms in an imaginary field,  
 That somewhere he will live — a hero forever."

When the last bullet falls from the last rifle,  
 And light and wind remain, pure as a child's laugh —  
 A grieving flower will darken the days,  
 A flower black with night and fear and the ash of bones,  
 A flower from the ghettos of Lithuania and Poland.  
 At the limpid call of every dawn,  
 My mother Badonna will emerge from my song  
 To weep for the saints of my generation.  
 In a world of flowers she will seek a thorn,  
 And on a stump that never savored  
 Sun or dew or soil,  
 She will find the black flower.  
 O the black flower — a goblet of slaveland Egypt,  
 Will enchant, drunk on my mother's tears,  
 And toast a bloody *L'chaim* to my generation.

**II****The End of Days**

I see the simple dream of honest people.  
They will toss away the millennial yoke.  
The misery of crooked ruins — an ancient hump —  
Will sit in legend, under a mountain of moss,  
Chased away from man, sun, space and time.

Dawn will thrust out the long long nights.  
Of beggar and king, queen and whore,  
Of poor and rich, of all the dirty evil —  
What will remain is:  
In a gray sky — wandering days,  
Of old clouds — a turgid river.

People will strike springs even from a rock.  
The holiday of labor — the nimble everyday  
Can pull rays even out of death.  
At the End of Days of wolf and lamb, of child and serpent,  
The plowshare — the former sword —  
Will plow the evil of the new earth  
Up to the last shadow, the last sound.

The old world, a witch with smashed teeth,  
Will claw through the locks of demolished jails.  
Hatred will remain sucked empty of its gall.  
A wind will come from my choked generation,  
Will swallow the ashes of charred gallows.  
O my every letter swears with the honest ink:  
What will remain is the world — a beautiful tale,  
Facing the eternal peace of the rainbow.

*MENKE*

### **In Tomorrow's Museum**

In the museum, our old-fashioned century will crawl.  
From a distant tomorrow people will see  
Our bright today in the land of Once Upon a Time:  
A winged worm — the king airplane,  
The mightiest wheel — a coffee mill.  
And the people of the distant tomorrow will see  
As many crowns of fire, as many ladders of steel,  
As much magic of Queen Broadway  
As there is play in a blinking candle.

In the museum, the battles of today will mould —  
Every battle — a mountain of twisted steel.  
Behind the dawn, corroded by rust,  
A cannon will stretch its condemned neck,  
An evil marvel for kith and kin.  
A thousand tornadoes of an atom bomb  
Will doze off, gray and forgotten,  
On a remaining pearl of a desolate throne.

*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

In the museum my people of Lithuania and Poland will be mute.  
A puff would scatter a grain of dust — a heart,  
A human extinguished in the echo of a sound.  
At dawn, a hero will live in every beam.  
At dusk a saint will die in every shadow.  
Jewish curses, like tangles of serpents,  
Will gnaw the enemy in moldy green dust.  
Jews whose sunset came in the Warsaw Ghetto  
Will flicker on the evening windowpanes.  
The evening will kindle the pondering skulls.  
The museum will frighten with eye sockets of a child's head.  
A firebrand will recall a destroyed house,  
A shadow of a serpent — a ripped-out braid.  
In the smoke of a chimney, a scorched sun will emerge.  
In a piece of soap made of marrow and dream and bone  
A cry stifled long-ago will hover  
And frighten the death of gassed horrors,  
That quartered the heart of my people —  
O my people of Lithuania and Poland:  
I see the Prophet Ezekiel seeking you in millions of graves,  
But I found you in a sad book of poems,  
And I saw even the God of Abraham slaughtered.

MENKE

### III

#### A Night in Warsaw Ghetto

I see a night in Warsaw Ghetto.  
 Old people keeping midnight vigil in bloody prayershaws,  
 Collecting all the tears of all Ninth of Avs, all Days of  
 Destruction,  
 And hurling every single tear at God Himself:  
 "Master of the Universe —  
 We of the four deaths: stoning, burning, killing, choking —  
 We demand resurrection of the dead.  
 Even Elijah did not hear our weeping,  
 When we saw the fear slithering like a snake,  
 We were blind, mad and lame  
 In desolate alleys, in bare ruins —  
 So how would Messiah son of David know us,  
 That we are plucked cemetery grass,  
 And the German burned even our souls?  
 Master of the Universe:  
 Drive away from us the flayed deaths!"

And the old people assaulted the skies,  
 And split the midnight with a horrifying blast of the ram's horn:  
*"Tekiyo!*  
*Shevorim!*  
*Tekio Gedoylo!"*

And echoes rush from distance to distance  
 And die out in a secret confession, saying:  
 "Messiah — Messiah — M—e—s—s—i—a—h!  
 Get on your horse and ride to us, come,  
 O you have tarried too long  
 And Exile hobbles the simple gait of your horse.  
 We see eternity in your Jewish eyes,  
 And your beard gleams with stars, with blessings and with dew."

*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

In the midnight of spring, torn pages of burned Torahs flutter  
And beg every grain of sand for a foothold.  
Pieces of a beard in the wind scream  
And seek the old people in the strewn ashes.  
And my dead brothers, the beheaded children,  
Hold their own beautiful heads,  
And like pure rivulets running down a mountain  
They murmur with the water:  
“Messiah, Messiah, Messiah!  
Get on your horse and ride to us, come,  
— O you have tarried too long —  
Lest we turn into blades of grass.”

Messiah is a firestorm,  
As if he fermented all the lava of the earth —  
Messiah is a rage that can bend death itself,  
Messiah is a water hero  
Who drives out all the abyss  
As if all the seas overflowed their shores,  
And flew on water wings against the foe.

*MENKE*

#### IV

##### **Dawn in the Ghetto**

Dawn is a flame of red banners,  
Dawn is the dream of white-blue banners,  
And those who throughout the ages  
With the dazzle of their own blood, the first light of the morning star,  
Have illuminated the martyr's death cell, the beggar's hut.  
They carry the dream to the sun.

A bright call illuminated the impending death:  
"Brothers, Jews of Warsaw Ghetto,  
Let lonely winds not blow apart anymore.  
Together there is sun and tempest, even against the wildest foe.  
Together there is miracle and courage — wonder on wonder.

— — — — —

Night in the ghetto.  
Death is a flame of red banners,  
Death is a flutter of white-blue banners:  
Every banner screams a curse to the mute world,  
So the most distant generation will hear.  
Saints sink into death  
To demand light of the eternal dark,  
To demand light of Death himself.  
And the banners of Zion fall — a white-blue dream falls,  
And red banners fall: the last sad evening rays.

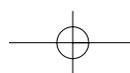


*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

The ghetto dons swastikas like demons.  
A stubborn fist is still there, clutching the sun —  
A fist — a torch that carries through the flames  
A bright dream of the Zion banner:  
“O if for us no day remains,  
We will dawn through the generations.”



O only you, my people, can love so eternally.  
Behold:  
Jews build a bridge of their own heads to Isaiah's dream.  
Behold:  
The corpses beam — a generation of dawns.  
Hark:  
Hosts come to chase away the death of the saints.



*MENKE*

**V**

**O My Brothers of Tomorrow**

A host of brothers comes from the distant After-Tomorrow,  
A host of unborn sisters.  
The last hangman chokes himself in fear,  
And in the dazzle — the shadowy poverty  
Vanishes in the dark of yesterday.

From Sodom to Warsaw —sated Death  
Will slaughter himself in evil.  
The brothers of tomorrow swear,  
The sisters of tomorrow swear:  
No Haman will again subjugate you, Israel,  
Not over the graves of saints, not in houses of mourning.  
Torquemada's eyes will no longer freeze above us.  
For the old Philistines a new Samson is waiting.

*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

O my brothers of tomorrow,  
O my unborn sisters:  
I send you a letter in tasteful *mame-loshn*,  
I send you the blessing of my blessed alphabet.  
Alas, a step of eternity separated us.  
O my distant grandchildren, I feel good  
That my song, unlike my body,  
Is bound to my unique century.  
I come to you, a song in your joy.  
O listen in the wind to my bold call.  
In your grief I am the shining solace,  
In your grief I am a tear of your dew,  
A hand caressing your suffering.  
O it would be good now to die with this poem  
And remain enclosed in the earth like a seed  
And rise with you after twenty generations,  
Not a man, but a flowerbed in a lonely valley  
And I in the flowerbed — a child of yesterday —  
Would blush through bowing roses,  
The spring of my generation would ache on every rose  
And smell of suffering, like a blooming wound.  
O the flowerbed would foam with poisonous wines,  
In its shadow grimacing the extinguished yesterday.

MENKE

## VI

### The Prophet Ezekiel

O brothers, Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto,  
You whose screaming blood — a curse against the enemy —  
Radiated on the red banner,  
And you, who in your last hands  
Zion hovered on the white-blue banner,  
Even when the falling ghetto wall screamed  
With leaping bricks, with stony shouts,  
And you, who, like Rabbi Akiva, like the Ten Martyrs,  
Did not stop whispering His Beloved Name,  
Even when white-hot tongs held every heart —  
I hear your *Shma Yisroel* lamenting in the wind for eternity,  
I hear the Prophet Ezekiel waking your unburied bones:  
Hear O Israel!  
Rise up —  
And gather the slaughtered hosts  
And let the world see  
My slaughtered people striding, host after host,  
And let the world see  
How much rage, how much courage there is even in death.

*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

Lo, my people comes — greeting the Prophet Ezekiel:  
Hebrews from deserts, steeped in sand.  
Jews, like mortar and bricks, walled-in in Egypt.  
Heroes against wild Canaanites, victors  
Who made thorns bloom with Jacob's blessings,  
Jews, armored hosts, the warriors of King David,  
Who protected Judea's crown with heads of Philistines,  
Jews with longing lyres on the rivers of Babylon,  
Sitting with a holy oath facing Jerusalem,  
Jews with dances, drums and songs  
Drawing home-home to Zion:  
The drums for Cyrus, the dances for Zerubavel,  
For God and for toil — the songs.

*MENKE*

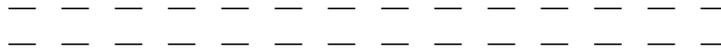
Lo, my people comes — toward the Prophet Ezekiel:  
 Jews from Modiyin, hiding in the mountains of Judea,  
 Who trudged through the nights with courage and faith,  
 Behind the steps of Judah the Maccabee, Judah the hero,  
 And choked the mighty idol with Jehovah's rage  
 (And no death could enslave the beauty of the Hannahs).  
 Until the giant gentile became a leprous midget,  
 Until the candle of light — the candle of hope —  
 Overcame all the darknesses of the wicked Antioch.

Jews from the flames of the Temple,  
 Who sacrificed their heads to Roman mockery.  
 Jews in arenas —ridiculed gladiators  
 In lost duels with lions  
 When Titus swore at the devoured Zealots:  
 "He who can slaughter a lion with his bare hands —  
 I swear by Jupiter he will live."  
 O Zealots of the Galilee, hanging on crosses behind Titus's march.  
 Wicked Titus drowned his rage with the blood of the Zealots.

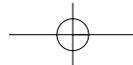
Jews who walked under Torquemada's whip,  
 Marranos devoured by the auto-da-fés of Spain,  
 Jews of Warsaw Ghetto with gassed eyes.  
 "Jews of all the ages are coming to the Prophet Ezekiel  
 And the Prophet bowed over my generation,  
 Sat in mourning even for the sun  
 And walked toward the morning star,  
 Whispering through every generation  
 Through every destruction:  
 "O happy Jews, O eternal sunrise."

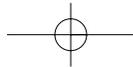


*THE SIMPLE DREAM*



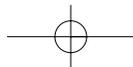
The Simple Dream of you and I will win  
With song and laughter over sorrow and tears.  
Everyone will be rich with the green-and-gold of years,  
With the curiosity of glowing desires,  
With the blessings of one land to another, one man to another,  
Only the skunk, the miser and the dark will remain poor.  
In the empty spiderweb, the spider will catch himself.  
In place of the ruins and the tears,  
The builder and the dreamer  
Will bless field and song, bird and beast.  
A child with the smile of an angel will calm  
The rage of God, of man and tempest.  
Even the eternal war between night and day  
Will become a play of sun and stars.  
Tomorrow embraces us all with arms that don't yet touch.

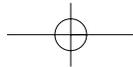






# **On Bicycles Through Central Park**





## *Triolettes*

### I

#### At Dawn

My street is a curious path longing for you to come.  
In this early hour you're my beginning — my first belief.  
In my tiny gray room, a dream beams even out of the dust.  
Through the windowpanes I see you, as from a dream you come.  
What power could now silence my festive unease?  
What desolate night, what monster can now steal the dawn?  
My street — an achieved path, poverty — a warning flower.  
In this early hour you're my beginning — my first belief.

City at dawn, we ride bicycles through Central Park.  
In the fires of windows, New York burned the night.  
O what light, what spring is as bright as your heart?  
We ride bicycles through the dawn of Central Park.  
Hey, bicycle, fly through valley under valley, through hill over hill.  
Hey, bicycle, carry us downhill with arms raised so light.  
I hear my childhood rustling through the woods of Central Park.  
In the fires of windows, New York burned the night.

I don't know if from joy or from sorrow I am strong,  
I could hurl a mountain in a vale,  
I could chase the dark into yesterday's tale —  
I don't know if from joy or from sorrow I am strong,  
Say, if from love or from unrest you are soft,  
I could glow into the secret of the sunset.  
I don't know if from joy or from sorrow I am strong,  
I could hurl a mountain in a vale.

*MENKE*

Eternity sets, an hour with you will never die.  
 See, here are shadows — ghosts, here shadows become beams.  
 Dark is shaking over dark and falls.  
 Eternity sets, an hour with you will never die.  
 The day comes toward us with the tremor of a baby's sigh.  
 A generation in love waits for every moment of the day.  
 Eternity sets, an hour with you will never die.  
 See, here are shadows — ghosts, here shadows become beams.

We ride bicycles through a bygone tale.  
 Girl, you're in love with me — a long departed sun.  
 Miriam dances through the ages against God and light and victory.  
 We ride bicycles through a bygone tale.  
 Caves cry eternally and resound with God's healing voice.  
 As many birds so many songs my people spun.  
 The brightest morning bursts out of the darkest vale.  
 Girl, you're in love with me — a long departed sun.

What is more beautiful than you and Isaiah's dream  
 If not my people — a childish dawn through horrors of ages.  
 We ride bicycles through endless wastelands.  
 What is more beautiful than you and Isaiah's dream  
 If not my people through night, through vision and jackals howl,  
 Hunted by wild Amaleks, chased by sand storms.  
 What is more beautiful than you and Isaiah's dream,  
 If not my people — a childish dawn through horrors of ages.

*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

I see my people — my young, my ancient people,  
With confident tread over slippery rocks.  
Old wolves etch their teeth in the rock.  
My people strides — my young, my ancient people.  
One straying step, one frozen stare —  
And of Isaiah's dream no trace is left.  
But eternal is my young, my ancient people,  
With confident tread over slippery rocks.

I see you in the east, girl — a bold morrow.  
We ride bicycles through rocks, through woods, through dreams.  
On a bicycle — a chariot of fire, the sun rides out.  
Let us ride, my dear, to the boldest morrow.  
Hey, bicycle, run, flee to that joyous age.  
O through insolent thorns — you are the modest rose.  
I see you in the east, girl — a bold morrow.  
We ride bicycles through rocks, through woods, through dreams.

*MENKE***II****At Dusk**

O the bicycle, my song, and you with seven graces.  
 The week gurgles like a hasty wellspring with simple words.  
 A generation of Menkes and Chaikas rises from our joy like birds.  
 We ride bicycles through the seven graces.  
 The holiday is lucid as God, like song, like you yourself.  
 The simple word "mother" moves us to tears.  
 O the bicycle, my song, and you with seven graces.  
 The week gurgles like a hasty wellspring with simple words.

My mother's goodness wells up in your clever eyes.  
 The evening expires in prayer, in wailing, and in flame.  
 A breeze whispers my mother's last words.  
 My mother's goodness wells up in your clever eyes.  
 Her life flew off in a dream like a flock of birds.  
 The day falls asleep with my mother's eternal sleep.  
 My mother's goodness wells up in your clever eyes.  
 The evening expires in prayer, in wailing and in flame.

Woe, who silenced the Prophets' searing curse?  
 Jeremiah laments from his lonely pit, hear:  
 — Who will drive a plow through the cursed earth?  
 Woe, who silenced the Prophets' searing curse?  
 As many jackals as wandering, wind and lament —  
 My people was destined through four thousand autumns.  
 Woe, who silenced the Prophets' searing curse?  
 Hear Jeremiah lament from his lonely pit.

*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

While there are keys, the locks are shut.  
 While there are pesky flies, spiders are still alive.  
 As the fly prays, so the spider is full.  
 Hey, bicycle, flee from keys, from shut locks!  
 While the gravedigger is still here, the serpent is alert.  
 While there are gallows, darkness chokes the dawn.  
 While there are keys, the locks are shut.  
 Hey, bicycle, flee from keys, from shut locks!

O I am rich with so many golden mornings,  
 As I am rich with the grief of long long nights.  
 Let us hurl the sun through blind, sick nights.  
 We are riding bicycles to the golden morning.  
 A last beam, cramped, wants to tell the victor, darkness,  
 That light will always triumph at the end of the duel.  
 O I am rich with so many golden mornings,  
 As I am rich with the grief of long long nights.

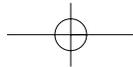
O how much birth in the shadows of a spring night?  
 Lilith asks: What is holier than sin?  
 That sin stammers with the first baby babble.  
 O how much birth in the shadows of a spring night?  
 Our heart is awake like the sunrise against mountains of darkness.  
 Time is always new like an eternal baby.  
 O how much birth in the shadows of a spring night?  
 Lilith asks: What is holier than sin?

Now, at present, this moment is our turn to live —  
 So many ages behind us, so many ages ahead.  
 O the dazzle of evening is good even on the cemetery's path.  
 Now, at present, this moment is our turn to live.  
 It is good for the butterfly to flutter one moment.  
 It is bad to be a lonely brook squeezed between mountains.  
 Now, at present, this moment is our turn to live —  
 So many ages behind us, so many ages ahead.



*MENKE*

O my only Chaika, my girl:  
A moment with you is a whole spring.  
The oldest antiquity is young as you.  
O bicycles, lead us, lead us astray.  
The night kindles such a pure pain —  
Such a Lilith-night, a magic ring.  
O my shining Chaika, my girl  
A moment with you is a whole spring.



**III****Grandfather's Wine**

Bicycle, hey, bicycle, let us ride  
Into the invented land,  
Until Abel's ridiculed claim  
Becomes the "pillar of fire" through the march of years.  
Through the farthest past, let us ride,  
Until only Genesis remains — the first light.  
Bicycle, hey, bicycle, let us ride  
Into the invented land.

Hey, bicycle, run, chase the old Today.  
Today almost choked all laughter.  
Let us, my girl, my, oh my, not die today.  
Hey, bicycle, run, catch up with the new Today:  
Where Yesterday and Tomorrow are also Today —  
A setting day is a rare flower.  
So much Today, so much Today, so much Today.  
The Today almost stifled every laugh.

*MENKE*

In a dream of the past I saw the new Today,  
Today is drunk on so many grandfather's wines.  
If there were no day, man himself would have shone.  
In a dream of the past I saw the new Today,  
If there were no sun, the blind would see,  
If there were no sound, the deaf would hear.  
Without the tears of the past, there would be no song of Today,  
And Today is drunk on so many grandfather's wines.

Without thorns, there might be no flowers.  
Without birth pangs, how could the dawn be bright?  
Without such a long night, how would there be the first light?  
Without a bicycle, how would I have come to the land of dreams?  
Without death, life would be silent as before Genesis.  
Without ancient times, where would we have gotten modern  
wine?  
Without thorns, there might be no flowers.  
Without birth pangs, how could the dawns be bright?

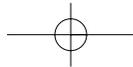
From pensive antiquity no mold ever remains.  
In the Talmud, antiquity is a venerable grandfather.  
My girl, one ray of the past is enough for both of us.  
From pensive antiquity no mold ever remains.  
Antiquity in a field is a blue sky in love.  
In every shadow around us, hear the past speak.  
From pensive antiquity no mold ever remains.  
In the Talmud, antiquity is a venerable grandfather.

*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

We are eternal, because life lives in eternity.  
It is not true, there is no death.  
There is such a bright, eternal hour.  
We are eternal, because life lives in eternity.  
One moment gives us a hundred years of joy.  
After our death, there is no death.  
We are eternal, because life lives in eternity.  
It is not true, there is no death.

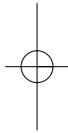
What is older than the oldest wine?  
What is brighter than the first ray  
When the long night falls and falls?  
What is older than the oldest wine?  
I know spring is the oldest wine.  
The heart is brighter than the first ray.  
You are every wine of spring,  
Through every end — a first ray.

Bicycle, hey, bicycle, let us ride  
Into the invented land,  
Until Abel's ridiculed claim  
Becomes the "pillar of fire" through the march of years.  
Through the farthest past, let us ride,  
Until only Genesis remains — the first light.  
My girl, hey, my girl, let us ride  
Into the invented land.





# Sacred Yiddish



MENKE

## *A Song to Chaika*

Jewish girl, Chaika from Michaleshik,  
With the two-thousand-year line of Mother's Sacred Yiddish,  
Simple and flowing like a Lithuanian stream is your name.  
My whole life I caressed your modest charm.  
My whole life I kissed your every wound.

So, it's easy for me to know  
How much faith in the first glow of morning:  
One gaze at you and I know  
So much wandering is in your Jewish eyes.

So, it's easy for me to know  
How much drunkenness there is in one moment of May:  
One touch and I know  
So much womanly magic in the rainbow.

So, it's easy for me to know  
How a heart can bear so much festive light:  
One hour with you and I know  
How easy it is to span eternity from shore to shore.

Jewish girl, yearning Chaika,  
See,  
A rose falls in love with a distant cloud,  
But the swift cloud rushes off  
And the rose remains hurt, deceived.  
See,  
How much life was poured into patient earth?  
How much sap flows like wine in the full late summer?  
How much blessing ladens  
Every bending branch of an apple orchard?  
See,  
Only from a strong-rooted trunk can apples ripen.

*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

My childhood in mossy *Cheider* alleys,  
With Sabbath angels in every weekday dream —  
I have made them blossom through you as a rare flower,  
Though your cradle stood here  
In the stony vision: New York.  
For you,  
I now sow the fragrant lines, like fresh, smooth flowerbeds.  
At your every step, at your every limb,  
I stop as before a sudden miracle:  
God, with so much lucid longing, the stars call us forever.

Jewish girl, lucid Chaika,  
To you my rustling unrest, to you my softest song.  
From the blind depth my love to you shone like a sun,  
And now  
Steeped in the dawn fire,  
I forge out of myself and out of the world  
The ugliest wound, the blackest sin.  
O in this age of destruction,  
All my boyish joy, all my blessing song to you —  
May it not perish.

MENKE

## *Michaleshik*

Michaleshik, my village of poor Lithuania,  
Where the wind used to tell the ancient legends,  
Where every boy — a knight out of a tale —  
Would lead his princess through enchanted caves.

Michaleshik, through your nights I saw  
Even pensive stars interpret the Talmud.  
O I was your hungriest devoté,  
And I heard in my dream the hymns of angels.

Michaleshik, my village of poor Lithuania,  
In my every limb your wounds throb.  
Your heart expires through me, cut up by the foe.  
All your lament and your ruin lurk in me.

Sometimes you see the world at the rim of sunset:  
In that sinking hour the sun shakes  
As if the crooked shadows of demise  
Triumphed over the wise light of the ages.

Darkness is strong, in a pitch blind night,  
And while you see no sign of a ray,  
You think the horror night is eternal,  
You think the darkness will never fall.

Michaleshik — my little village, Germanized,  
The victory of German and Murder will never be a victory  
And will never stop one pace of the sun.  
With all the charms of *mame-loshn*, babies will shine upon you one day.

## *A Kind of a Lullaby*

Lully-lully-lullaby, my son,  
 Lully-lullaby.  
 The German chose for your father eternal dark  
 And took the last beam away from your cradle,  
 Here remained only the shadow of mourning and ripping.  
 Lully-lully-lullaby, my son,  
 Lully-lullaby.

The German plucked the spring from the flowers  
 And every singing tree remained — a mute gallows.  
 The German choked the sun with garroting hands  
 And a cold grave remained — the whole earth.  
 Lully-lully-lullaby, my son,  
 Lully-lullaby

The German is a sated crow that crows: Victory!  
 And its crow-crow remains the only song:  
 “Crow-crow, I am beautiful!  
 I am beautiful crow-crow!  
 Beautiful is the blond glow on a wound.  
 Beautiful is the rose bloom on a grave.  
 “Crow-crow, I am healthy —  
 Crow-crow!  
 Healthy is everything that death has healed.  
 Healthy, a worm can creep to a corpse,  
 Crow-Crow I am healthy —  
 Crow-crow!  
 “Crow-crow I am just.  
 I am just crow-crow.  
 My sword is more just than justice:  
 Just is the last hour in a death cell.  
 Just is in a flowery field — the thorny gallows,  
 Just is the curse that follows my almighty command,  
 And the bullet that rips up a heart is more just than everything.”

*MENKE*

Lully-lully-lullaby, my orphan,  
Lully-lullaby.  
Your rustle scatters a bony fear  
And I fear even a simple street tree,  
Lest it turn into a naked scarecrow.  
And I fear even to invent for you a dream  
Lest a listening stone hear it,  
And even the eye of a star can denounce.

Lully-lully-lullaby, my orphan,  
Lully-lullaby.  
Angels hover over you  
And ask you to be good  
And ask you to be sha—a  
Hu-sh-sh-sh-sh — — —  
Lest your cry recall  
That a stray spark of light goes out somewhere:  
Lully-lully-lullaby, my orphan,  
Lully-lullaby.

*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

## ***O Chaika – O My Small Town***

### **I**

O my small town, O my barefoot childhood,  
In a dream I sought your crooked alleys.  
Through a ruin, a sick light still glowed,  
In our garden an ash flower still frightened.

In vain did I seek through you a leaf of life.  
The second flood flooded even Noah and his dove.  
Instead of children, joyful crows hovered,  
Instead of Jews, burned pages fluttered praise to God.

On Pig Street, among the dead, only Chaika  
Alone remained — a mirage: an invented woman.  
Night after night she counts the stars, she counts the dead  
And curses the sky that will not stop being blue:

A heap of ashes recalls a familiar face.  
Michaleshik on a cloud — a straying land.

*MENKE*

## II

### **Chaika Among the Ruins**

O Michaleshik, blind, with no tears, I lament you.  
Your curse is on me, who sees you trampled by the foe.  
Your curse is on God who didn't hear your wail.  
Come, my love, at least in a vision may your shadow creep.

O come, I am your destined one clothed by the moon.  
The Viliya plaits water braids from dead figures.  
I am the solace on graves of children and grandfathers.  
O Michaleshik, I shall walk with you to the stars.

At the stars I will meet my bridegroom.  
I see him longing through the ages — a knight in love,  
Cast from the wells of a distant spring.  
O come, my love — hero of ancient whirlwinds—

Like Joshua in Gibeon, stop the sun,  
May the Emorite fall today to last man.



*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

**III**

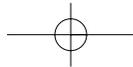
**Come, My Love**

My love, all that was life in me,  
You will know in the flowers of winey orchards.  
A summer web will couple us.  
All that was night in you, my love will sear it.

O the weight of a grave will never bend you —  
Your Elijah's wonder, a heap of tales in the wind.  
Come my love, with Samson's courage in your eyes,  
O come, kindle the first ray through the end of all suns.

Come, I see my people writes a shining fate,  
But now, let the destruction scatter me out of the blue,  
You must gather my limbs like Israel's pearls,  
And, my love, let my bones become an eternal lyre.

O bright, the tormented today will become like my beloved.  
As many as the sand of the sea, so much light will my people be.



*MENKE*

## ***Yiddish – My Song, Chaika – My Gold***

### **I**

And he who loves, like life itself,  
The simple mame-loshn that my people told,  
For him your name is beautiful, O beautiful,  
O Chaika, my song, Chaikala, my gold.

Hear: a mountain stream rolls down  
Into a spring valley, beautiful and tame.  
Hear: the echo of a lover's call  
Caresses and whispers your name.

The hangman's hand, brandishing a whip,  
Flogged every letter of your name.  
You know the taste of mud and blood.  
Your name, of fire and rock it came.

O Chaika — my song, Chaikala my gold,  
Like simple mame-loshn that my people told.

*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

## II

O Chaika — Yiddish, Yiddish — my song, Yiddish — my gold.  
Your word is thorny from the scorn of friend and foe,  
With your letters you could build a thorny wall.  
Every letter was kissed by my mother and by God.

Your curse seethes with gall of a ridiculed tear.  
Your blessing — Jacob's ladder, a legend of yore.  
Angels bring you down, carry you up to the stars.  
In the black time, you are my path, light like you, my heaviest yoke.

O Chaika — Yiddish, Yiddish — my song, Yiddish — my gold.  
Against the enemy, your every letter flew like a stone.  
(Hey, sour aesthete, hey, philistine with shaved sounds,  
I see the same mockery in the murderer's eyes.)

Chaika — Yiddish, I walk in love through hail and wind,  
As if the first tremor of dawn ignited me like a cinder.

*MENKE*

**III**

O Chaika — Yiddish: I am writing my song to you.  
And my eye is so alert, my heart so clear.  
I shake a distant hand through pensive paper,  
See: a Jew reads my book a hundred years from now.

He reads a storybook of my generation —  
And Yiddish is not a weeping princess,  
Yiddish on his tongue — an enchanted truth,  
Takes him through poems, through graves, through stars.

And at my dark confession, the Jew remains  
In fear, doubled up from my word.  
Over me and my generation — fossilized tremor,  
Around him — the world, a nearby rainbow.

And I — in love, will shine from the dust,  
I will make you into a sun, transparent, pure and exalted.

*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

**IV**

O Chaika — Yiddish, Yiddish — my song, Yiddish — my gold.  
My villages — Michaleshik, Svintsyan,  
Jagged and hollow — cursed by God, flower, and man,  
Their light is now in you.

The first light will chase the vermin from their lair.  
Where maggots were, a bird will build its nest.  
A twisted shadow cannot stand long against the sun.  
Man will forever trust in the Messiah.

The sea of blood and dark overflows its banks,  
But even the longest night, starless and blind,  
Will always fear our “good morning.”  
In the place of thorns, a child will still laugh.

And the child will laugh aloud in our mame-loshn  
Through small towns extinguished by a Nazi hand.

*MENKE*

V

And if at my death, I am fated to hear  
From the noisy street a Yiddish child's babble,  
My last moment will become the first star,  
An eternal song through extinguished eyes.

And I will joyfully whisper my confession, Chaika:  
"O if I blackened one sunrise for anybody,  
Brothers, if I tore somebody's heart  
With a sharp word, as with a thorn, somewhere:

"O forgive me, my brothers — my limbs,  
My sister, my beloved, forgives.  
I swear by you, by my poem, by one moment of being —  
Every sin will remain a mourning tear on my body."

I see Yiddish in the garden of tongues: — my ghetto flower,  
Yiddish — a bubbling brook of long-muted cries.



*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

**VI**

Man will give to the earth with his body, to the sky with his dream.

Joy will give both the elephant, the giant fool,  
And the sad gnat, a gray dot of life.

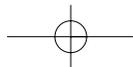
In a long-past autumn, the tree of poverty will wither.

Through winter nights, kissed by snowflakes, at the fireplace,  
Grandfather Yiddish will tell of years gone by, of rich and poor.  
Somewhere, a moldy man — a spider — will still rot over his gold.

O the dawn will give a golden dream, equal and rich —

And equally he will give to all his light and joy:  
To the fox, the sage of the forest, and the stupid chicken,  
To the coquette, the rose with dewy pearls on her gown.  
For the worm, a grain of dust will be a table in the sun.

Fellow Jews, we will again start from Adam: I confess.  
Jews, we will yet plant the Tree of Life: I confess.



MENKE

## *Hanukah*

I see eight candles in the last windowpane  
Of my ruined town.  
One flicker falls weary,  
One flame proudly leaps up.  
The blind windowpane rattles in the wind.

Every candle — a scared ray.  
Bending, begging, huddling, doubling up.  
Every candle — a jittery prayer,  
A millennium of crying no one heard:  
An eye of a praying grandmother,  
Beaten and mocked by the cursed Amalek.

My people, you are destined  
Like these candles, to light forever, to dream forever.  
All wound, you will drown out the roaring monster,  
All hope, you will silence the most seething abyss.  
Your smallest ray will live through the longest night.

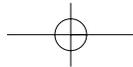
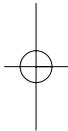
Not the hangman's choking rage,  
Not the wildest storm could extinguish your candles.  
You console, you call, you demand for the gallow years.  
You change the most dreadful hour into a hellish flame  
That blocks the enemy's black visions in a ring of fire.  
You ignite the courage that breaks the deadliest vises.

I see eight candles — eight stars of an ancient night,  
In a last windowpane of my ruined town.  
I hear Judah Maccabee roaring the song of the Jew:  
"Through all the hangings, all the pyres, the Treblinkas,  
Chana, beauty and faith are your eternal spring."  
He holds a candle of light — to burn all the dark.  
He waves a brave fist, O Judah's clenched fist  
Stabs Apollonius the Wicked with his own sword.

*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

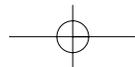
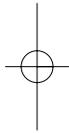
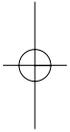
O Matisyohu,  
With you and your five sons, we are people of heroes.  
With your light, with your courage, we stride —  
Through pitch and Germans and tar — to victory.  
O Johanan, Simeon, Judah, Eliezer, Jonathan,  
Like you, we carry Hanukah candles through December winds.  
We swear like you, we swear:  
Antioch will become a rotten yesterday  
Under a springtime, Hasmonean earth.

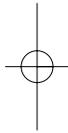
Awake, Judah!  
Cast out the raging millennia!  
After the Flood, only the just remain.  
Your call gushes through our every turn  
To victory!  
To victory!  
Hear:  
The same Antioch collapses before the new Maccabbean generation.





## **A Curse on Loneliness**





*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

## ***A Curse on Loneliness***

A curse on you, O loneliness,  
In my gray room  
And on wide, vagabond roads.  
O loneliness, I trusted you  
With my most yearning years.

How many times have I,  
Far from man, from sun, from world,  
Locked myself with you, O loneliness,  
And distracted you with the sick shadow of a candle,  
When New York dazzled: a rock of vision and light.

I sought a trace of my dream  
Through the cynical fires of the night city,  
And the suspicious darkness came to me.  
I sought the sense of joy in the unrest of wandering  
And met a strayed, ridiculed god.

Now I give you back all the tempting lights  
For a shining word that can light up the dreary heart.  
I give you back all the charms of flower and tree and wellspring  
For the intimate look of a newly arrived friend.  
In a long longed for, arrived moment  
I heard a harp through all the ages.  
Now I give you back Beethoven's divine symphonies  
For the good tidings brought by a surprise voice.

*MENKE****A Night in the Lonely Forest***

Long and mournful is the night here in the lonely forest.  
 I would give all birdsongs for a simple chat.  
 The crickets' chirping so sad and monotonous,  
 You feel like breaking into tears yourself:  
 Cricket to cricket — chirp-chirp-chirp,  
 Cricket to cricket — chirp-chirp-chirp.

My own angst pursues me as with whips —  
 Calm down, my angst, calm down.  
 The brook murmurs new tales of ancient times:  
 That Methuselah's twenty lives turned into a thousand years of  
 boredom,  
 That Adam and Eve went out alone to face the brutal sentence of  
 eternal life,  
 That in the forsaken Paradise, the happy serpent still crawls —  
 Calm down, my angst, calm down.

I hear the roaring of a bound beast in the lonely forest.  
 A wild scream wants to silence for a moment the eternal cricket  
 choir,  
 But neither fire nor man nor storm  
 Can change a single tone of the stubborn chirping:  
 Cricket to cricket — chirp-chirp-chirp,  
 Cricket to cricket — chirp-chirp-chirp.

Long and mournful is the night in the lonely forest.  
 The moon — primeval gray pest,  
 Won't weary of grooming herself in shroud light.  
 Somewhere, through the yearning distance, a wounded bird  
 screams.  
 O how I would scatter myself now in bits of storm  
 And joust with tree, with rock, with beast.

*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

A storm in the forest:  
The wind, pursued by a mighty curse,  
Cannot find a moment of calm in all the somewheres.  
For the wind, a moment of calm is a moment of death.  
Hear:  
How many nations are trumpeting in the wind?  
How many nations, in decline, are lamenting in the wind?

The wind struggles with its cursed lot:  
The sense of the endless pursuit is to chase yourself away,  
But the wind chased and chased for a whole eternity  
And did not chase himself away —  
So maybe the wind condemned himself to eternal lament,  
And he himself — from open love —  
Locked himself in hatred,  
While even the stalk of the smallest grass  
Is not destined for him,  
And therefore  
He throws about his courage, he pursues his rage.  
The poorest tree must collapse first.  
From a flickering house, he tore off the roof.  
The wind — full of rage, went after  
The trembling straws of toiling nests,  
And left stiff birds — silenced, choked.  
A victorious dust danced over the forest.  
The proud oak must kneel on his broken knees.  
The wind plucked all the generations from the forest giant.

-----

*MENKE*

C—a—l—m.

The forest is steeped in a beastly sleep.

Every shadow is a visionary — a curious secret.

In the glow of my gaze the flower smiles, the tree grows pensive:

— A forest a—l—o—n—e is steeped in fear to the rim of demise.

And as many times as man was here

And as many times that man will still be here —

So many times was the vision here,

So many times will the vision still be here.

C—a—l—m.

The tree bows in a prayer of leaves:

“O who condemns me to stand here for ages?

Curse me, God,

To crawl at least like the serpent.

Bless me, God,

To run with my branches as on wings:

Above mountains, above cities, above seas, to escape the forest

To run to the true love of one single person.”

But God does not answer in such a long, mournful night.

*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

## ***The 'Doll'***

The Doll was a homunculus with a purse full of gold.  
Even his brightest dream was half-belly, half-pate,  
And even the child's sky looked potbellied to him.  
When he once saw my slim poem,  
He began to crawl on all fours.

And with him, all the nights of blind autumns  
And all the bright nights of twenty golden summers,  
Under one grocery roof — you violated your shining body,  
And what remained was an eternal partnership — your children.

And as the Doll roared like a stallion  
And brandished his eyes — two carving knives,  
What remains of you is barely one breath of life,  
And what remains of you is barely a sack of fear and tears.  
And lost years, dazzled, sick,  
And with you they all fell:  
Pound-heavy bracelets — goiter suns,  
Coquettish rings — insolent stars.  
In the gray Philadelphia street — a scattered rainbow.  
A life fell apart in gold and in blood — a sold yesterday.  
The Philadelphia princess has turned into a disembodied ghost.

And as the Doll, like a sated rat, vanished into his lair,  
I found you — a raw, crawling wound.  
The springtime was trampled under the Doll's wooden legs.  
In the extinguished eyes, searing fires ignited,  
The dirty tresses shampooed in blood.  
Your body, abandoned, half naked,  
Scattered among police, prostitutes, and doctors.

*MENKE*

I carried you in my arms —  
A bruised, sinking vision,  
And declining, I heard your cries —  
As my forefathers, heads covered with ashes,  
Burst into a lament at a sudden evil decree.  
And I, bent over every bruise, every pain,  
Stubbornly, long, I woke up the dawn,  
And over the darkness — a first ray  
Finished my poem like this:

“Ethel,  
For your sake the false stars are declining now.  
As much past in a single tear,  
So much present in the charm of a woman:  
Mine is the present, and yours the first ray.”



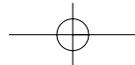
*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

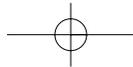
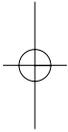
## ***Friends***

O together with friends, your heart aches with joy.  
How much wonder on wonder is in a simple handshake?  
A human word plays more beautifully than the most touching flutes.  
A heart is more summery than summer itself.  
A dream is more fragrant than all flowerbeds.

At dusk, after gray toil,  
O what is brighter than a human smile?  
A sweet sorrow gnaws at your blood at the last fire of evening.  
The sun dies singing a hymn to People.  
— O People,  
Take me as a magic harp and play on me your eternal life.  
It is so good with light moments to chase away the stubborn yoke.  
O sunny longing, cauterize the dirty hatred in our bodies.  
It is so good to remain for a translucent hour at the set table.  
My friends, my brothers, my dreams,  
If each of us is in love with the brightest dream,  
Who can be the most loving?  
Ours is the love that can light up the black lot.  
Ours is the love that can turn the most horrible night into day.

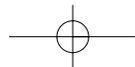
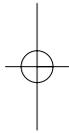
O with friends together, the furthest legend becomes a close friend.  
From all the ages, God emerges to bless man, the only creator.  
Towers of the night — heroes, rise with stars — the wisdom of ages.  
The windows are shining stairs to an endless life.  
Lo, a street cries — a forest with lopped-off branches.  
Lo, a street laughs through the violence of steel and man.  
The city clatters as if melted winters stream from the mountains  
As restless falling waters to surrender to the first spring.

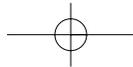






## Evening Bread





*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

## ***Evening Bread***

***for Ethel***

The evening gives away its riches to doves, tramps, and children,  
To brother poets and to ourselves.  
In the little room, the heroes of folktales are mirrored now.  
The table blooms like a fresh garden bed after a rain.

Lying and clatter live in cities, God lives apart.  
O God moved here to the fourth floor.  
He walks with evening steps, through miracle and wonder.  
Of the sun a forlorn wound remains.

On the half-dark windowpanes, a dying world sets.  
The table smells like a garden bed with opened buds.  
The vegetables boast, prepared by nimble hands,  
The fruit steeped in light and wind.

The now past summer is green again  
And brings the blessing of tasty fields so close.

*MENKE*

In every corner, the poverty is cleaned up chererfully cheerfully.  
The daily bread hides the rustle of blessing rye.  
The sweet old day came late into our room,  
To leave us its luxury, to wish long years to our joy.

The plates ripen with the full sap of a mature orchard.  
On the horizon, various darkneses are towering.  
The sun heavy with the demise of battles — a sinking wheel —  
Sinks people and gods, countries and planets, in its last spin.

The sun crumbles into stone, smoke, and dust, in leaking light.  
The night — a dark Hercules, a hidden death-ray —  
Scatters the day into chaos, into time before Eve.  
O angel and demon will soon, O soon, fall into an abyss.

Like burst atoms, the night flings death and death and death.  
O it is good to set now, as lucid as the last light.



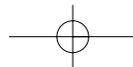
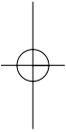
*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

Until the End of Days, man will dream in pensive evenings.  
Do not fear, my dear, the roar of atoms  
Will not silence my poem to you, the softest prayer.  
The brightest sun made by man will not darken God's light.

The windiest chase, the most artful wing, the fastest wheel  
Will never catch up with the life of a colorful butterfly.  
The most modern ray will not make the modest dawn old-fashioned.  
All the power of a monster, all the depth of a secret

Will not block the blessing of our simple evening bread.  
Man will forever love the cool shadow of a tree.  
Of an artificial flower, no dew ever remained.  
O where is the miracle that can weave a noose for death?

The evening cuts through the flames — a golden path for our fate.  
From a distant springtime, the first swallows fly toward us.



*MENKE*

In the street, at listening windows, an Irish beggar sings  
Of a boy who won't stop lamenting in the wind for his beloved:  
"O Mary, of all the Dublin flowers, you were the loveliest.  
See my heart, trampled in the streets, borne on your call."

Pennies fall like distant tidings, softly wrapped in papers,  
As if the good people upstairs make sure that  
The clatter of pennies will not awaken the beggar's calamities.  
On pennies as on wings he sees his beloved hover:

"O Mary, your bright smile cleanses my dirty Irish bones.  
Glowing girl, your kiss kindled my blood like Apollo's,  
But any dog's cry barks my beggar's lot."  
The beggar with the vision of a girl disappeared —

Through cold labyrinths, stony desolation of New York's sunset,  
In the bachelor street, his moving song still trembles.

*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

The night in our little room gushes with sated calm.  
The night smoothed the hours with lunar hands.  
In the secret of our bed, only Genesis and me and you.  
The little room — a paradise with no serpent and no fig leaves.

From somewhere the screeching city breaks through.  
Around us shadows stray from Adam's world:  
Adam, I too, at the Tree of Knowledge, would have betrayed God.  
O not eternity, God, give me a fruit of the sinful garden.

The smell of coffee rises from my tenth cup.  
Light, casual chats — long, talkative letters.  
When only mourning grass remains of us,  
Who will babble the chats — the long, talkative letters?

Ethel, behind you, a golden goblet filled with tears,  
Facing you, a poet's little window filled with stars.

Childhood cannot create old age.  
Not old age, it is love that gnaws at your whole heart.  
A touch makes the thorny years bloom.  
From every star pure childhood emerges:

Fifteen springs, seventeen springs, how much light?  
Girl, I hear you, panting, telling me a secret:  
"O my dear, my beautiful beautiful boy,  
A dream comes from an old blue flame.

"And from an old blue flame,  
You brought me in our little room again,  
Just such a moment — an enchanted dew,  
A basket full of roses, kisses, and poems."

Fifteen springs, seventeen springs, how much light?  
O my dear, beautiful beautiful boy in the night.

*MENKE*

Dawn lined up the rays in shining hosts.  
Night sends chunks of dark into battle, creeping shadows,  
Like a knifed gang of a defeated underworld.  
The sun in love embraces the cities and towns of the metropolis.

A shrewd tradesman bought up the old moon  
And exchanged the stars for silver junk.  
The night with all the curses of the Bible is fleeing,  
But could not escape her eternal foe, the dawn.

The night flees into attics, into underground skies,  
Where the day falls down at dawn, choked by poverty.  
Even in us, the night remained: over the city dozes off  
A sun — a golden calf made of marrow and bone, light and death.

Not forever will calf-gods circle the roads of life.  
Yes, the true dream of this poem I gave to you.

## *At the Start of Sunset*

I met you at the start of sunset,  
The hour was pure, the joy clean.  
We walked through evening, through fires.  
Now I see you barefoot, in a village dress.  
You are the spungold of evening wellsprings.  
Now I see you far away in a fantastic ball.  
You came dressed up in evening,  
You wear every ray, like a fireflower,  
So many first stalks in the grains of a last sheaf.  
The evening took you apart in jewelry.  
O see, my dear, the sunset can die so beautifully.

As much light as there still is in early sunset,  
So much supple voluptuousness in your limbs,  
And in my steps so much Genesis-song.  
You are the hour in love that grants me my poem.  
O good is the late breeze from the west.  
Of heavy gold, of saturated ripeness,  
The fragrant rye bends in late summer in the sated field.  
I love the reality of every dream, the dream of every reality.  
In reality, sadness is muddier, in dream, love is more loving.  
Of all my unrest, of my windy thirty-nine years,  
What remains for me, if not you and my festive poem.

And if, of too much dazzle, O dazzling woman,  
The years suddenly rush forward,  
We shall sit at a dream on the side  
And gather the ripe years in sheaves:  
A fresh-mown field, in the evening distance,  
Will darken with sorrow, with caressing silence.  
O birds will circle above us, nostalgic.  
The clear yearning gnaws always with its first flutter.  
So much evening play still remains for you and me  
Until the late rose of autumn freezes cold and flat.  
O my love, the last ray can love like the first.

*MENKE*

You hid your years in your dimples.  
 No, your young grayish hairs  
 Are not the first sign of a sorrowful night.  
 Eternal is the sin of a glowing woman.  
 Your blossoming thirty-seven years  
 Brought me such an orchard of limbs.  
 Gray hairs but are distant, starry figures,  
 When curiosity of the desiring eyes subsides,  
 You will cuddle my poem and make small talk like this:  
 "Menke, Menke, alas, such a golden hour flew away,  
 And the old old dew weeps like a child."

I fade with you at the end of sunset.  
 O who can trust his own shadow now?  
 Out of a beautiful tale, our death emerged  
 With childish fear of a good-natured bear —  
 A clown, donning wonder on wonder.  
 O let us play out his bearish turn,  
 With a grandmother's chant, with a poppyseed cookie.  
 All disappeared like a rare wine.  
 O you will remain, like Lilith, sin itself,  
 Over Abraham's sky, eternally blue,  
 In my poem you'll remain — beauty itself.

You came dolled up in evening,  
 You wear every ray, like a fireflower.  
 So many first stalks in the grains of a last sheaf.  
 The evening took you apart in jewelry.  
 O see, my dear, the sunset can so beautifully die.

*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

## *Alone*

### I

Menke, come to my lonely garret.  
All my charms await you.  
I love the twists of your distant shadow.  
O alone, I mirror myself in the evening.

Night after night, you are the wings of my sleep:  
My longing hand beckons you from afar.  
In every dream I met you,  
But your voice was alien, your touch unknown.

O if you suddenly came in,  
Weary of dreams on wavering roads —  
How could I afford so much light?  
How would I have parted from my old loneliness?

I would have rocked you in my arms, a weary man,  
You would have been limb of my limb, and I — the song of your songs.



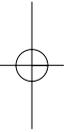
*MENKE*

**II**

I bear the burden of loneliness through the endless city.  
Broadway fires running madly  
To herald happiness over the towers.  
I bear the burden of loneliness through the endless city.  
So much dazzle banishes my own shadow.  
Here everyone can buy happiness by the pound.  
I bear the burden of loneliness through the endless city.  
I glow with yearning like the city with fire.

**III**

Every window can sell the brightest dream  
From women to stars, from ghosts to gods.  
The thinnest dream leaks potbelly satedness.  
Every window can sell the brightest dream.  
Streets breeze with the slender walk of women —  
In your arms I see all the women glow.  
Every window can sell the brightest dream  
From women to stars, from ghosts to gods.





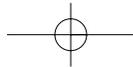
*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

**IV**

The city screams with handmade joy.  
In every window the sky is blue.  
Like butterflies to fire, women are drawn to you.  
The city screams with hand-made joy.  
A gypsy on Broadway can conjure away all bad dreams.  
I seek you through all the dreams, all the fires, all the women.  
The city screams with handmade joy.  
In every window the sky is blue.

**V**

The city can no longer hold all this restlessness.  
Soon the towers will tremble and fall.  
Soon the city will attack me with all its stones.  
The city can no longer hold all this restlessness.  
The hot joy wafts a cold sadness —  
Come, Menke, hide in the garret from so much joy.  
The city can no longer hold all this restlessness.  
Soon the towers will tremble and fall.



*MENKE*

**VI**

Of all the fires of the endless city,  
The little fire of your window shines above them.  
Of all the words, I hear only your last letter to me.  
O devour me, fires of the endless city.  
Everyone's sorrow, everyone's weeping look like me.  
Like a chunk of sun, show up, Menke, my love.  
Of all the fires of the endless city,  
The little fire of your window shines above them.

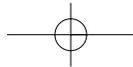
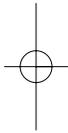
**VII**

How much alienation in an alien street?  
How much loneliness hordes of people trample?  
How many long nights in a single tear?  
Moon, man, and dream congeal on my street —  
Only a bold butterfly at the corner lantern  
Stakes the whole world.  
All unrest disappears, only rest remains.  
I hear in the wind words just sounded:  
Your every word — an exhausted ray.  
O of the softest hours there is no more sound,  
Only a garret, I — and you?  
A shining memory.



# Mother





## ***Mother***

I love so much my mother's hearty laughter.  
Her laughter — the clear call of a waterfall.  
Her laughter till tears, the good eyes beaming.  
Her laughter drowns out the darkest cries.

Mother,  
I will tell you a tale of a Jewish wolf.

Listen:

The wolf left the wild forest  
And remained alone with God,  
Because tired of his own howling,  
He wants not to scare us anymore,  
He wants to love us as himself —  
So wants the wild wolf,  
To lie like our clear-white baby goat  
Among raisins and almonds.

Mother,  
I want to tell you a tale of a Jewish wolf.

— — — — —  
The prophet's wolf is no more, my child,  
He fled back to his pack of forest robbers,  
And never trust, my child,  
The prophet's amiable serpent  
Who so desires  
To rock Moishele to sleep in her delicate lap.  
Alas,  
Elijah's "thin small voice" is still drowned out  
By the enemy's victorious howl,  
And sometimes, trampled,  
Wallows  
He-Who-Is-Everywhere.

*MENKE*

My child,  
 It's Tammuz now in my town.  
 Poisoned breezes sow the ashes of man and streets,  
 And the helpless rage falls  
 Like a thud, from a stifled throat: "A tooth for a tooth."  
 God with wringing hands, orphaned, alone,  
 Perceives only the twisted prayer of murder,  
 Hears only the roar of the rotten butcher.  
 O if God had counted the whole earth in separate grains of sand  
 (Good thing Adam overlooked the Tree of Life),  
 If wounds healed themselves with a blessing,  
 There would still be more wounds than grains of sand.

My child,  
 Who knows  
 How many words we brush off through the seventy years of small  
 talk?  
 How many words, like blizzards, stay mute on a frozen mouth?  
 Who knows  
 How many words the gravestone — the last stone — has stoned?  
 How many glowing words freeze in the eternal winter?  
 And man has not yet found the lost dream.

My child,  
 Who can understand  
 Why the demon does not laugh at every credulous generation?  
 Why the wind has not yet won the vain race?  
 Why the cricket never tires of hearing itself  
 Lamenting its lot?

— — — — —

*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

Mother,  
My whole life I've been searching for one single word,  
A word never heard by an ear.  
A word: uttered not in laughter, not in tears.  
A word: not in the darkest thought, not in the brightest silence.  
A word: still untouched by any dream.  
A word — all miracle.  
And, Mother, I am so sorry  
That through a whispering leaf, Ecclesiastes told me:  
— Too late!  
Even before Genesis, the thirsty wisdom devoured all words.  
Even in the primeval chaos, a clever chatterbox uttered all the  
words.

Mother,  
Such a wellspring of joy gushes from the ancient source  
And moves to tears my beautiful poem to you.  
The word, the only word I found in your happiness and in your  
tears.  
The word, the springtime word sings through your bones.  
To the only word:  
Mother,  
I fall swooning,  
With the desert thirst of a craving tongue to a cool well.  
The word is the flame that will burn the blindest dark.  
It is the holy flame of the vision of Our Teacher Moses,  
Which also sanctified the eternal dream of freedom.

Mother,  
Above all horrifying horrors,  
Above all rotten butchers —  
Isaiah's hope dawns — and you.

*MENKE*

## ***At the Dawn of a Child***

My mother,  
My wise Michaleshik mother,  
I saw you today at the dawn of a child.  
You said:  
“Don’t believe, my child, don’t believe:  
It was just a black dream,  
The shrouds, the cleansing board and the coffin.  
It is not I who turned to dust.  
See,  
I am all springtime, I remain in every blade of grass.  
For generations, I am ready to live.  
Hear, in the wind my laughter, my eternal joy.  
And the sun, like you, will love me forever.  
Don’t believe, my child, don’t believe.”

Mother,  
I thought it was you  
On that last Friday evening.  
I saw an invisible, cursed hand  
Tear you away from our Sabbath chat.  
I heard  
As from a burning jail a lost cry:  
“Open all windows, open all doors,”  
As if you suddenly saw a fantastic guest  
Who brought you a gift of all eternity.  
I sensed  
The slaughter’s knife mirrors in the entrails.

*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

Woe!  
 I thought it was you  
 On that last Friday evening,  
 But it was a wind wailing over a bare thorn,  
 But it was a blizzard rushing through a wall of fire.  
 My mother,  
 I feel good,  
 I feel fine  
 That I did not see you  
 Scattered in dreadful shadows  
 At the set, wounded table of horrors.  
 O it was just a black dream —  
 But why, Mother,  
 Did my desolate heart remain so full  
 Of night, of lament, of mourning rips.

My mother,  
 My wise Michaleshik mother,  
 Death did not block from me  
 A single beam of your life.  
 Day after day, moment after moment, breath after breath,  
 I will love you stronger and softer —  
 But where will I hide with so much love,  
 Unless running, running, running —  
 From the seething hatred, from the bony horror of the world,  
 Fleeing to your starry purity.

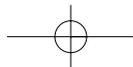
*EPITAPH*

*Engraved on Mother's Gravestone at  
 Riverside Cemetery in Lodi, New Jersey*

*Do not believe it, my child, do not believe,  
 Not I, O not I have turned into dust.*

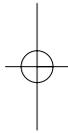
*See:*

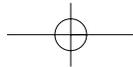
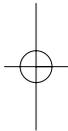
*With all the springtimes of Michaleshik and Svintsyon  
 I am there in every leaf of grass.*





## **An Hour Through My Window**







*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

**I**

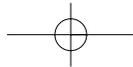
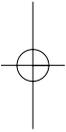
**Sunrise**

A homeless beggar dreams of pennies and a house.  
The dream becomes reality, the towers — giant mirrors,  
And windowpanes are gardens of fantastic roses.  
An alchemist transmutes the sooty bricks into gold.

Love in my street is a prayer to dawn:  
How can I be soft under the whistle of the world's whip.  
How can I beam if a beam is a caress of a beggar's hand?  
If a beggar is a sack of days in the lawless city?

Hatred stifled the sunrise before it rose.  
What remained is the night: in a gas chamber a child's heart.  
The night is my people in Treblinka — a millionfold morgue.  
The night against the sunrise is a blind soldier.

And night reaches out a hand that deals us sun from a false scale.  
Of all the nights, the dawns will remain ours.



*MENKE*

## II

### **Thorn be Blessed**

In sunrise, as in sunset, there is such a daybreak.  
The valor of a rock — in a mute pebble.  
But you must speed up the pebble like David!  
There is holiness in dung that fertilizes a flower.

But brothers, all flowers are abomination  
Without the thorn that rips out the enemy's heart.  
Without the thorn, the life of a flower is abandoned.  
The thorn — a guard, protects the flourish of a rose.

See, in the thinnest bud, O how much belief:  
"O let me, I will grow as big as a giant,"  
But my brothers, all beliefs are abomination  
Without the curse against the yoke on weakened shoulders.

Be blessed, O thorn, who protects the rose from the enemy.  
Be blessed, O thorn, against the eye that robs our light.



*THE SIMPLE DREAM*

### III

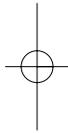
#### **The Cloud**

The cloud is not our enemy, brothers,  
And doesn't darken one moment of our days.  
The cloud is a song of rage —  
Rage against crows on our road.

The cloud comes to remind us of days of misery,  
So that hatred, our fist, would not doze off  
When the heart — the sun itself — is at stake.  
The cloud is the home of all our tears.

The good cloud lowers from the sky  
To show us how tears become storms.  
A cloud to a cloud, like a brick to a brick,  
Through generations a dark tower grows.

O watch out, enemy, for that tower —  
It is the storm of all storms.



*MENKE*

**IV**

**A Sun with a Snow**

A snow with a sun and a sun with a snow.  
Sun and snow embrace in love till death.  
The hatred will pass, yes, pass forever.  
The snow like a sieve strained out all the evil.

The snow is just pure love.  
The snow is destined to kiss and kiss.  
O snow kiss, the world is ill, your kiss gives strength.  
O kiss snow the whole earth from shore to shore.

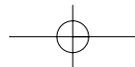
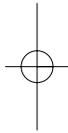
The snow falls like the light of tomorrow.  
O snowflakes, birdies and children:  
You sowed my days in clear flowers.  
My nights — an inkwell full of tales.

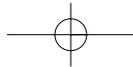
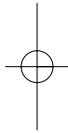
Another snow with a sun, another sun with a snow —  
The hatred will pass, yes, pass forever.



# ***Midday***

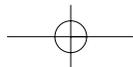
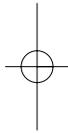
***1954***

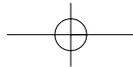






*For  
my brother,  
my friend —  
Yeiske*





*MIDDAY*

## ***Midday***

Was there ever was a Yiddish grandmother  
Who did not say: "The middle way is a golden sleigh?"  
And who among us did not glide away in that golden sleigh?  
And who among us, at midday, will not be in that golden sleigh?

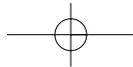
It was long long before we came into the world —  
O brother, to be when we are long gone from the world,  
No restlessness of ours will stay silent in the wind.  
To be! Through blessed generations, we shall age the wines.

Hear, a dead leaf flutters up: there is no eternal sleep,  
The golden sleigh is an eternally eternal midway,  
A midday with no beginning and no end,  
That always will guard our love from all hatred.

Love is everything that does not crumble in the light of bright  
midday.  
Even before Genesis there was no naked darkness.  
Even on the Eve of Genesis there was longing for being, for mid-  
day —  
Even Genesis was not a beginning but a midway.

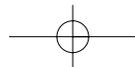
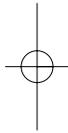
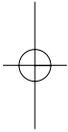
In midday, our golden sleigh will not stop gliding  
Toward springs where even time has touched no flower,  
Through winters where only an unborn babe can glide,  
A midday lucid as an unfurled lily of the valley.

O golden sleigh, fly through generations as on subway rails  
To catch up to our softest hour — the farthest vision.  
See, our brother from a distant generation shakes our hand.  
See, our golden sleigh is real in the middle of a fine day.



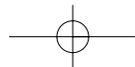
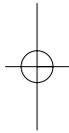


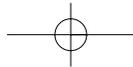
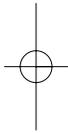
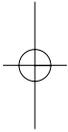
**[Rivka's ink drawing of the family house in  
Passaic, New Jersey]**





# **My Father Heershe-Dovid**





## *My Father Heershe Dovid*

*half sonnet cycle on the fresh grave of my father  
(1879—1951)*

### I

The empty table is still warm from yesterday's *I'chaim*.  
The empty goblets are still full with your glowing words:  
"To my toil, to the crystal ice, to the coal — *I'chaim!*  
Toil is creation, man's calling: Let there be light! Genesis joy!

"I saw a sunrise enact the creation of the world on a block of ice,  
I saw Isaiah's vision mirrored in ice as in a glass of wine,  
And the coals, with their lineage of dark deep mines, show  
How many miners' midnight dangers lurk at high noon:

"O-ha, so much kindness of fire is in coal  
For the homes where even the sun is stingy with a penny of light.  
In my oven, the long gone years arise again, twinkling  
From the nearby once, the flames of ruined Svir, Michaleshik,  
Svintsyan."

The ashes recall the ruins that frighten only the dumb Hill of Svir.  
Father, in that old house of yours, you became a legend of Svir.



*MENKE*

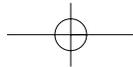
## II

Father, in that old house of yours, you became a legend of Svir.  
We five children are hushed in fear of your quieted voice.  
In the pages of the open *Tilim* book, the loneliness of your  
vanished generation —  
At least in the stories of the wind, your past will live forever.

The air at the table is still scrubbed by Talmudic *Whys*.  
On a leaf of paper, an unfinished letter longs for your hand.  
Yesterday's goblets are filled with today's laments.  
In the abandoned kitchen, midnight lights its dead light of *Tilim*.

Through the five rooms, wondering, every familiar shadow seeks you.  
The extinguished stove paints a frost with the death's chill: Good night  
To the ice, to the coals, to you, to yesterday's *I'chaim*.  
Outside, through frost and wailing of Shvat, even God cries for you.

The meek shine of the first dawn stands guard on your grave.  
Such a glow falls on the shadows, as a faithful wound.





*MIDDAY*

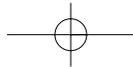
### III

Such a glow falls on the shadows, as a faithful wound,  
The light of ice and coal, of Svir, Michaleshik, Svintsyan.  
You taught me old wisdom, as the old sun is ever new,  
And ever new is the old gold in my song to you.

Who knows as well as you how much holiday can be in daily toil?  
The ritual of placing, measuring, cutting tall blocks of ice  
Into straight, transparent squares like pieces of frozen sun  
Can give awe, as a prayer to the Lord of the Universe.

Even in the summer, the ice sears you with its frosty drunkenness.  
And the joy of loading the shed with the plenty of fresh coals  
Coupled with the plenty of dreams of the distant childhood years.  
Father, the blocks of ice melt like Svir's frosty moons.

Your early grave nights shine back from the abandoned coals.  
Over the road in the icehouse all your Julys lie frozen.



*MENKE*

#### IV

Over the road in the icehouse all your Julys lie frozen.  
Locked up solitude breaks out of the locked icehouse.  
Each chunk of coal looks like an evil ghost, a black crow.  
It seems every brick of the house will leap out at us soon.

In the Passaic icehouse, the ice melted like the Svir sun.  
At dawn, your Svir walk, the orphaned path from home to prayer house  
Will wait expectantly for your morning steps forever.  
Your steps of forty years have planted an invisible garden here.

Where are the pious beginnings, the faithful skies, Father?  
Did the coffin, the grave, take away all the skies  
And leave me only a long, evil dream?  
You are eternal as the glow of all the generations on your grave.

Woe, is your eternity with no sun, no space, no man, no flower?  
My song to you is a garland of ice and coal, of moon and grass.



*MIDDAY*

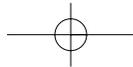
**V**

My song to you is a garland of ice and coal, of moon and grass —  
Ice of tears and frost, coal of eternal darkness.  
Svir in my dream is the moon, forty summers of Passaic are the grass.  
O Father, is the World to Come just such eternal darkness?

Of all paradise, if you became just sad sand,  
I shall love each grain of sand more than all the stars.  
If on the thirteenth day of month Shvat you became just a set sun,  
O how I would like to become every ray of your sunset life.

O burdened with your death, curled up threefold,  
I am the desolation of your first cemetery nights,  
As if your death — a crow with thorny eyes —  
Flew through me, with all your days and nights.

Like thorns, your seventy-two years pierce me.  
O Father, hear my desolation in the wind above your grave.



*MENKE*

## VI

O Father, hear my loneliness in the wind wail on your grave:  
Such a loneliness as in the solitary tree in the silenced yard.  
Your years of toil freeze on the naked twigs.  
The tree is the guard of the yard's blossoming summers.

The tree shuffled back to the wall of the icehouse's permanent winter,  
As if it modestly stood alone in a forest corner,  
Not to let its festivity disturb the sale of ice and coal —  
With your dawns, its crown shone with light of the World to Come.

The tree, like the Tree of Knowledge, emerged from paradise nearby  
Through the tree, prayers always whispered songs of praise to your labor.  
The wind carried the paradise all the way to the fresh, sad grass.  
The tree remains like a bent over giant at the frost of the icehouse.

Through the nights, you are the pensive stardust on every twig,  
You see the backyard like a Svir streetlet, forsaken without you.

*MIDDAY***VII**

See, the yard without you is as abandoned as a street in Svir.  
The short path from house to *shul* becomes a distant star-way.  
O delude me, fool me, my dream, to be able to say  
You live, Father, like my longing for you in the distant star-way.

In your last moment, God Himself sang a song to your toil.  
See, Rabbi Akiva brings you the key to heaven  
And counts and counts your good deeds of toiling at ice and coal,  
Even more the good deeds of your dawns reciting the Psalms.

You live! You live! — Like dew, like light, like the summer rain  
That blesses the fields with love, fullness, lucky years.  
Father, in the twilight between Svir and Passaic you will live forever!  
You live as my unborn child lives on tomorrow's roads,

As my song to you that will always lament in the ruins of your generation,  
As my people, you will always live, Father, live forever, live!

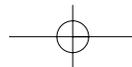
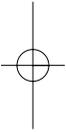


*MENKE*

## ***Half a Magistral***

The empty table is still warm from yesterday's *I'chaim*.  
Father, in that old house of yours, you became a legend of Svir.  
Such a glow falls on the shadows, as a faithful wound.  
Over the road in the icehouse all your Julys lie frozen.

My song to you is a garland of ice and coal, of moon and grass.  
Hear my desolation in the wind above your grave.  
See the backyard like a Svir streetlet, abandoned without you.  
As my people, you will always live, Father, live forever, live!

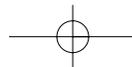




*MIDDAY*

## ***My Father on Old and Young***

Old is the fool and the creep with the slippery voice.  
Young is Elye-Leizer, my grandfather with the smile of a child.  
Young is the well-worked wind in grandfather's windmill.  
Old is the fool and the creep with the slippery voice.  
Young are the kisses of yore in the Song of Songs.  
Young is the last word of my grandmother in her death pangs  
When she heard her grandchild, my first cry, she said:  
"I see my death, as through a bright window, blessed like you, my child."



*MENKE*

## ***My Father on Once, Today and Tomorrow***

Without the story of once upon a time there would be no today.  
Without the Golem of Prague, the Hill of Svir,  
The Hero Samson would not be so strong.  
Without the story of once upon a time there would be no today.  
Without the bird of once, how could an airplane be today?  
Not a dream but a hunchback would remember a mountain.  
Even peace would be a gloomy dove.  
*L'chaim* to the Golem of Prague! *L'chaim* to the Hill of Svir!



MIDDAY

## ***The Hill of Svir***

### **I**

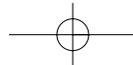
#### **My Father Tells a Story**

As Prague is famous for its Golem, so Svir was famous for its Hill.  
How many storms through the generations did the Hill keep silent?  
How many giants from stories came to compete with the Hill  
On blind November nights?

Facing the fires of the yearning evening,  
*Cheider* kids would incessantly tell each other  
How the Mountain met the giant eye to eye  
And with a mountainous fist bent the giants one by one.

Through *Cheider* kids' stories, the might of the Hill lived on:  
Ho! For the Mountain, a giant is the size of a honey cookie,  
Even before the Flood, the Mountain drove off the Nefilim.  
He can scatter the world's great peaks with one push.

Ho! Svir Hill, who are you, where did you come from?  
You, who devoured giants, you who vanquished the storms!



*MENKE*

## II

### Stories of Svir Hill

At Svir Hill, grandfathers never cease  
Telling each other wonders of wonders, again and again.  
And each of them can swear by his beard and sidelocks  
That the Hill was once the Kabbalah cave of a sage.

And when Shimon Bar Yochai was hiding in the cave,  
The Master of the Universe raised the cave from abyss.  
In every breeze, the Sage's figure hovers.  
The astounded Hill itself hears and cannot believe itself.

They say Og the King of Bashan is the Hill of Svir,  
Waters of the Flood have swept it up here:  
Wind and hail, signs of the flood, still carve the Hill.  
They say the first light of Genesis dawned on it.

Kid and kin, bird and worm, echoes of caves,  
Would tell each other stories of Svir Hill.

*MIDDAY*

### III

#### **The Strongest Boss in Town**

For so many generations, Jews blessed or cursed  
The strongest boss in town, Svir Hill.  
Butchers would tear each other's matty locks  
And scream: "Fool! Bouff! May you be swollen as Svir Hill!"

Butcher curses would smell of slaughterhouse blood —  
Curses sated with the roar of the first slaughtered oxen  
Ready to spread the Hill itself on the slaughterhouse logs  
As if they cleansed with an axe the dead oxen.

Even pious grandmothers made believe they cursed:  
"That you should not, my child, be swollen as Svir Hill."  
And he, the Mountain himself, blessed or cursed no one  
But stood there, as if a Hill taught patience to man.

At midnight, the might of my people woke in tales of Svir Hill:  
Our mountain entrusted secrets as many as stars.

*MENKE*

#### IV

#### **Beware, Philistine!**

If we believe the wisdom of our Svir grandfathers,  
Svir Hill is none other than the Hero Samson,  
For Samson did not go to rest forever in heaven  
But entered the stone of Svir Mountain as a storm.

See for yourself, isn't the mountain peak like the cliffy shoulders  
Of the hero of all heroes, Samson?  
Age after age, Samson's strength grew here in the stone  
And the rage of Hero Samson grows in the stone.

Ho-ho, blind, chained Samson's shoulders left  
Just handfuls of ashes of all the prisons and the Philistines:  
Svir Hill with a lineage of millennia on its shoulders  
Will someday rage forth for all the deaths of your people!

Let just one Philistine make one step toward Svir  
And the Mountain will trample all the earth's Philistines!

*MIDDAY*

**V**

**Move, Mountain!**

And when the Germans came to slaughter the little town Svir,  
Jews screamed at the miracle worker, Svir Hill: "Move, Mountain!  
Lead us in peace over the heads of the murderers!  
Don't save any sulfur and brimstone and death on the Germans."

But like an endless stony ghost, the Hill was mute in horror.  
God himself became a valley of lament.  
And Svir Hill went on to beg Death: "O dear Death —  
Master of the Universe, hurl me into the Valley of Lament!"

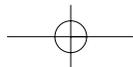
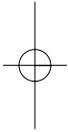
But, though in spite, Death didn't answer the Hill.  
For not death, not God but Germans determined the fate of man  
and flower.  
Jealously, Svir Hill looked over the ruins,  
Hoping in vain that merciful Death would come to it also.

A mountain of curses rises and rises over Svir:  
One day Svir Hill will doom the German and his whip.

*August 13th 1953*

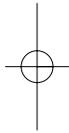


**[Rivka's picture of a Hut in the Woods]**





# A Hut in the Forest



*MENKE*

## ***Hey, Hunter!***

Our little hut is woven from young birches,  
The walls, like my song to you, are wood and simple mortar.  
Through the little windows, our holiday drives away the everyday.  
At night, the moon's hands caress our little hut.

Our hut in the depths of the forest  
Is guarded by the wild primeval life.  
Let a hunter try to assault our forest,  
He would be attacked by the wild primeval

The birds would sharpen their beaks like weapons,  
The trees — raise their rage against the hacker,  
The rocks would hear their own courage,  
And every night shadow would become a sword.

Hey, hunter, here with the pedigree of roots, primeval is young —  
If fire strikes, you will fall first onto the tongues of flame.



*MIDDAY*

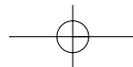
## ***I and You***

A little hut in the forest — and I and you.  
A dream chased away all the evil of today.  
Only tomorrow is here, and I and you.  
We are close to the farthest dawn.

And as close as you is the farthest happiness —  
A thorn lives in peace with a flower.  
From all the nooses, the yearned for repose  
Has knitted the last noose.

The last noose for the last hangman —  
Of all the gallows, the last gallows.  
See, a curse devours the last hangman,  
The last gallows burns in the sunset.

The day dozed off on the little windows.  
Rivella, see, the sky has spread a world in stars.



*MENKE*

## ***My Quiet Boro Park Girl***

As small as my quiet Boro Park girl,  
So large is our love, like the hut in a dream.  
In place of every prison stands the hut in our dream,  
For our hut is higher than all the towers, all the giants.

And I invented wonder of wonders for you,  
How my mother's sprouting wisdom reincarnates in a ray,  
Your thousand smiles — into a thousand bright generations,  
Your goodness — into the gold of all twilights.

The forest screams, as if bursting to flee from evil.  
Against all hatred rises the eternal love — life:  
See, mother bird collects her treasure — her birdies  
And, wise and strict, she teaches the new birds to live.

The little hut falls asleep, blessed by the insolent night:  
A yet unborn person trades secrets with the stars.

*MIDDAY*

## *Night*

The lamp, like a chunk of sun, went out.  
We are alone with the wild night:  
Tree and stone, beast and sleepy song,  
Soft fear, pure as consolation, as love.

But suddenly a dog hurls yelps our way:  
No, it is no consolation, no love — it's murder!  
On a star-path, through the bright fear of the forest,  
Just now, a hare leaps away from murder.

The dog is left — a fooled bandit  
Biting his own tail, biting until it hurts  
Gnashing his teeth at himself, the fool.

O Hare, little Hare, I give you new luck —  
May you never again know of murder,  
But do not curse me if someone should fool you.

*MENKE*

## *Lost My Way*

Alone in the forest. The night has swallowed every sign to you.  
A deer flees from the hunter, ruffles the fear through berry bushes.  
I went astray, blindly, through slivers of light like broken mirrors —  
How can I ask a deer, a bird, a tree to show me the way to you?

The smallest worm is a victorious serpent in its own eyes.  
A glowworm in the dark is like the eye of a forest robber.  
The trees are enemies who imprison me, bar me from you.  
The beauty is sorcery to enchant you with death.

Suddenly a distant little light — the animal at home in the forest.  
The yellowish lamp suffuses the brown of the hut with gold  
As if a sleepwalker in love carved the walls from my poem.

The simple flame in the forest is more beautiful than all the stars.  
And here is Rivella — a forest girl running out of the hut.  
The little flame of joy and peace has burnt the night behind it.



*MIDDAY*

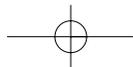
## ***From Rain – To Storm***

The rain takes a walk on the roof of our hut.  
Now the rain is a water nymph, dancing without steps.  
Now I hear flocks of birds pecking with fast beaks.  
Now a brook splashes life and disappears.

Now the rain is a sea that stepped out of its shore,  
Now a storm, a horde of galloping horses  
That have scattered the riders with their horseshoes  
And run in a circle, as if someone has driven the earth away.

Now lightning shudders through space like flashing frost.  
Does death live in dark or in light? The night knows.  
Against this little hut, the huge storm  
Wrestled with all its wild weapons.

I never heard the forest laugh so much.  
So Rivella, let us laugh at the fool — the storm.



*MENKE*

## ***Lightning and Thunder***

My dear Rivella, listen, the thunder doesn't roll over the mountains,  
But the mountains roll over the thunder, scattered in buckshot.  
Now lightning — a wild giant, a guzzler — swallows the mountains,  
Now a distant scream — somebody's last step — swallows the lightning.

Our little hut seems built of lightning and thunder,  
The little windows from nearby lightning, the walls from distant thunder.  
Lightning never gets tired: in-and-out — a mischievous death.  
Nor is thunder tired of trying out his baritone.

Rivella, we are here — a hut of poems in the forest.  
Calamity is a foe with a body of thunder and lightning,  
And you, my slim girl, so delicate and soft.  
Above us, the catbird helplessly cries a catlike cries of woe.  
Through your eyes, the lightning dazzles like a thousand swords.  
Night is eternal, there is no point to wait for day.



*MIDDAY*

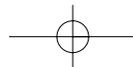
## ***At the End of Days***

At the End of Days only the storm will remain  
To summon the memory of generations long washed away,  
And the superfluous storm will strike himself,  
For he cannot drive himself away from the generations.

The cursed light of lightning will curse itself  
And envy the single spark of a firefly:  
O to be a poor glowworm, not lightning!  
I don't want to chase, threaten, nor vanquish anyone.

And the thunder will thunder against his own roar:  
Not through rage would I announce the cool rain  
But quietly as a cloud, surrender in blessings to the field.

The volcano will bury itself in shame before the sun,  
Will collapse at a wink of a man — towards wisdom.  
Like flesh and blood, the rainbow will live in everything.



*MENKE*

## ***Steps Not Yet Born***

How I would like to be a fellow still unborn  
And be born a hundred years hence,  
To be a longing that would shine even on death row.  
The man on death row would have heard my consolation.

I would have shown him myself a hundred years hence —  
The prisons long burnt in the fires of rage.  
The nooses torn by lightning, by old storms.  
He would see a hangman with severed arms attending death.

I would have gone like a breeze through a hundred years of tears  
With absent steps of a yet unborn man.  
At the abysses of grief, I would have risen like a herald of happiness,  
Like a brook whispering endless blessings to man.

In the nights, I would entrust myself like a secret in everyone's dream.  
And through me, everyone would see a new earth of dream and bread.

*MIDDAY*

## *In my Dream*

All the children I kept from being born  
Come to me in a dream at midnight.  
They all fall upon me like falling stars,  
Children — springs run dry, mocked flowers.

Children — stories no wind will ever tell,  
Come to me in the forest, wake me from my slumber,  
And my hut becomes a cursed cave  
Hurt by unheard crying, by blind misfortune:

If you have come to demand life of me,  
I will give you my body and poem for your life taken away.  
Children, nimbly don my flesh in good health.

They rend me, limb after limb, tooth to a tooth,  
Until what remains of me is unborn nothing, fear times fear:  
I am a poem that only an unborn child can write.



*MENKE*

## ***Mountain over Mountain***

The path from our hut to the village  
Is a valley between mountain over mountain,  
The valley scattered in a brook  
Chattering its longing for every mountain.

Forests in mid-flight over mountain  
Did not arrive — green of envy and hatred.  
Forests falling, ready to kill,  
Boast of a higher forest race.

When the valley will attain its ambition,  
When valley will be mountain and mountain will be valley,  
Then the heights will again bear witness  
How in its depth the valley seeks the mountain's height.

Everything strives to eternity, to infinity.  
Even in a last gaze — such a first hope.





*MIDDAY*

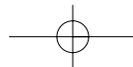
## ***Dawn in the Forest***

Dawn. The whippoorwill announces from skunk to bird in the forest:  
“We-Pur-Will, We-Pur-Will, I am here, the summer is young.”  
At dawn, even the crow is a fantastic bird,  
Under her wings the oldest dark grows young.

I am rich as the forest with poems not yet sung.  
Every second of the day is a newly opened bud.  
At the brook, dawn turns fire and water into brothers.  
Now a single ray can drive out a hundred clouds.

A wild gang of a hundred thorns gets scared by a rose.  
Midas walks in the forest, changing beast, tree and stone into gold.  
Gold emanates even from a blind worm.  
God forbid Midas should change us too into gold.

Does the bird sing in the forest about today or about tomorrow?  
The poet is a spring in the desert, even when he's dead.  
The poem of once upon a time is drunk on the sap of time.  
The bird tells us: the older the wine, the younger the joy.



*MENKE*

## ***My Rivella***

O what has more than a thousand wings?  
What is closer than this close night?  
Hear, the wind has a thousand and one wings,  
An hour with you has a thousand and one nights.

The dying sun paints a dream for us:  
Dream and reality are twin brothers.  
The most distant dream will reach reality.  
The night falls thirsty to the spring of my poem.

The fireflies build fire roads  
With light of undiscovered planets.  
Like a saw, the cricket in its mossy home  
Recalls the noise of cities still unbuilt.

Dark, as if the forest suddenly disappeared,  
And you, my Rivella, are a dream in reality.

*MIDDAY*

## ***A World with No Locks***

The free forest has protected our little hut from locks.  
The door has never carried a latch or lock.  
Our hut knows nothing about bars around the world.  
The glow of a long awaited day plays in the little windows.

Here a tree was never a gallows.  
Here a bird has never sung a lie,  
No eagle has sat in an absurd cage —  
Our little hut was victorious over all prisons.

From our forest, my girl, it is easy to see a world without locks,  
Where a child will encounter a lock or chain only in a story,  
Where once fought battles will be quiet, without sword or rage.  
See, the more yesterday's grief, the greater tomorrow's joy.

Like gardeners, let us guard the unplanted flowerbeds,  
Lest a sprinkle of blood poison the wine of time.

*MENKE*

## ***The Old Apple Tree***

The old apple tree — the wise grandfather —  
Is the most modest neighbor at our hut.  
Goodhearted neighbor,  
With crooked branches, twisted fingers  
He gives his plenty to all.

Long winters decayed our neighbor.  
The peeled bark shows wounds on his bare body,  
But no storm has ever broken his wisdom —  
He never stops calling man to beauty and peace.

And since he never ceases inviting man to visit,  
His tasteful arms are always ready to give.  
If a weary wanderer strays to this place,  
He spreads his cool shadow like a brother,

Prepared to serve his guest sweet apples  
At the bow of Good Morning, at the kiss of the stars.

**[Rivke's tree]**

*MIDDAY*

## ***Good Bye***

My sad little hut in the wild forest, so soon  
I stand on your threshold to bid you Good Bye.  
Crows crow their song of the forest.  
The cricket told all the summer's secrets.

The summer is tired of green and gold,  
Has scattered for wind and wanton.  
Today, for the last time,  
My love bathed in the clear brook.

A miser gives short days and stingy light.  
The deer will encounter not me but the hunter.  
Hey, little hut, prepare to be friend with blizzards,  
Prepare to meet the foe alone.

O my little hut, with all the gilded days  
The brook sadly runs away.

*Summer 1951*

*MENKE*

## ***Little Princess***

*for Rivka*

**My poems to you are like you, so soft and small,  
Filled with stirring of the wind in the evening rye.  
Yiddish, like the brook over tiny pebbles,  
Rushes to you like a rivulet, cool and clear.**

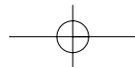
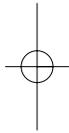
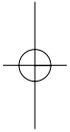
**Every poem fits you like a crown on a little princess.  
O Rivka, my girl, with longing as far as Michaleshik,  
Oh Rivka, my wife, my chosen Boro Park Princess:  
I conjured you in a dream in the child's heights of Michaleshik.**

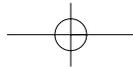
**Our single room on the sixth floor  
Is more present than all presents, nearer to all tomorrows —  
A little hut of tomorrows on the sixth floor,  
The furthest tomorrow is closer here than yesterday.**

**The poem I am in the middle of writing to you now  
Scatters in a thousand kisses at the open windows.**



# Yiddish





*MIDDAY*

**1**  
***Mayflower in Michaleshik and Svintsyan***

**I**

Now what does the mayflower do in Michaleshik  
 If not show what is lonelier than a stone?  
 And if King David's violin is in the wind,  
 King David's violin can weep only in Yiddish here.  
 For only in Yiddish did my people see the sun here,  
 Only in Yiddish was the world a story here.  
 In my town, such a prayer remained,  
 A prayer like the hand of a blind beggar,  
 A prayer that even God may curse and bless  
 Both his hatred and his love in our only mother tongue,  
 Our mocked at, cried in mother tongue.

**II**

Yiddish, with the tipsy taste of a first kiss,  
 Like my Mother's gaze, will never fade.  
 Yiddish, to you my first scream, my last kiss!  
 Yiddish, glowing with the dazzle of pyres —  
 Who would dare shield himself from such gruesome light?  
 After such a fire, no trace of the foe remains.  
 Simple as candles in poor alleys,  
 Straight as the stones that raged  
 Against the enemy in Vilna and Warsaw alleys.  
 What broom can sweep away such tears, such flames?  
 Yiddish, blessed with as many years as the flower called May.

*MENKE*

### III

What is the mayflower now in my childhood Svintsyan,  
If not a blind, gray man in the sunset?  
For here, a breeze, a flower, a star, a blade of grass  
Can show their beauty only to their own grief.  
A light breeze flutters like a tortured, bodiless infant,  
Abandoned by father, mother, heaven and earth.  
A flower is a lost game of morning joy,  
A star is a child's oozing eye,  
And what in the shadow is grass separated from sun and field,  
If not anguish chattering unfinished words?  
An unfinished word is a holy man — ashes in the wind.

### IV

What is the mayflower now in my small towns,  
If not a blossoming fear over graveless children?  
For there is no one to see the joy of a leaf,  
As if no eye was ever here.  
In every light there is blindness  
That can assault the sun with the courage of all annihilation.  
The loneliest shadow frightens the most joyful ray  
And in every flower there is the rage of a thorn.  
And here the mayflower is a sunny death,  
Here the longing for Yiddish is delicate unto death —  
Delicate as a heartrending flute in the wind.

*MIDDAY***V**

Good that the mayflower tarries in my townlets,  
And little breezes still caress the simple sound of Yiddish,  
Yiddish that stayed behind in the rustle of ruins,  
With the glow and trembling of Kidush-haShem in every sound.  
O he who will not let us love Yiddish as a Mother  
Was born loveless with a crow's hatred,  
Cannot stop loving only his own hatred:  
O no gold was ever molded from the fire of hatred.  
O desolate is he as a desert singer of a jackal choir.  
Yiddish, how many stones, how much hatred will block our way,  
Before we shall like the mayflower break out of the cracked stone.

**VI**

Brother, without Yiddish, what is your childhood,  
What is the mayflower, if not a hollow barren rose?  
Brother, without Yiddish, without your childhood,  
Without the mayflower,  
How can one break free from so much death?  
O Yiddish, a thousand years of dream, a thousand years of May!

*MENKE*

**2**  
***Enemy of Yiddish – Enemy of my People!***

**I**

Yiddish is a lost town of Lithuania or Poland.  
 Young cutoff years idle in every ruin.  
 Here, a good luck charm hovers on broken wings,  
 There, a toy is longing for a former child.  
 Here, desolation breathes fear from an empty cradle.  
 Hark, an unfinished song seeks its singer.  
 There, a word is mute — a tongue cut off,  
 Here, a word is wailing — half-slaughtered by the slaughterer.  
 There, a word explodes — a flaming warning,  
 A curse that curls the heart of the traitor.  
 Here, a word dawns — a leading light, a Pillar of Fire.

**II**

Yiddish, O mother tongue, father tongue,  
 A nomad pursued through thorny generations  
 Like my people, chased through every wander-way.  
 Thorny is the tender tongue of my people,  
 Yiddish fire and brimstone of millennia wandering —  
 Yiddish, a thorny millennium through the enemy's eyes,  
 Yiddish like my people breaks every chain, every lock.  
 Without Yiddish a Jew cannot love his people,  
 as the sapling sapling that cannot suck the sap of its roots.  
 The enemy of Yiddish is the enemy of my people.  
 Yiddish, O mother tongue, father tongue.

*MIDDAY***III**

O what other language can tell it like Yiddish?  
Why the dew is always crying —  
O my people can count a thousand thorns for every flower.  
A thousand laments lurk in every laugh,  
But it is easier to hear a thousand laments  
Than one hyena giggle of those who mock.  
Hey, you wretched builder of pride and hatred and mockery,  
In your giggle lies the face of the butcher,  
The murderer laughing at the last, helpless scream for help.  
The earth of your grave will hold no mourning.  
Your mockery, like a crow, will crow a black year upon you.

**IV**

Night. Far flickering lights glimmer like a floating rose field.  
Yiddish, for hundreds of years we laugh the same laughter,  
Yiddish, for hundreds of years we weep the same weeping —  
One destiny accompanying us for hundreds of years,  
From reality to dream, from dream to reality,  
From old calamities to new wander-ways,  
Every stone polished our rage toward the enemy.  
Brother, polish your rage. You will need it a long time.  
With this rage, Mother Yiddish guards Love:  
Do not let the spiteful voice screech our pure song,  
Do not let the slick tongue flatten our every depth.

*MENKE*

**V**

Yiddish is the sorrow of my mother wringing her hands,  
Yiddish is earthy as my mother's simple goodness,  
My grandmother's tear of hope shining through every grief —  
In her gray house, the radiant Sabbath Queen,  
Over her poor "riches," the first blessed candle.  
Who can love to the deepest without Mother's sorrow and joy?  
Who can hate the enemy without Father's love and rage?  
Who can be strong as the Ten Commandments against Formless Void  
Without Grandma's lofty praise, Grandpa's stern morality?  
O Father, Mother, Grandfather, Grandmother: the courage of rooted generations,  
Above my grave, Yiddish will always blossom — a hopeful rose.

**VI**

Forever, my mother will be talkative in every in every breeze:  
"Yiddish — under the enemy's whip, my whipped blood and flesh.  
Even in death, the hand that hits Yiddish will not stop hitting me."  
Through grass and stalk and flower,  
In my empty villages, the spring will forever rustle in Yiddish.

*MIDDAY*

## ***My Will***

### **I**

Brother, step softly on dust, dust can ache like a wound.  
O hear, the dust under your foot speaks in Yiddish silently  
About each cry of every bizarre death.  
O the dust wails out this holy Will:  
Hark, the Will and Testament of all graveless Jews:  
“We are Yiddish fire and brimstone, sun and hail.  
Yiddish is the last gaze of sisters and brothers —  
A reincarnation, the gaze wanders through night and storm.  
Brother, do not let us become a tale of once upon a time,  
A last ray of a drowned sunset.  
Speak Yiddish, so our voice will not be silenced,  
Our choked song will sing again through you.

“We are Yiddish — the awesome flame of Maidanek,  
Yiddish is raging from our ashes, a fear of warning.”

*MENKE*

## II

Who will dare mock the Will of the Warsaw Ghetto:

“We are Yiddish — fists, rifles and teeth against the enemy,  
Rage, boiling like the blood of the Warsaw Ghetto.

Rage is a crow that plucks the enemy’s heart.

Yiddish — what death can deafen this wailing?

Yiddish — what curse can curse this lament?

O like your people, like the sea, may Yiddish never be muted,  
So that our blood will never, never cool.

We are all Yiddish — every word a limb,

Every letter a mocked tear from Ponar, from the Ninth Fort,

The unfinished last confession of good Aunt Beilka,

Her prayer heard by the only one who has pity, Death.

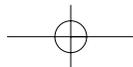
“Speak Yiddish, so our anger will not stop raging through you,  
Speak Yiddish, so every spring our love will collect its due.”



*MIDDAY*

**Y**

Brother, in every grace of Yiddish, see a new dawn,  
In every sound hear a Jew not yet born.  
As many words in Yiddish, as many rays in dawn,  
So many dawning Jews will laugh in Yiddish.  
Yiddish, the miracle around the whole earth,  
Like Moses' staff, it flourishes whenever hurled,  
Destined to raise the day from dark ashes.  
Every sun will set at the rising song  
"Never say you walk the last road."  
With the wisdom of a proverb, with the spungold of a folksong  
My mother tongue shines — an eternal first road.



MENKE

## ***Hirshke Lekert's Yiddish***

Brother, learn Yiddish from immortal Hirshke Lekert,  
Colorful apprentice cobbler from Vilna, the Jerusalem of Lithuania:  
Yiddish — the rage of the first May Day marchers  
Through the gauntlet of von Wall's mocking whips.

O not for nothing, not to kill time  
Did Hirshke draw a gallows on the floor of his death cell,  
A gallows — a rage no language can describe.  
Yiddish — the curse that Hirshke wrote with fettered steps  
All around the endless night of death row.  
Yiddish — Hirshke's death still lives in us.  
Hirshke Lekert's Yiddish is an axe of rage  
That frightened frightens the horrors of generations, the desolate rage of gallows,  
Through all the May Days, Hirshke's Yiddish resounds, the axe of rage.

Yiddish — Hirshke Lekert's vision of the gallows:  
A dream as bright as a child's first smile,  
A dream where even the thorn is in love with a flower,  
A dream where the last executioner waits in the last death row.

*MIDDAY****Hirshke Lekert's Thoughts on Death Row***

He who never saw a bird flying out of its cage,  
Never saw a bird,  
Was never free himself.  
He who never freed a bird from its cage,  
Never saw a person,  
Was never part of the human race.  
Even my cell on death row envies me.

**Y**

Hirshke, can someone a moment before being hanged,  
Recall the last time he laughed  
And hear a childish voice at the gallows?  
O Hirshke, if a moment before hanging  
I could have brought you  
News of light and fire in the midst of your darkness,  
That not you but the hangman sinks into the abyss,  
That not you but the executioner sinks into dark,  
Then a moment before being hanged, Hirshke, you would have  
Laughed until your voice choked the executioner.

MENKE

## *Yiddish at Midday*

Midday brings to mind the healthy clamor of the streets — Yiddish  
That trampled the thorns of all the world.  
Midday brings to mind new generations, new Jews, ancient Yiddish.  
O Yiddish, a thousand years of dawn will never set in the world:  
If not in New York, then in Chile or in Tel Aviv or in Shangri-La  
Yiddish will resound eternally like a springtime waterfall,  
And Michaleshik will hear Yiddish forever in a tender drop of dew.  
So many generations, that many stars will not be lost in crooked shadows?

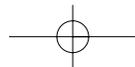
Swear, brother, to this most motherly millennium,  
That the sound of Yiddish will never fall silent,  
That your step will not be drowned out,  
That the dust of your grave will not silence your voice.

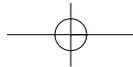
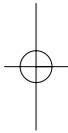
Swear, brother, like me at my forty-six years,  
Yiddish like a noisy wheel will not leave the center.  
Yiddish always remains at midday after all the dangers  
Generations in and out, storm in and out — end in, end out.

O brother from Ponar, before I die, I will whisper your sacred confession:  
Woe, without Yiddish how can midday be bright?  
Yiddish — the voice of my graveless sisters and brothers,  
Eternal as my people in bright midday.



# **Our Yiddish School**





*MIDDAY*

## ***The First Hour***

O what is younger than the first hour of our new school year?  
Like the beginning of a world, a first word buds.  
Yiddish already bore the first letters  
And every child savors the taste of honeycake.

Here is a letter — a beam, a sound — a meaning, a child — a song.  
See, the night can never overshadow the day!  
And children who are already friends with Yiddish hear:  
The lie will never drive out the truth.

In our school, the first hour glows with the wisdom of the ages —  
The wisdom of wandering, with smells of thorny roses.  
The teacher in school is a tale of light and freedom,  
Every child a hero who won't get out of the tale.

O our people has an inkwell full of tales:  
One tale is about Amos, Peretz, Ruth and Isaiah.  
Amos demands May for everyone in midwinter,  
The shepherd Amos smells of figs, of the open field.

Peretz is the blade of a knife through mother's cake.  
Ruth binds her luck like a sheaf of Boaz's grain.  
The Prophet Isaiah breaks the sword with the thunder of a word.  
Isaiah sowed peace to the End of Days.

The most beautiful tale is a school packed to the last bench.  
Abraham saw Jewish children like the stars,  
So let our school be starred with Jewish children —  
O a school that will be heard by the Jew of a distant generation.

*MENKE*

## ***Yiddish School Activists***

To every guardian of our school — a blessing today,  
A blessing for the Malkas, Moyshes, Chaikas, who come  
With cheerful radiant children  
To light up dark cellars  
Your reward is from distant gardens — any flower of tomorrow.

Little children scour Yiddish from yesterday's shops.  
Cunning merchants and gray storekeepers do not come there,  
But Amos, Lincoln and Isaiah enter abandoned shops,  
The wildest wolf may feel shame here before Isaiah.

Guardians of our school, your knock on a stranger's door  
Proclaims sunny luck to Jewish children.  
In the shul: rows of children, rows of adorned tomorrows,  
Yiddish words sow good tidings, as handfuls of linseed —  
Every tiding a heave to uproot the blackness of our century.  
Your reward is of blossom and of peace — those simple wonders.

*MIDDAY*

## ***Leibl***

*In memory of the Yiddish teacher, my friend Leibl Shapiro*

No, Leibl, your laughter is not forever silenced,  
All the dawns are not forever snuffed out,  
Our dawn breaks out from thousands of tied together years.  
No, Leibl, your laughter is not forever silenced,  
Fall has not withered all your summers:  
Every summer will find you in a tree, a child, and a flower.  
No, Leibl, your laughter is not silenced forever,  
All the dawns are not forever snuffed out.

Hear, how many children in the "Leibl Shapiro Schools,"  
Laugh Yiddish, laugh your laugh with tomorrow's laughter.  
From your picture you see a world of light and laughter.  
You blossom up in every child of the Leibl Shapiro schools,  
Every ray here is full with your smile  
And the mother tongue beams with joy as genuine as you.  
Hear how many children in the Leibl Shapiro Schools  
Laugh Yiddish, laugh your laugh with tomorrow's laughter.

Leibl, ebullient fifty-year-old boy,  
You have gone away to love people through generations.  
In your place emptiness sits so bleakly.  
Leibl, ebullient fifty-year-old boy,  
In every Yiddish letter your every turn and move live on,  
You remain the glowing one in the way we miss you  
Leibl, ebullient fifty-year-old boy,  
You have gone away to love people through generations.

*MENKE*

Alas, so many nimble games unfinished  
Look for you, Leibl, as orphans.  
You are among the stars the brightest game, Leibl.  
You are of tomorrow — the games not yet played,  
Of people and dreams — the sunniest game.  
We are all your dream, Leibl.  
We play your unfinished games.  
You give light through us, against every darkness, Leibl.

Would you stand with us by your graveside now,  
You would say: From the grave I also don't see my years,  
As torn out leaves carried through gloomy autumn.  
Would you stand with us by your graveside now,  
You would say: If I have become wind and grass,  
Then every seed that lost its way gets green through me.  
Would you stand with us by your graveside now,  
You would say, Man! I am with you until the end of years.

MIDDAY

## *Child Prodigy*

### I

“Mama, in what language can the brook speak?  
Who can, like Solomon, understand the tongue of a brook?”

“The brook can speak Yiddish like you and me —  
It’s easy as Yiddish to understand the tongue of a brook.”

“Mama, how long will a Jew speak Yiddish to a Jew?”

“As long as the brooks will bring water,  
As long as water will speak to water,  
As long, my child, as brooks will live.”

“Mama, how much water can a brook carry?”

“As many stars as Abraham found,  
As many years, my child, as our people will dawn,  
Through so many mirrors, seven suns are reflected.”

“Mama, yes, I hear the brook murmur like Yiddish.”

“My child, no sea will push out the brook.”

*MENKE*

## II

“Mama, why does the brook rush from stone to stone?  
What do the waters want to tell us in Yiddish?”

“The brook tells of days without sword or poverty or tears,  
When a knife will kill only a loaf of bread.

That’s why, my child, the brook never tires  
Of caressing the pebbles, washing their heads,  
That’s why, my child, the brook never tires  
Of hugging and kissing them.

And if you want, my child, to ask for wisdom,  
Ask, my child, the wise brook itself:  
The brook always rushes to hear you,  
Ask, and the brook will answer you itself.

When your last question comes to the last answer,  
Messiah will come and bring a new question mark.”

*MIDDAY*

**III**

“Where do you rush, brook, where do you find a home,  
When you tire of long wandering, as I from playing?  
Maybe you could for a little while, like my step, like the tree,  
Halt and listen to your own song?”

“My child, only the idler, death and the liar  
Can halt time, like a rolling stone.  
What strong man can overcome a moment in motion?  
Only Joshua can halt the sun at midday.

“My child, brooks are more eternal in the middle of the way,  
So brooks will never know any end,  
The middle is perpetual beginning, so there is no edge,  
The end can never seduce the middle.”

The wisdom of the brook took the child  
And showed him: A beginning without end —  
A kind of eternal flower.

*MENKE*

#### IV

“What is, mother, more motherly than all languages?  
What is, mother, prettier than all the seas?”  
“Yiddish, my child, is more motherly than all languages.  
The brook, my child, is prettier than all the seas.”

“Mother, why does the brook never stop laughing?  
Whom does the brook never stop chasing?”  
“My child, the brook doesn’t stop laughing at the fool Pride.  
The waters don’t stop chasing the enemy Boredom.”

“Mother, what is the world’s saddest sparkle?”  
“My child, the gleam of eyes that only shines through tears.”  
“Mother, I too want to be a child of the brook.  
I want to become a water that rushes through stones and thorns.”

“Yes, my child, we will yet, all of us, be children of the brook  
As rushing waters cleansed of tears — be forever-forever.”



*MIDDAY*

## ***A Leaf of Grass***

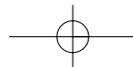
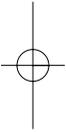
### **I**

A leaf of grass was born between rocks,  
Alas and alack to its skimpy life.  
In honor of the leaf of grass the birds all sing together.  
Even the crow shouts out: "Make way, make way!"

The leaf of grass has every sign of poverty,  
Even the dew falls upon it as tears:  
Is it a wonder that the leaf of grass is pale as fear,  
It can be stoned among stones.

So the blade of grass thinks there is no laughter in the world,  
But then the flower smiles to a bee,  
And the grass burst s into laughter with a thousand breezes of the field,  
And hugged itself with every ray.

The leaf of grass forced apart all the rocks.  
The grass outwitted death itself.





*MENKE*

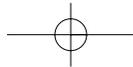
## II

The leaf of grass did not get a caress from anyone,  
From the thorn it got a stab, from a stone a push and shove  
But as the day tears itself away from the nets of the night  
Life bursts out through thorn and through stone.

The Maytree nourished the leaf of grass with all goodness.  
The peasant scattered the Maytree through the seeds,  
So the leaf of grass between stones in the field hopes,  
Though it is so thin, the leaf of grass, a shadow of a shadow.

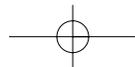
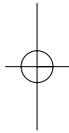
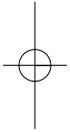
A first ray awakened our blade of grass from its slumber,  
Even the thorn — that deaf stick — could hear the happiness,  
But against the thorn it had the might of a giant:  
With every gust of wind our blade of grass dances the *sher*.

The little leaf of grass cast fear upon every thorn:  
The thorns stopped threatening its life.





# Evening in New York



*MENKE*

## ***Spring on Ocean Parkway***

### **I**

Spring is every boy, every girl  
On the bicycle path on Ocean Parkway.  
As to one goal, one hope, one joy,  
Endless cars rush through Ocean Parkway.

Pure moments of first love,  
To be touched in the air, as with lips.  
Evening, of the day a last kiss remained,  
The kiss adorned itself by the fires of the city.

I ride on my bicycle through heart of spring,  
The light of eyes, at the sound of laughter,  
Is clearer and springier than all springs —  
O give me, fellow person, such a kind of laughter.

I ride on my bicycle to the furthest generation:  
Hear, people laugh more lightsofely in each new generation.



*MIDDAY*

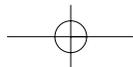
**II**

The avenue is beautiful to the point of pain.  
It is all regretful to the purest purity.  
Spring rides on bicycles though Ocean Parkway.  
Spring glides asunder the slim girls, slimmer still.

By the sides of the avenue trees crown themselves,  
Birds kiss with light and wonders —  
So the trees are cool with the shadows of birds  
In the middle lonely little islands of grass.

And here a horse is harnessed to a wagon,  
As if it lost its way from the market square of Svintsyan.  
The driver like Tanke the wagoner, whip in hand,  
Drives right in here with a spring from my hometown.

High over the horse an airplane boasts dominion,  
But both will remain — children of Spring.



*MENKE*

## ***Rivke***

Rivke, radiant girl of the gray Boro Park streets,  
Bathed in light you came, a girl of dawn,  
When I caressed the solitude of New York like a sick flower.  
You came with all the longing of gray Boro Park streets,  
Where the useless moon lies bored as in Chelm, the city of fools.  
Your modest voice hushed for a while the roar of lies, gold and murder.  
Rivke, my child bride from the gray Boro Park streets:  
Tenderly you embraced my every sorrow until my last sunset.

Your light body drew out the heavy gloom of my bachelor room,  
Enough gloom to swallow all the joy of a gloom-less age.  
After midnight, the smoked over orphaned stars of Manhattan still seek me.  
Opposite the sadness of suspicious love, home's delicious aroma rises:  
O in how many starless wanderings I stared out New York's stones and steel  
Against all troubles when age-old clouds towered over the city.  
Out of my long nights, they shine: the camaraderie, my poem and your slim body.  
From the darkest abysses, through you, I heard the clear voice of destiny.

*MIDDAY*

As a man who is lost takes a next random step forward  
And sees the light of a distant window on a blind path  
When despairing roads are dense with doubt, shadows and maybes,  
So I am an aimless believer in God's world.  
Aimlessly wandering in the world, I asked the wind about you.  
The street blew with evening, with you — with raw springtime,  
With your twenty-eight Aprils the street blew.  
You were the long-desired light on a blind path.

As many thorns as my forty-four summers held,  
So many times, lost on roads and paths, I yearned for your image  
But your street hid you with poverty, dream and grief.  
In my brightest vision, I saw you walk toward me,  
But your small steps were drowned out in the roar of the day:  
Wall after wall, tower over tower, the city blocked you.  
O how many unwritten poems are hidden in your thin limbs?  
A man not yet born will grace distant generations with your grace.

*Boro Park, for Rivke's birthday, October 3rd 1950*



*MENKE*

## ***Evening in New York***

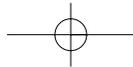
### **I**

Weary crowds drive out the day from shops, offices, factories.  
Every turn of sunset mirrors my old village,  
The sun remains in the glowing ashes of our burned house.  
Weary crowds drive out the day from shops, offices, factories.  
The sun remains like a lost wagon wheel behind a slab of night.  
Of all the gardens, on every windowpane a dead rose remained.  
Weary crowds drive out the day from shops, offices, factories.  
Every turn of sunset mirrors my old village.

### **II**

On every tower I see the shadows of Michaleshik straying,  
In every shadow lives the face of a dear one from yesterday.  
If not for the ashes on my tongue, O what remains of my small town?  
On every tower I see the shadows of Michaleshik straying.  
The evening lights in me every death that silenced my small town.  
On Broadway, light dances fear, as if driven by whips.

On every tower I see the shadows of Michaleshik straying,  
In every shadow lives the face of a dear one from yesterday.





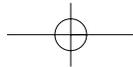
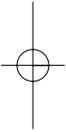
*MIDDAY*

### III

Listen: in the wind Yoske plays a fiddle, Berrel Berel a bass.  
The sun like a dummy falls behind the horizon,  
Like my good aunt Beilka's chopped-off head.  
Listen: in the wind Yoske plays a fiddle, Berrel Berel a bass.  
The day struggles, turning to stone in the roar of the streets.  
O Death himself was afraid of so much death —  
Listen, in the wind Yoske plays a fiddle, Berrel Berel on the bass.  
The sun like a dummy falls behind the horizon.

### IV

The whole earth is a bed of wounds for the day.  
At least in a dream my small towns appear — Michaleshik, Svintsyan!  
O my heart is under the wheels of subway trains.  
The last ray of my vanished village swears  
An oath heard in the most distant dawn:  
“No, death will not drive out a single beam!”  
It is good that the enemy could not stifle our earthly dreams.  
At least in my dream my small towns appear — Michaleshik, Svintsyan.





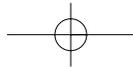
*MENKE*

**V**

If my child will speak Yiddish, it will not be doomed.  
And dying, I will see at the End of Days the distant flower nearby,  
And on my grave, with my own step, my unborn child will come.  
If my child will speak Yiddish it will not be doomed.  
Even my last ray will not signal my sunset:  
See, even with dead hands I embrace a bright beginning.  
If my child will speak Yiddish, it will not be doomed.  
And dying, I will see at the End of Days the distant flower nearby.

**VI**

My small town, in your death there is the light of birth,  
Though the wind will mourn forever the desolation of your ruins.  
I will train every word of my mouth to promise:  
My small town, in your death there is the light of birth,  
Though every flower in God's hands will be a goblet for your tears.  
No cricket will ever stop repeating this song:  
My small town, in your death there is the light of birth,  
Though the wind will mourn forever the desolation of your ruins.

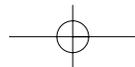




*MIDDAY*

## VII

Ask Bar Kochba if our defeat is not stronger than the enemy's victory.  
My eternal nation trumpets from Bar Kochba's silent dust.  
Ask the deserts how much thirst of my nation rests in the desert dust.  
Ask Bar Kochba if our defeat is not stronger than the enemy's victory.  
The longer, the older the night, the younger, the softer the new ray.  
The vanquished day falls victorious like a saint from his gallows.  
Ask Bar Kochba if our defeat is not stronger than the enemy's victory.  
My eternal nation trumpets from Bar Kochba's silent dust.



*MENKE****Troim***

Troim, girl of the Williamsburg backyards,  
 After so much lurking at your window for a distant glimpse of you,  
 After so much searching in the wind for a single note of your voice,  
 Suddenly you came to me  
 In this ordinary New York cafeteria,  
 As if you jumped out of my yearning poem.

Troim, my child, who strayed here from nearby strange places,  
 You are here next to me —  
 Looking like my body and my poem,  
 Limb of my limbs — joyous reality.

I walk with you  
 Street in street out  
 Poverty is sowed here in every beam,  
 Darkness grows here unfettered,  
 Need through night is a warning black year.  
 Every loose brick is a rebel in the wind  
 But my tenderness for you is so clear, my child.

*I troim — dream — with you*  
 Street in street out  
 And change the cold worries of streets for your shining laughter —  
 A unique, sassy laughter  
 To drive out all the crying of man and beast forever.  
 Through the pitch-dark fear of ages — such free laughter!  
 In your laughter I hear a distant world's laughter.

Troim, my child, thorn of the Williamsburg backyards,  
 As suddenly as you came, as suddenly you left:  
 Generations of my people's disquiet in your every turn and move —  
 A thorny Troim.

*MIDDAY*

It is midnight now.  
I don't know  
If I saw you in a dream or for real.  
I ramble through streets as through dreamt-up pathways.  
Through the unlit plate glass of a closed New York cafeteria  
I see an abandoned corner dreaming in the moon —  
The moon on the glass is a diffused *troim*.  
For me there remains  
The pain of yearning through irrecoverable years.  
For me there remains  
Such a frightening shadow of doubt and death,  
Of a Williamsburg backyard — a *troim* that has been thwarted.

*MENKE*

## *The Snows of Yesteryear*

*For B[er] G[rin]*

Woe, how I saw you, A. Prince — emerging from a fairy tale,  
A friend riding through tempestuous times as a knight in arms:  
In dreamy hours, that alchemist's gold lingers.  
A lonely Sheherazade still withers with old roses.

Night after night in the cafeteria the moon set:  
The snows of yesteryear became the brightest princesses,  
The hump of loneliness at a mug of coffee became a crown —  
The rust of twisted moons gnaws at my bones.

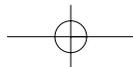
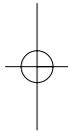
In my dream, a cafeteria hovers like a magic castle.  
Around the tables, imagined girls yearn away the years.  
In the kitchen, plates and spoons serenade a faraway generation.  
Woe, of all the harps, a long, deaf stick of fear remains.

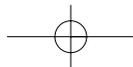
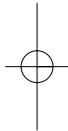
The evening on a tower pane leads a prince into a tale.  
Job curses himself in the whirlwind, hurls eternal complaints at God.

*New York, March 1954*



# Ethel





*MIDDAY****Ethel Menke's***

You called death an hour too early.  
 I came to you an hour too late.  
 The garret was silent as a wound:  
 Woe, you called death an hour too early.  
 July breezes swirl around the city  
 The beautiful restlessness of your tall, thin body.  
 Woe, you called death an hour too early.  
 I came to you an hour too late.

A little window blossomed in the garret.  
 The dawn crowned New York the queen of cities.  
 As always I spoke to you so simply:  
 "Ethel, don't give me your death as a gift,  
 See, I give you myself as a gift.  
 I have not yet revealed to you the brightest secret.  
 A little window blossoms in the garret.  
 Around us rumbles New York — the queen of cities."

On the festive table (our old acquaintance)  
 Lay your last letter — a cramped heart.  
 In the gold and green of the day, your fate was black.  
 On the festive table (our old acquaintance)  
 The last impression of your hand was still warm.  
 Open gas rocked you as with smells of paradise.  
 On the festive table (our old acquaintance),  
 Lay your last letter — a cramped heart.

I came to you today so elated.  
 The morning is an angel from Jacob's ladder.  
 The street flutters with July and doves.  
 I came to you with poems and kisses  
 And you seek me in the cold eternity.  
 Even the heartiest rose has no heart for a grave.  
 I came to you today so elated.  
 The morning is an angel from Jacob's dream.

*MENKE*

July gave birth to a beautiful day:  
The day is a tale for little children.  
So who would ask for death today?  
July gave birth to an aborted day.  
A breeze recites the prayer before death, for your early years.  
You exchanged the sun for a cemetery path.  
July gave birth to a final day.  
The day is a great fear for little children.

What do eyes tell at a farewell?  
A grain of sand becomes an imagined land.  
In the first ray is your last gaze.  
What do eyes tell at a farewell?  
Such longing is met only at death.  
Your eager hand still waves to me from the attic window.  
What do eyes tell at a farewell?  
A person becomes an imagined land.

This poem will be a gravestone over July 11th, 1947.  
It will never leave your young cut off years.  
Like mourning grass, this poem will never leave you.  
This poem will be a gravestone over July 11th, 1947.  
A suicidal moon will stone the night to death  
And seek her own demise at the precipice of dawn.  
This poem will be a gravestone over July 11th, 1947.  
And will never part from your young cut off years.



*MIDDAY*

What does the night alone do in the empty garret?  
In the dark, the last gaze of your eyes shines.  
A black hour like Poe's raven bends over you.  
You yourself are the night in the empty garret.  
Your last letter whispers: "I love you."  
Gray and numb, all the sucked out stars lie there.  
What does the night alone do in the empty garret?  
In the dark, the last gaze of your eyes will always shine.

*New York, July 1947*



*MENKE*

## *A Prayer*

O how I want my life to set,  
To set, to set.  
*Save us, we beg Thee.*  
That I should set, set  
Today, today, today,  
When the roar of mockery, insolence and gold falls,  
When the noise of wheel and man and stone  
Wheels in, stones in, evenings in:  
O how I want to enter the last ray.

*Succeed, we beg Thee,*  
That I, with caressing fear, should sense  
The approaching steps of Death as intimate as my body  
That I should be worthy to be the dust of springtime earth  
Which carries the stalks, the rose,  
The grass with patient tremor  
That I should be worthy to become eternity.

*I confess*  
You gave me for a while  
To ignite my longing against your stars,  
And today, today, today  
*In distress I call upon God*  
To let me hover for a glowing moment  
Through all the past and all future generations  
And vanish, vanish, vanish.

*New York, end of February 1954*

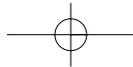
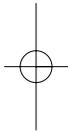


# Good Bye

*By Eltshik Chait*

*“Don't talk yourself into believing that the grave is a hiding place for you”  
[Mishna Avoth, 4: 29]*





*MIDDAY*

## ***At the Waterfall***

### **I**

There is a last kiss in every rush of the waterfall,  
Of the rushing blood of young men and young women at death.  
Such a clear-white blood wails, of suiciders absorbed in thought  
That the waterfall doesn't stop wailing at all —  
A person becomes a wave here a moment before the fall —  
The rest of the body a rod against itself.  
Could be the waterfall doesn't stop laughing at all,  
I hear the ceaseless wail of such clear-white blood.

I heard the restlessness of suiciders at the waterfall,  
Who are at the ready to jump off cliffs,  
I saw a person testing his noose to ensure it won't unravel,  
Smiling with froth that death by his own hand is his destiny.  
And I have heard a person fondling the cutting edge of a knife.  
O every swallow of this waterfall is a cup of poison:  
Not the waters, my beloved did I hear fall here,  
She pulls me down to herself with water-hands, in love.

*MENKE*

## II

### **Frost on a Windowpane**

On a winter's night I stood as a snowman at your house.  
The frost painted a distant girl on a windowpane:  
"O faraway girl or nearby girl, who are you and from where?"  
"Do not ask, my love, I am ground into frost.  
At dawn the girl falls off the windowpane,  
Into a waterfall,  
Only a touch a rustle of the depths,  
Returns right to the height,  
To the terror of the waterfall.  
She falls,  
Falls apart though a thousand and one sunfalls:  
Such light can be seen only with the last glance —  
Her stare of frost downs a cliff  
Attacks me like walls.  
Before she glides to dawn, before she falls  
Back to night,  
Before the frost crushes her to light,  
On the windowpane  
My love is only a tear, a water rose.

*MIDDAY***III****Queen of Waterfalls**

I see you, my love, a queen of waterfalls:  
For your sake the water, like silver, does not stop flowing,  
Water girls, limb in, limb out do not stop falling —  
Fall, fall without stop, want to submit to your passion.

You fall prettiest, your every fall hurts me as it does you —  
If a dream is punishment for all evil, then I am punished enough!  
Come out of the waterfall, stand by me at least a moment,  
If you are clearing Adam's sin, then you will fall to the end!

Here comes my beloved, with hair of waterfalls combed out,  
Distantly she whispers: "See, a cliff cannot my weakest limbs  
crush,"

And I was weak, so weak that I was ashamed to live,  
So why, my love, should I want to come out of the waterfall?

"And if I come out unto you, I would melt away in water-gushes,  
And you, my beloved fellow, would even in your dream not find me."

*MENKE*

**IV**

**Come, O Come!**

“If this waterfall has, dear girl, swallowed you up,  
Then why does this water never stop swallowing you, a gulp after a gulp?  
Why don't the water tongues ever stop licking themselves with desire?  
Someone drowned in a river is at least there in water rings.”

“I am not here, so you will find of me a wound,  
I am in the wind, plucked out blossoms of every flower,  
If you want, my dear fellow, to find a nearby step of mine  
Make a splash in the water, wherever, and hear me coming.

“Throw a stone in a well, and I will circle out zeros,  
And give a flutter, just like that, in the dark deep — water suns,  
Even when dead, before you circle out a minute of life,  
At least in a dream, around you, to turn green as a ripe field.”

My beloved — a passionate emptiness takes me over:  
“O. I am the waterfall, fall through me, beloved fellow. Come O come!”

*MIDDAY***V****Wonder of Wonders**

My poem is all spungold of a last rose.  
Year after year, yoke after yoke I throw off from myself,  
And become like you — waterfall: the size of a dream,  
And come to you so light, no body, no head,  
And the most workday hour becomes like you, all magic,  
We are not frightened by jumps from cliffs and falls through the abyss,  
No petty human can gray us over — no snobbish piece of dust  
Can pierce us like a wound, a sword's thrust.  
No midget can cut us into pieces of penny luck:  
He who sells to the sun like froth the sea,  
From the tear of the hypocrite and the smile of the dog catcher.  
Let us escape to the wonder of wonders!

The thrust of fate, the swallow of the tide doesn't even hurt us,  
The press of love, the glow of joy is what hurts now.

*MENKE*

**VI**

**Waters in Love**

You have remained, my beloved, a child of the waterfall.  
And it is good that through death at least I can come to you now,  
O, to fall in love with every fall of the waterfall.  
You have dissolved yourself here like a water flower,  
So I will look for you without stop, drop after drop, —  
And become like you — a waterlet of the waterfall.  
I will taste you as the waters taste each other,  
Not stop together with you to fall, fall, fall,  
With you, from cliff to cliff, as the eddies break out in dance  
together,  
With you, as waters necking with each other from fall to fall.  
O good that through death you are completely mine,  
I and you — waters in love in the waterfall:

Without stop, to throw myself apart in this last poem:  
I — the wonder-bow, you — the wailing harp.

*MIDDAY*

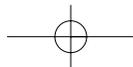
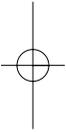
## ***Flowers Cut Before Their Time***

From flowers cut before their time the prettiest death dreads out:  
The colors discolor as undawned dawns,  
Flowers, by which fine gold will no longer ignite the dew,  
The sick roots stay in the soil as haunting wounds.

Flowers longing for the field cast spells on a child's wonderment,  
As a world being put out, as stars at the start of their fall.  
And flowers at happy events just want to die in loneliness, separately,  
Play up through that happiness — every ray of their lost days.

From a flower that can only wither a bee can suck only gall.  
No matter how prettily you decorate the dazzle of flowers in a wreath,  
They will no longer bend by a satisfied wind but by sadness,  
No longer be touched by the earth of the fields but by death.

Flowers cut before their time, as goblets for gloom and tears.  
O to die in one piece on your own stem, not to become part of  
someone else's wreath.



*MENKE*

## ***To My Friends***

Forgive me my friends that I want this way to die,  
That I know the hour of my death exactly, as I know myself.  
I have fallen in love with death, as they say, to death,  
So that it is easy to entrust myself to death.

So every sadness, every load has become easy:  
Thorns pet me as tenderly as hands in love.  
I have become so light for myself too, to the point of not being,  
An oven in Treblinka would not burn me now.

All poem, I knew only joy and joy.  
As a new child pushes to every first light,  
I push to bring myself forth: from myself final greetings  
In my poem to be lost among stars and time.

So I leave unto you all the prime of early blossomed summers,  
I become clear, as if I were a garland of limbs of the sun —  
Transparent, as distant scents of hidden flowers, —  
All the bad in me becomes, down to the last sin, all blessing.

So I am a sentenced to death “ to see yet not be seen.”  
O so often, when I spent joyous time at the table, loving you all,  
I suddenly heard in my booming voice the call of death,  
As if not with me but with death you would be celebrating, my friends.

O you should through me, my friends, see only sunrise, —  
That I should be not yonder year's darkness but all tomorrow:  
You should always see me in the light of generations unrisen.  
Who else is like me, after the last step, so eternal, O my friends?



MIDDAY

## *Sacred Dust*

The dust where the little blind worm crawls,  
Can also bless the seed with all that is good,  
The rose too must crawl through this dust:  
To this sacred dust a person returns.

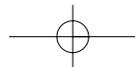
When the little worm shouts with all its silence,  
I see God himself in all his grandeur crawl —  
Near the worm — shuffle after shuffle, side by side,  
In order to tenderly repair the thinnest tear of flesh.

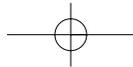
Hark, a drink of dew falls like a drop of spungold,  
And God stills the thirst of the little worm in the dust,  
The little worm crawls lightly over not one death:  
“O, shield me God from the eye of a robber.”

An eagle would perchance not want to be,  
If the worm could only be asked:  
The highest cliff can be a little sheaf of straw  
The smallest leaf is an ample couch.

The little worm is also a child of God,  
God preordained such a light through every blindness,  
In the little worm too — the blessing of God:  
A spark is allotted to gray nothingness too.

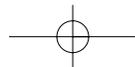
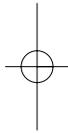
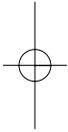
Only curses and oaths are in the dust,  
Where the hangman's shadow dreads out in the place of my people:  
More curses than specks in the dust,  
The curses have even almost cursed God.







## **From Ponar to a new *Oz Yoshir***





MIDDAY

## *Longing*

I read and read a thousand letters  
 Until all words resound from the paper  
 Until I become a blank paper.  
 My senses, sharp and thin as needles:  
 Through the evening noise, I sense only how  
 A blade of grass in the city wind grows helpless, crying.

A moment of longing can stone you with all the stones of the world.  
 Even my fingers grow gray from longing.  
 Above me I sense every wheel of the city,  
 The sounds of cars like crows — a cursed choir.  
 I watch the broad avenues shrink into Michaleshik alleys,  
 Every alley under the whip, under the German, whose heart is a thorn.  
 From every tower, from every hand, stone after stone falls on me  
 Until every tower is a hunchbacked hut of clay.

Night. Restless poetry and starry tales.  
 Insolent lights mock my poem and the stars.  
 I go to you through all my poems, Michaleshik —  
 I go to you and time goes back, back:  
 One step becomes a year, I am a thousand years old,  
 I am a strange miracle, a thousand-year-old man.

Woe, my Lithuanian town, Michaleshik,  
 What remains of all your generations is a pile of plucked grass.  
 In Uncle Chaim's smithy,  
 A springtime of my childhood still rusts on the silent anvil.  
 In the Viliya, the waters still murmur  
 The vows of boys and girls in love,  
 Swearing eternal love to one another.  
 Instead of a Talmud chant, the wail of jackals,  
 Your sunsets are made of cemetery light.  
 My mother sees you in Paradise as a tree of death.

*MENKE*

Dawn.  
I feel so good, Michaleshik,  
That your dawn never stops growing blue beside me,  
It feels good at least to be near you in the poem for a single hour.  
I feel so good walking over the unembellished lines /  
As through your crooked alleys.  
I rush to you from darkness like a blind man to the light  
And call you as far as my thinnest affection:  
Mi-cha-le-shik!  
You're entirely inside me, as the whole forest is in a single leaf.

*New York, July 1953*



*MIDDAY*

**I**

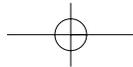
**Ponar**

There is a word that will not cease frightening the daylight: Ponar!  
Ask my town Svintsyán if Ponar is not Ezekiel's Valley.  
A man will come a hundred years hence and ask in Ponar:  
"Is it Ezekiel lamenting in the wind from the Valley of Bones?"

"Whose crying rises and sets in Ponar, Ezekiel's Valley?  
The primeval intoxicates like the aroma of poison flowers.  
The crying of the ages never stops in the cursed valley.  
What power can silence Ezekiel's crying in Ponar?"

Listen, my people laments from the stone: "O man a hundred years hence,  
May a mute teach you to hear the language of stone.  
Know that here this crooked thorn was once a rose.  
O say the word that can change a stone into a star.

"Know, mute is not he who cannot lament through words —  
Mute is he who cannot understand the language of stone."



*MENKE*

## II

### **Prayer of a Stone**

Every stone of Ponar begs: Break me up, crush me into sand, Son of Man,  
That I not remain here like the hideous heart of a murderer.  
May a grain of my dust bless with support a pursued seed,  
May a grain of my dust rustle to spread the sound of a stilled life.

So I won't remain here in Ponar — a weeping that never wept.  
So I won't remain here a stone — a song that never sang.  
Woe, I helped to stone the wise Litvaks here,  
And now I want to become a wound that pains only itself.

Like the wind, incessantly, I will bemoan the Lithuanian towns,  
Become a tear that can move the stones of the whole earth,  
A tear that goes on to shine through the nights of Ponar  
So I will adorn the grave of Ponar with bright tidings:

Tidings of the first springtime after the last, the very last Ponar —  
So that even a stone will care about a bullet in a child as in its own body.

*MIDDAY*

## ***Rockport, Massachusetts***

Rockport:

Your old alleys dreaming around the sea  
Are embedded in longing.  
Your alleys are like tales told by the sea  
When you remind me of Michaleshik,  
But you are called Rockport — the haven of rocks,  
You are a secure, rocky arm around the sea.  
Michaleshik used to huddle with a Talmud chant at the Viliya.  
Yoorke the peasant pulled the river ferry to my boyhood dream.  
O my town, my childhood of love,  
I am trampled in your every grain of dust.  
My people was orphaned, Mother Michaleshik.

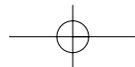
Rockport, alien beautiful stepmother,  
You rise and set on the canvases of painters — skies of dreamers.  
A Yankee printer shows  
How the waves around you laugh the laughter of America.  
A Jewish painter shows  
How the waves lament the millennia-old lament of my people.  
A wave breaks a path through the eternity of rocks  
But retreats — vanquished, deceived.  
A wave pours the rage of the saint — Michaleshik.  
A wave boasts of her Yankee pedigree,  
A wave bursts arrogantly to flood the last memory of Michaleshik.



*MENKE*

Rockport, dawn.  
The sun rises like a magic artist's pencil.  
The sun is a fantastic ball that children throw in their dream  
From dawn to dawn, from dream to dream.  
The sun gives away all her gold to beggars, birds and poets.  
On the platform of the Widow's Walk,  
Shadows of stooped widows appear  
And seek with sad eyes  
In lost distances  
The late fishermen.

*Rockport, Massachusetts, 1947*



*MIDDAY*

## ***Mother Srentsa in Buenos Aires***

### ***For Sh. Davidovich***

Mama Srentsa brought her ruined town  
Down to its last scratch to Buenos Aires.  
As if her grandfathers wandered through Buenos Aires,  
The same dreams caress her and torment her at night.

The same crooked alleys meandering and winding.  
Through every noise she heard her town here too  
Horrifying as the cries of a whipped mute.  
Here too, she steps on the same wounded earth.

Woe, the people, the birds, the sun itself were butchered,  
But her heart confided to the abiding night:  
At night shadows from her Polish town come alive  
And the hangman-choked generations wander around.

The alien days of Buenos Aires pass by her:  
In an alien light you become alien to yourself,  
But the stars stay faithful to her even in Buenos Aires,  
And ask every distance about her town.

It is no more! With alley cobblestones, even God was stoned to death.  
Even a lone stone can remind her of her town.  
Woe, with her own ears she can hear a stone crying like a baby  
And in a clod of earth she can recognize a familiar face.

Mama Srentsa fell in love with the night.  
In her own dream, the alien city has disappeared disappeared,  
And like her own firstborn Shmuel, she loves the flame of day  
Because the dawn is like Shmulik's first steps.

*MENKE*

Just like the dawn, Shmulik loves the sunrise,  
Sunrise even through the grief of decline,  
To hear the bright tidings even through a dying weeping,  
To see men rising even in the last sunset.

But Shmulik is far away, as the long road of a quarter century  
That steeped Mother's heart in yearning.  
She sees him lost among the wonders of New York.  
She caresses the light that the dark spaces remember.

And suddenly a letter: a new star arrives.  
The rustle of curious paper is like the fluttering of wings.  
She clutches the letter to her breast like Shmulik's life.  
He is coming on wings as in a storybook:

"I'm coming, Mother, to your Passover table, Mother, I'm coming."  
O such a night of tidings! Who has eyes to fall asleep?  
The scream of all torments fell silent for a time.  
O so many thousands of nights hoped for, this night came true.

Mama Srentsa in the faraway Buenos Aires  
Saw her desolate town newborn.  
The same sky is blue and gray in Buenos Aires —  
The foe and the destruction were just an evil dream.

She sees him at her Passover feast, free of all thorny roads,  
All miracle, as if the Prophet Elijah brought him here.  
The joy in the house is like a sea overflowing its shores,  
And Srentsa doesn't know whether to cry with joy or to laugh.

*MIDDAY*

Shmulik emerged as from the Book of Passover  
And Mother Srentsa grows young as hope.  
In the wine Miriam dances the victory of her people,  
And Shmuel sang a new splitting of the Red Sea.

But the flooding joy like the laughter of a robber  
Took the breath of Mama Srentsa's heart.  
A Passover prepared on her holiday table was an image of horror.  
Like Shmulik's kisses, Death embraced her.

And the night of Passover never reached the sun,  
And Mama Srentsa, like her little town, remained in the night.  
Through the little window in the door, a star sneaked in  
And wrote and rewrote Shmulik's letter on a windowpane.

*MENKE*

## ***A Grain of Goodness***

Who can long for Jerusalem like Yehude Ha-Leyvi?  
Maybe a leaf in the wind longs like this for his home — the tree?  
Maybe an eagle in a cage can long like this for the nearby heights?  
Maybe a man in a cell can long like this for his beloved?

O grant me, God, if anywhere, anytime, I sowed a grain of goodness,  
That I will kiss the earth of my people like Yehude Ha-Leyvi,  
Even if an Arab rider is ready to gallop  
Over me, as over Yehuda Yehude Ha-Leyvi, the prince of my people.

Yehude Ha-Leyvi, in your honor, your age was a Golden Age:  
Only from afar, Our Teacher Moses saw with his last gaze  
The eternal land, where he was not even allowed to die  
Under the hooves of the horse of an Arab rider.

Yehude Ha-Leyvi will long eternally for Jerusalem  
As Jerusalem will long eternally for Yehude Ha-Leyvi.

*MIDDAY*

## ***A Grain of Beauty***

O God, if I ever sowed a grain of beauty, grant me  
That, like Our Father Isaac at a well in the Negev,  
As a clear joy, I will see Rebecca of Boro Park on a camel  
In the Negev with a jug of water on her narrow shoulder.

O really to touch with my footsteps the miracles of my people!  
O miracle, purify us until everyone's sin is changed into a star,  
Purify us until the world becomes the beginning of Genesis.  
To touch with our fingers the gentle light of the brightest morning!

As many grains of sand, so many grains will be in the Negev,  
As many crooked thorns, so many palms as proud as my people:  
And to the Negev, the garden of Israel, will come my people.  
My little town too can enter the Song of Songs, in Yiddish.

But behold, the ashes of Michaleshik bend our far day in grief,  
Hear in the wind the millennium's ceaseless lament.

*MENKE*

## ***A New Oz Yoshir***

And my right hand did not forget its cunning,  
Because I did not forget you, Jerusalem,  
Since we sat down by the rivers of Babylon.  
My tongue did not cleave to the roof of my mouth,  
But my longing glowed, generation after generation.  
Our forefathers made us brother to miracle,  
And my right hand did not forget its cunning,  
And I did not forget you, Jerusalem.

How much wandering years in the present?  
As much wandering as only the wind knows,  
As much springtime promise as a first blade of grass.  
O after all that grief, to gleam with a first smile,  
To light up with all the dawns that will be in the sun.  
The thorns recall death and tomorrow's lilac.  
How much wandering years in the present?  
As much wandering as only the wind knows.

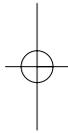
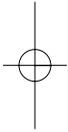
Through how much immolation have we borne our destiny?  
Through how much darkness have we climbed, up and down, to sunrise?  
How much desert did we put under our heads under homeless skies?  
Through as much immolation as we have borne our destiny  
As many wells will my people strike from Moses' rock,  
As many stars will watch over our heads under Isaiah's skies.  
O my people will not stop dawning through the most hideous nights.  
O my people will never descend from Jacob's ladder.

## MIDDAY

My people is a millennium-old tree with a saw through its heart.  
 Carefully, O carefully, let us remove the saw from the wounded tree  
 So the lament of the branches will not kill the root.  
 My people is a millennium-old tree with a saw through its heart.  
 But no Haman, no darkness blackened the Prophet's light,  
 No Amalek, no devil took my people.  
 My people is a tree of life with a saw through its heart,  
 Carefully, O carefully, let us remove the saw from the wounded tree.

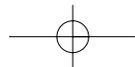
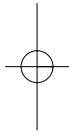
May darkness befall our foe, whoever and wherever he may be.  
 The flame of the thorn bush made our rage white hot,  
 And we are an eternally burning thorn bush,  
 A thorn bush shining in the glowing ashes.  
 Darkness on our foe, whoever and wherever he may be,  
 If he takes an axe to threaten our years,  
 Darkness on our foe, whoever and wherever he may be —  
 Thorn bush years brambled through our rage.  
 Here is the first flower of the long-awaited spring:  
 Such a spring! What enemy, what storm can bend it?  
 O it is the spring that eternity cannot bend.  
 After all the deserts, here is the long-awaited flower.  
 Brother, do not take away the delicate fire of dawn,  
 But with death in our hands, victory in our eyes,  
 Let us guard the first springtime of our garden:  
 Such a spring! What enemy, what storm can bend it!

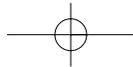
Abraham's vision studs our land with stars.  
 From the ancient darkness, bright Gideons trumpet:  
 The curse of curses will devour the last Amaleks!  
 Abraham's vision studs our land with stars,  
 Through the ancient darkness, bright Gideons stride.  
 From Isaiah's dream our land beams:  
 O be blessed, plow, in Jewish hands.  
 O here, Moses is singing a new *Oz yoshir*.





## Simple Truths







*MIDDAY*

## ***Truth***

What is simpler than the truth? What is deeper than a mystery?  
Who told man about the first grief?  
The first grief was told by the wind — the flute.  
The destiny of my people was mourned by the wind — the flute.  
The simpler the truth, the deeper the mystery.  
He who saw the sun, the first wheel, for the first time  
Saw the simple truth — the deepest mystery.  
The simpler the truth, the deeper the mystery.





*MENKE*

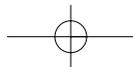
## ***Bleak Field***

What does the rain do in a bleak field after battle?  
O not a blessing for the little children  
The rain has brought to the summer earth  
Not one loaf of bread to be weighed.

Perhaps, deluded by a mirage, the rain roams —  
A grave in a field looks like a new flowerbed.  
The rain does not come to refresh the grief  
But to rejoice in the birds, the children and the flowers.

When the rain finds graves instead of flowerbeds,  
Smells of scattered summers instead of loaves of bread,  
Then medals bloom on the graves instead of flowers:  
A bountiful harvest of death blossoms.

The wind in the field trumpets the victory of robbers' gold.  
The night wears the magic of early played out miracles.

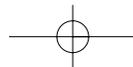




*MIDDAY*

## ***A Warning Tree***

The hangman's forest grows so many gallows,  
Will a whole tree remain for the birds?  
The hangman sees springtime in the gallows, not in a tree.  
So many springtimes were choked by the hangman's forest,  
Every tree casts a shadow of a hanged man.  
A branch without a noose is as if from a lost tree.  
So many gallows will grow in the hangman's forest,  
But see, for every hangman a warning tree arises!



*MENKE*

## ***Simple Truths***

### **I**

If the builder stills the hearty bugle of the hammer,  
Towers of rust will grow instead of living stone and steel.  
If idle time adorns all the iron with flowers of decay,  
Only an idler's lying voice would resound in the silence.

See, the arms of the smith, bent like irons in fire,  
Recall the raising of towers, the noise of happy cities:  
White cold steel glows with distant flames in window eyes,  
But who can extract a single spark from the darkness?

See, without the peasant, a grain has no blessing,  
Remains naked and lonely in the wind's wail  
To scream vainly for life to the thorn of barren earth,  
Abandoned like Abram, orphaned, a forsaken child in the wind.

Like the sun, like man, this truth is eternal: in the efforts  
Of bee and man, of hammer and flower, our happiness will blaze.



*MIDDAY*

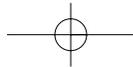
## II

If the captain leaves his ship with a crippled rudder,  
Suddenly the ship remains in the ancient, far past Columbus's dream,  
Steered by the mercy of cruel sinking,  
And the condemned wait for the wink of the Deep.

Without you and me, him and her, energy could hear no blessing,  
No curse could make the dawn kindle a sunrise.  
Even the forget-me-not would want to be forgotten,  
And the sun itself would want to disappear from space.

And only the spider, the rifle and fear would reign over the earth,  
In fear, the days would forever be extinguished —  
Such a night would walk away to the Devil with the eternal sun:  
Only the curse of curses could sire such a world that would remain.

And the fool, the evil one, and the one who doesn't know what to ask  
Still don't know to whom the world belongs: to man or to horror?



*MENKE*

## **L'chaim, *Singer!***

### ***In memory of the Brownsville singer Chaim Singer***

He is the longing left of his village, Koydenov,  
The song of the vanished street singer's footsteps,  
The weeping for sun and justice of Yoske the fiddler,  
O Chaim the bass, the Brownsville singer.

He reminds you of the wise light of old wine —  
The darker his eye, the brighter his gaze.  
He is rich in years as the evening in light.  
Through blind calamity, he saw a world of happiness

And walked to happiness generation after generation,  
The farthest star of happiness is close to him.  
On such a path of wandering through sunsets,  
How could your heart not get tipsy?

O *L'chaim* to Chaim, Chaim Singer!  
He sang out the grandchildren's round dance —  
Of grandchildren in a round dance he sang  
The more snow on his head, the younger his dream —  
O he never finished singing the dream in the real.

*MIDDAY*

## ***A Blessing***

Blessed be the zest of a hammer over all crusty moulds  
Not over the mold on ancient cliffs,  
Nor over the moss of the heroic forest —  
Thunder itself will smash the moulds,  
Rain itself will wash the hair of the moss.  
The oldness of the sun will never mould  
Pure old age, like wisdom cannot stand the mould.  
The youngest dolt is older than all the mould.

See, no mold grows on the old age of a day,  
Our elderly day is loaded with the young warning of thousands of years:  
Every hour, sacred, hears the hammer breaking through the moulds —  
Over such a radiant old age, no foe laden with so much death  
Ever won a single battle or gained a single victory.

In the modern convulsions of electric chairs,  
In the ancient deaths of Roman circuses,  
The same spat-upon tears keep on demanding.  
The truth of the vanquished always ruined the most ruthless victor.  
The dawn always vanquished the longest night.

Blessed be the hammer over every serpentine softness  
Soft as the hangman's caress of a condemned man,  
Such a smile as gray and transparent  
As dark treason transparent in the soft spider web —  
A hyena smile against Walt Whitman's eternal American democracy.  
No spider since the time of Genesis has created a single ray,  
All spiders fear the dazzling sunrise.

*MENKE*

Blessed be the hammer over faith that believes only in suspicion,  
Suspicion that is more suspect than the most horrible suspicions:  
Hey, suspicion, even a lonely night would not trust you with her darkness,  
So you cannot poison every shadow with your gall.  
Even a crow would flee your sick hatred in fear,  
But know that the dawn never fled from any darkness.  
Know that it is not a bowed slave with a pierced ear who faces you,  
Every plow, every needle, every awl knows already, everybody knows:  
No fence, no chain, no lock ever locked up a dream —  
Through all the fences, through all the chains, through all the locks,  
A man pulls the truth out of its sheath —  
A man of the fires of love and rage!

*MIDDAY*

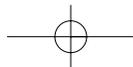
## ***In the Grief of Evening***

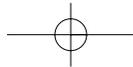
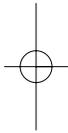
The blood of shepherd Abel will forever frighten all Cains,  
So the scream of his brother cannot chase murder off the earth:  
Cain with no murder is like Abel with no flute, no field, no sheep.  
Without Abel's first love, dawn remains without a ray,  
Only Cain, the night and the whore can hope for eternal darkness.  
Without Abel's love, the soil will not absorb a single grain.

Woe, Cain still did not hear the lament of Abel's blood,  
But at the End of Days, Cain will have no sword, no victim  
Because no Cain, no death can choke the scream of blood.  
See, not a single blade of grass was born of Cain's murderous lust:  
An endless valley laments in place of eternal mountains —  
Only Abel will remain in the blossoms and light of the field.

And as many steps, brother, as you are fated to take on the earth,  
From your first hour to the last, from your first step to the last,  
As many times as Cain attacks your every step to sunrise,  
So many times Abel will cringe upon the earth.  
Cain walks behind our every turn, moment after moment, step by step.  
Over Abel, Isaiah spreads a rainbow of deaths embraced and kissed.

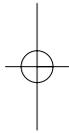
The Prophet comes in evening's sadness when with all her  
splendor she bids the world farewell.  
The world at the brink of doom becomes such a hopeful wound.  
Peace, mocked and jeered, rises so childishly bright against the sword,  
And the Prophet sees his dream tied by the hands of a hangman,  
But the hangman always fuels the Prophet's rage, the curse of all curses,  
And the Prophet sees, close, closer the End of Days — a secret revealed.

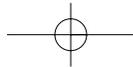






## Friends at a Table







MIDDAY

## *Friends at a Table*

*for my friend who died before his time, Leizer Safrin*

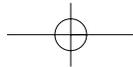
### I

Faraway places have never enticed me.  
Wanderlust has never eaten a moment of my time.  
With friends at a table, I flew through the whole world, heart to heart,  
Wandering through conversations is the destiny of my life.

Wandering at a table is the oldest voyage around the world.  
A friend at the table is more beautiful than the beauty of all travels.  
What sunrise can lighten the world like a friend at the table?  
What stunts of an airplane can pull off the wonder of a word?

What ship sails light as a chat over a cup of coffee?  
Hark, a word — Noah's page, here's a stride, a wind, the first train.  
Hark, a word — a rock, a hero who draws the earth to the stars.  
Hark, a word — a hand that takes all the evil away from here:

All the good things remain baffled by this dazzle of joy, zest and plenty —  
The earth grows young, man is new as Adam's first gaze at Creation.





*MENKE*

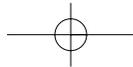
## II

O the glowing talk with friends until late at night:  
The light of suns that never set gives light round the table.  
The word is the only sword in the fiercest battles.  
Cigarette smoke rings blow planets around the table.

A chat over a cup of coffee is the longest journey.  
O to travel through the sunny chatter — from blindest antiquity  
To the time when gardens will rise in the place of gallows,  
When towers of dream will mate with towers of steel.

Hark, the table — flowerbed for a faraway unsown rose.  
Hark, Isaiah, warrior against the sword, sits with us at the table.  
Hark, a child pulls a vegetarian wolf out of the Bible  
Banishing the weeping of man, tree and animal from all the earth.

O a chat with friends through the late night tells the world  
That after all the battles, the word will remain as the only sword.



*MIDDAY*

## ***In Every City of Every Land***

Alas, there is still a jail in every city of every land.  
Woe, if even one person remains in a cell,  
The world will still be in jail in every city of every land,  
And the lock of the cell will come to haunt us in our dreams.

Every cell reminds that earth is still an endless jail.  
If you walk by a cell, every free street becomes a stone wall,  
Every bird, every rose is still destined for the chains of humanity,  
The wind even is not free in any city of any land.

Woe, there is a policeman — a gun on every corner,  
As if human hunters attack all of us again.  
Near the revolver, I hear the caveman's cry:  
The sky, as after battle, is a bleak field, man — the last ray.

Will only a black rose remain of the hopeful summers?  
From the brightest dream — will the same thug emerge?



*MENKE*

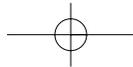
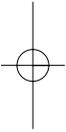
## ***A Page of Blank Paper***

A page of blank paper is a world still undiscovered.  
A naked line teases like an untouched road.  
Lines become bars around a death row cell,  
And lines become roads, where only friends run toward you.

And the poet destines the fate of every road,  
One road leads to your brother, another to the slaughterer.  
Here the hammer blesses with cities and the saw sings through boards,  
There a fist caresses a child, and the lie is called truth.

See, on every road, mother is a drop of ink,  
The pen is a mill to grind all mills.  
Here a word hurls a tower — a mountain — down the mountain,  
And of the tower — the mountain — not even a valley remains.

A blank paper is a world untouched by a single teardrop,  
Where yet no word has led man through fire.



*MIDDAY*

## ***In the Attic***

In the attic of my father's old house,  
No song is as eternal as the night:  
One fate is destined for the thorn and the rose —  
No star has ever trusted the night.

O who reads my books of poetry here  
If not the dark and the dust, the spider and the horror?  
I walk about as if my heart is hanging  
In the darkness of a spiderweb — a sack of fear.

In the attic of my father's old house  
Only blind ghosts caress my poems.  
Here, no springtime opens from the spiderweb:  
Happiness and gloom whisper the same confession here.

Letters, mountain on mountain, eaten by the dust,  
Look for light, like the eyes of a morgue.

*New York, Eve of Yom Kippur 1953*

*MENKE*

***On My Gravestone  
1906-19...***

Brothers, sisters of mine:  
In the place where Yiddish is mute,  
As this very dust of my grave,  
There I have never lived.  
In the place where Yiddish weeps,  
As the ash of my villages —  
O Michaleshik, O Svintsyan, —  
There my father and my mother weep.  
In the place where Yiddish laughs,  
Sanguine as spring's wind,  
There my father and mother laugh,  
There I never stop laughing  
There we never stop living.

*New York, September 1953*

*MIDDAY*

## ***Oath***

Before all the people I took an oath  
To throw away my pen — a superfluous stick.  
But fate gave me a thorn instead of a tongue,  
And I heard ghosts gasping through the dainty harps.

I was in Nowhere, I became seven times Nothing,  
Like Bovshover, I wrote on the walls with my fingers,  
And my poem like a curse secreted blackness over the years,  
And in place of a heart, there remained a barren head.

So I myself remained the darkest poem in the world  
Uttering the word of the wounded crow falling earthward.  
In place of words, I collected gall, firebrands and stones  
To stone myself, to disintegrate in my poems:

To remain like drops after a shower to adorn leaves and flowers,  
To remain in a place where even time can never touch you.

*MENKE*

## ***The Good Harbinger***

Even the distant joy of people a hundred years hence  
Is as close to us as a brother's handshake in a dream.  
Through night and death, I hear such a good harbinger coming —  
We all become as wise as the wisdom of a hundred years hence.

The man of a hundred years hence walks through our furthest day,  
With his restlessness we see each cloud rushing:  
The darkest dark dissolves at the touch of his dawn,  
He strides, and miles of space become miles of time.

And for a moment, everyone becomes a man of a hundred years hence —  
A generation of brothers rises up: shoemakers, poets, builders — dreamers.  
The shoemaker embraces the shoes with fatherly love  
The gardener in the orchard of happiness becomes a fantastic tree.

At dusk, even the spider becomes gold in the web.  
When the evening is late, eternal night attacks the spiderweb.

*MIDDAY*

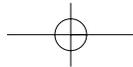
## *Yeiske*

### *To my brother, my friend — Yeiske*

If my laughter is sometimes so clear, light and new  
That all the deserts seem to become one waterfall,  
If my poem is all the flowers of my forty-six Mays  
That even a dull instrument trumpets out joy,  
It is because, Yeiske, one and only Yeiske,  
I feel good to be grief of your grief, joy of your joy.  
It is because our love, my strong, lightsome brother,  
Is stronger than the hate that rises mountain over mountain.

And if my crying is sometimes gray, heavy and old,  
Like a cricket endlessly chirping in the moss  
Because like the storm it cannot scream its loneliness,  
Because it cannot for a moment escape its own chirping,  
It is because my longing leads to you:  
Every cloud is a wander-road where death lurks for you.  
O the longing is sometimes a ghost, sometimes a star,  
One day at least to see your face before my death.

You wander through lands as I through the dream of poems.  
A land hovers in a dream like a newborn poem.  
I walk through streets as through long lines of poems —  
In my dream, every door is open for guests like my poem.  
In the furthest make-believe, there is intimate truth —  
Taste of a dream in our hardest reality,  
A reality smelling like a wild rose field.  
Let us see the world, my brother, from a hut in a field.



*MENKE*

When you come, Yeiske, a man of the most glorious time shines  
through the dark.

My hopeful blood is like the restless wind in early spring.  
The purest love breaks the barrier of years like bars  
And as eve of spring drives out death from the whole earth:  
All the yesterdays, all the tomorrows, live in one moment.  
When you come, Yeiske, I am eternal, only death can die.  
O a hundred years hence, when I resound in this poem  
In a loud voice: Yeiske! — You will, brother, come.

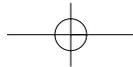
You will come with all the blue of your eyes,  
You will come and we will live in the dawn.  
Your call will be clear as the chatter of brooks,  
Brooks that man and time can never drain.  
O is man destined till the end of time  
To chase in midday the twisted shadows of the earth?  
See, dawn has adorned the thorns with fire-crowns:  
The horror touched by your morning step becomes a ray.

*Early 1953*



**Good Morning**







*MIDDAY*

## ***The Lock***

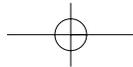
### **I**

A bird never shamed his nest with a lock.  
A fruit tree never locked up someone else's property.  
Abraham greeted his guests as angels.  
O let the Devil, the door, lock everybody out like a heart.

A lock on every door reminds us that the sword still holds sway.  
While there still is a lock, there still is gall in the eye, curses in the mouth,  
Sick fear and a lock on the brain:  
The darkness tells us to hope, the murderer teaches "Thou shalt not kill."

O the lock, cast from cursed patience, welds  
Space and time in iron: moment after moment, generation after generation.  
For so many generations, man hurled storm after storm against the lock.  
See, fire and brimstone will break the lock — the silent torturer!

Behind us, an ancient hand is ready to fire a shot at the sun itself.  
Before us, I see the last lock — the last curse, in a museum of horrors.





*MENKE*

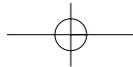
## II

O what is the most horrible mouth if not the mouth of a lock?  
How does a bird look through the bars of a prison cell?  
The prettiest sunset looks like a massacre through the lock.  
How ugly the mayflower looks in a cell, how tiny the endless world.

The lock, a moron, locks its mouth with a single tooth,  
But no animal attacks you as murderously as a lock.  
This tooth would knock out all the teeth of all the animals.  
O if only man could fight with a lock the way he fights an animal!

Cold and mute, motionless, the lock devoured man.  
How does the lock look on a cell in early childish dawn,  
If not like a Nazi mouth that just sipped a goblet of blood?  
A Jew on the spears, from Ponar, looks like a jail bar at dawn.

Destroyers of the world, knock out the lock's only tooth,  
O smiths, melt down the lock into a sunny wheel of fire.



*MIDDAY*

## ***Why We Came into the World***

Brothers, we came into the world  
Because the tree, the bird, the springtime wanted it,  
Because May wanted to show us its green and gold.  
Brothers, we came into the world  
Because the flower wanted to give us its charm,  
Because life loves us more than all loves.  
Brothers, we came into the world  
Because the tree, the bird, the springtime wanted it.

A yearning Eve of Genesis called us  
To learn the joy of becoming, from the dawn,  
To learn to chase the darkness, as does the dawn.  
Storms not yet storming called us  
To sound the clear call through all ages:  
May the dawn fire in us live forever.  
Storms not yet storming will call us  
To learn the joy of becoming from the dawn.

*MENKE*

## ***Old Dream – Old Wine***

We emanated from an old dream.  
The first sunrise of the world  
Never stopped rising through us.  
We emanated from an old dream.  
So many Hamans fell into the dark.  
Ezekiel's vision is destined for my people.  
We radiated from an old dream,  
From the first sunrise of the world.

Which holds more drunkenness,  
The old dream or the old wine?  
Shulamith looks in the mirror of old wine —  
Which holds more drunkenness?  
The dream is the great gift of a child,  
Miracle on miracle entered the dream.  
What holds more drunkenness?  
Childish as the old dream is the old wine.

The older the wine, the brighter the dream.  
The older my people, the closer to dawn.  
More eternal than all nights is the dawn.  
More intoxicating than all wines is the dream,  
The dream of a new Genesis.  
O to see a dawning world at the end of all horrors!  
The older the wine, the brighter the dream.  
The older my people, the closer to dawn.

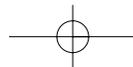


*MIDDAY*

## ***Light of April***

So many times the dawn blued out  
And gray days are still about  
And loneliness, the creep is still here.  
So many times the dawn blued out  
And left spider, sword and want in the dark.  
See, in every ray there is such a bright generation.  
So many times did dawn turn blue  
And there are still gray days.

The rose lives and dies only to teach us beauty,  
April comes only to teach us softness,  
To calm the grief of a broken twig  
And caress an abandoned blade of grass after a long winter.  
O my poem, be a limb of the End of Days:  
In a true word there is the purest light of April,  
A word to quench the thirst of the earth as the dew of April,  
A word to kiss a tear of my people in the days of mourning.





*MENKE*

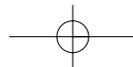
## ***The Purest Wisdom***

The purest wisdom is simple as the clear flow of brooks.  
What is so real as the peasant's laughter  
When every grain under the plow becomes a shaft of light?  
Ask the peasant how much wisdom glimmers in the wise dew.

The childish brook tells of the purest depths.  
The brook is drawn to the earth as the cloud to the sky:  
The heavy cloud wants to fall apart in the light rain  
To give sated fields some sky to drink.

So much black earth in the sky,  
As much sky as is in newly plowed earth:  
By night, wheat and rye are studded among stars in the sky,  
By day, the sky becomes a blue field with blessed earth.

Night and space, the high and the deep: sky, man and earth  
Are eternally linked in fate, through work and peace.

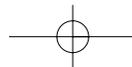




*MIDDAY*

## ***A Grain of Sand***

The smallest grain of sand bears the secrets of all the stars.  
Did Simon learn from a grain of sand that wisdom is quiet  
Because he knew how much Torah a grain of sand can keep quiet?  
One little grain of sand bears the secrets of all the stars.  
One little grain of sand is great grandparent to Adam and Eve.  
One little grain of sand wiser than man need not worry about death —  
One little grain of sand with the force of mountains undoes death.  
One little grain of sand must have taught Simon that wisdom is silent.





*MENKE*

## ***A Butterfly***

A single day is seventy years of life for the butterfly.  
Every golden hour has a childhood, a youth, a deep old age.  
When the butterfly's day dies, eternity flickers, the world dies.  
A single day is seventy years of life for the butterfly.  
So the butterfly scatters the beloved day into seventy suns:

“Butterfly, butterfly, one day of holiday is older than all weekdays,  
Give me your single day and take my seventy years.  
A small circle against the sun is bigger than all the gray worlds.”



*MIDDAY*

## ***A Thousand Years Hence***

I saw the world a thousand years hence:  
The bird has not changed its song by a note,  
The bees have not tired of the same buzzing.  
Beauty, a poem and wisdom do not grow old.

I saw the world a thousand years hence:  
Clouds loaded with merchandise — heavenly caravans.  
The Empire State Building is the smallest midget,  
Every ray is a pilot, every wind an airplane.

Jews ask each other casually: “Where from?”  
“From the State of Mars, things are no better there.  
In a wide welcome there is more miracle  
Than in naive excitement about a flying bridge.”

“Right. I give up all the tricks, high and low,  
For one cool shadow of a crooked apple tree.  
I give up all the top hats of fancy languages  
For the raw rustle of a zesty Yiddish.”

I saw the world a thousand years hence:  
I heard a familiar weeping in the wind.  
I saw fear in the faces of flowers.  
A stone reminded me of Ponar — a mute scream.”

MENKE

## *Good Morning*

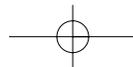
The thirtieth century is near us, a lucky neighbor  
Before us with blessings of a free earth, a new sky:  
A generation comes, brave and new — a road yet untraveled.  
O brother of the thirtieth century, our lucky neighbor.  
Let me in at least for a while O lucky neighbor,  
Thousands of years under whip's lash, we seek a road to you.  
Happy holiday, brothers, sisters, world! — A lucky neighbor  
From Isaiah's dreamed of land comes to us soon, O so soon.

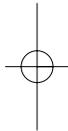
*L'chaim* brothers, *L'chaim* sisters of the thirtieth century!  
See, here we are, reaching out to you across the last mile of time —  
In the course of eternity, just a step to you, blocked by time.  
See, barefoot, through thorny rocks, we pave a path to your freedom.  
See, the fist wounded from breaking the locks to your century.  
A neighborly welcome to you, we hurl the locks of time!  
We live! You hear us in the storm like a tale of fear, guts and wonder.  
We come! Years — fences fall. Near us are the far distances unreached.

*MIDDAY*

All our spiders are sickened by all the light of your generation.  
I see your light in the Valley of Dry Bones, in the valley of murder  
and mourning.  
But here, every twig, like every limb of the victims, will blossom forever.  
Woe, the weeping of my generation will forever assail your purest song.  
Your unsung song becomes a human of ashes — a gassed skull.  
O what is Michaleshik if not a rivulet of the Viliya?  
And perhaps my town is the first ray of your every sunrise?  
O if, like Michaleshik, I too could be a rivulet of the Viliya.

O it is good to be the dream before becoming, a sun before rising,  
It is good to glow in Eve of Genesis, full of fire still unignited —  
A word as yet unspoken, trembling with unexpected news.  
And may Yiddish be in the crown of every sun yet to rise.  
The New York evening reflects Ponar's wounds on its panes.  
Hear, even the April wind is full of the weeping of the Litvaks.  
O it is good to be the dream before becoming, a sun yet to rise.  
It is good to glow full of fire still unignited in Eve of Genesis.

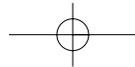


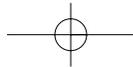
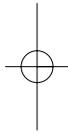




# ***Safad***

***1979***

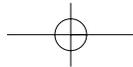






# The Little Land





## ***Goodbye, New York***

Goodbye, New York, legend of magic-man and steel,  
In my dream my village is a tower peak of New York,  
A hut between the stars — a chimney of New York.  
In all the wonders of wonders, there is Michaleshik.  
Giants from my cheider come to grind light-mills on Broadway.  
Nephilim Nefilim in: My Father Tells a Story, titans from the  
Bible are climbing in New York.  
In a motor's roar I hear the voice of Joshua.  
A simple wheel is the sun at Gibeon in New York.

My first step on the ship in New York harbor  
Is a first step through the generations of Jerusalem,  
A tower as tall as Og, King of Bashan in Jerusalem,  
A longing long as the exile in the port of New York,  
My eyes agape with yesterdays lost in a game.  
I will see angels of steel even in Jerusalem.  
O the restlessness of all my New York years.  
I will be a limb of New York even in Jerusalem.

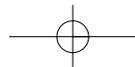
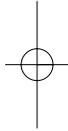
Evening comes on wings of fire lifting New York,  
Wants to carry the city of all cities to the Negev.  
One more gaze, one more weeping over the city of all cities  
A multitude of stars — the ever-wakeful windows of New York,  
Behind me, city smoke embracing city smoke.  
Years fall into a wheel, a forest of days and nights  
In a last last gaze at the city of all cities.  
Forever shall I see the stars as the night windows of New York.



*MENKE*

## ***The Little Land***

Great, O great is the little land of my people.  
The tiniest path is endless as God.  
A sunrise is like the eternal Burning Bush.  
Great, O great is the little land of my people.  
A first ray is a light-giving prophet of long ago.  
Every step is new, of tomorrow's generations.  
Greater than all lands is the little land of my people.  
The tiniest path is endless as God.

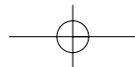




*SAFAD*

## ***Evening in Safad***

The holy ARI, Isaac Luria in the evening cool  
With fingers as *Sefiroth* over man and stone —  
Every stone becomes the dream of Jacob's stone,  
Jacob's ladder is as close to you as the sky.  
As many windows, so many are the suns in the evening.  
A stone becomes an angel, an angel — a stone.  
Like a kiss of God is the cool of the evening.  
O delicate now — even rage, even stone.



*MENKE*

## ***Jews on Donkeys***

Jews ride donkeys all over Safad,  
As if to say the End of Days is near.  
Small, bent-over donkeys all over Safad,  
Still stricken by Evil Balaam.  
Great great grandchildren of Balaam's proud donkey  
Plod, not stubborn, submissive —  
And there is a hint of Messiah in every donkey:  
See, redemption is here, but not Messiah.  
Donkeys laden with packs, like the weight of generations,  
Of merchandise worth a penny, a pinch of tobacco,  
Sway their weary heads as if in prayer to God,  
Their eyes as deeply thoughtful as Messiah's.  
Messiah has tarried for a while,  
So he sent Redemption so that it would not tarry.

*SAFAD*

## ***For He Saw It is Good, O Safad***

I traded Broadway's lights and Fifth Avenue's splendor  
For Messiah's poor donkey in Safad.  
Fifth Avenue may be prettier than all the gods, but  
That would not make Messiah ride the Empire State Building.

Legends of New York are told by steel,  
Fires of night smoothed by blisters.  
The builder's heart beats in glistening stone and iron,  
But poets of the saw, the plane and chisel are in Safad hands.

If the New York night is a legend of thousand and one suns,  
All the light of the Bible is in the sunset of Galilee.  
I love the distant, night windows of New York,  
And my own are Abraham's stars in the Galilee.

In electric legends, New York is infinity,  
But by *Sefiroth* light, God says: It is good, O Safad, it is good.

MENKE

## ***Moon over Hula Pond and the Sea of Galilee***

Galilee, lonely harp in the night, longs for King David.  
Like an open Psalm book, the Sea of Galilee ruffles its waters.  
Stripped of the ages, Bathsheba whispers: "Come, King David,  
Come, O come, I am naked magic in the Sea of Galilee."

King David comes, plays her every limb in every tremor of the night.  
And in Galilee only her slenderness is left, lost in the old melody.  
And from the far time when Abishag comes, glistening out of night  
She pets away all the king's sins with her nubile body's hot rays.

So King David plays over Galilee, Abishag is an echo of an echo.  
As great as Abishag's passion, so great is King David's sin.  
Abishag listens as King David tells her tales of once upon a time.  
The prettiest tale of light and of might is King David:

"Abishag, the cool night is a bed made of shadows of your hair,  
It is good to tell you now the tale of why Galilee is a harp,  
It is good to tell you now why Hula Pond was destined to be sick,  
The curses of condemned waters, the heart of the swamp:  
The Hula Pond paused a moment to listen to Galilee play,  
And the wild boar attacked it, the fly of death — the swamp."

Abishag dozes on David's shoulder, sleeps through the long Exile,  
The moon hugs the Hula Pond and Galilee like her own children.  
Two lakes like gloom and joy, two close neighbors: two distant stars.  
O die, Hula Pond, and your star will shine like Galilee.

Listen, King David plays and plays until he is all harp: Psalms.  
It seems that Galilee will float away into the moonlit night.  
Soon all the prayers will go out, leaving an empty book of Psalms.  
King David will remain an eternal harp in the night.

*SAFAD*

## ***Haifa at Night from Mount Carmel***

Haifa, not Apollo, nor the God of Light on Broadway  
But little Jewish fires, vivid as wisdom, sharp as unrest:  
As many dreams here as the lights on Broadway —  
Dreams of you and me, not of gold and bone and steel.

Little fires, eyes of my people, ppensive pensive yesterdays  
Bring Shulamith-roses field upon field up high.  
Ships in the port command longing for distant lands,  
A tune heard by thorn and stone calls you.

Little fires, Elijah's visions from Mount Carmel,  
Grape after grape from Naboth's vineyard, sparkle in Haifa.  
And at night, stoned Naboth comes to Mount Carmel  
Silently conjuring a world with no Ahabs or Jezebels:

Such a world — a tale of tomorrow's children,  
Waiting in each little fire to be born,  
Waiting without space or time beaming in the wonder of wonders,  
Living like stars on the windowpanes of simple houses.

Stars tumble over Haifa, fall apart from beauty,  
Streets float as on wings fashioned by stars:  
Maybe night dies in Haifa from so much beauty  
It seems, you can trust even death over here.

At the River Kishon, Elijah still strolls  
Standing up alone to the prophets of Baal.  
The prophets of Baal are like night all around.  
The sun burns all darkness, every prophet of Baal.

Dawn. From the depths of the city to the Hadar to Mount Carmel.  
Jewish builders hurry to the blessing of work.  
Mount Carmel proudly surveys hopeful generations.  
The Mediterranean blossoms blue in a hymn of blues.

*MENKE*

## *Joy*

He who never walked on the soil of my people  
Never had his foot blessed with the joy of walking.  
How much joy is in the simple wonder of walking?  
O ask a star how many times the sun rose here,  
Ask a leaf how many Mays passed through here.  
The light of the Burning Bush never sets on your steps here.  
No, he who never walked on the soil of my people  
Never had his foot blessed with the joy of walking.

A step on the soil of my people is a step through everywhere,  
All of time's distances are as close as your own step.  
O my poem, be like the lily of the valley.  
Where, if not in the Song of Songs, do eternal flowers grow?  
A grain of dust in the valley seeks his father mountain in the wind.  
In the most ordinary day, God celebrates endless holiday.  
A step on the soil of my people is a step through everywhere,  
All of time's distances are as close as your own step.

*SAFAD*

## ***A Summer Day in Safad***

A day so new, so hopeful and blue  
As if today is the first day of the world.  
Only a lonely raven flies by from time to time  
As if to remind you of the world's darkness.

Safad. Evening. Bats flutter low,  
Cover with darkness the blindness of beggars and thorns.  
At Atsmon Mountain a dawn girl comes.  
The evening kisses the nubile hills of her body.

Night. A hoop of the moon throws hoops on the Galilee.  
My own shadow follows me like a sleepwalker.  
The girl from a distant generation seeks her beloved in the Galilee:  
Her love on the mountains is pure as God.

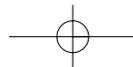
With the last ray, my love gives a long farewell,  
Woe, and flees forever into the night.



*MENKE*

## ***The First Rain***

The first rain, song of autumn, sings of the field's plenty.  
First rivulets rush to announce new good luck,  
At midday rinsing away every thirst of the long summer.  
Smelling of man's toil, flowers' nectar, field's blessings.  
A simple bridge from reality to dream, sky to earth:  
Superfluous shadows of crooked generations fall by daybreak.  
After the first rain, flowers' hair looks like brides shampooed.  
A drop of rain is a spungold kiss in the blessed field.



*SAFAD*

## ***Dawn in Our Garden***

Grandmother sun is a child again in our garden.  
The newborn day begins to learn how to dawn.  
Sunflowers wake from their sleep, goblets of joy  
Showing all the spungold hidden in their dream.

How many kisses still unknissed are in the early dawn?  
Lo, my beloved comes, with steps from a far century  
With her body, a still unopened flower, on the eve of dawn:  
“Say, girl, how many springs after my death, how many wonders?”

“My love, the flowers on the pomegranate tree die gladly,  
Happily leave their place to kernels of sunrise,  
Fall glowing around the tree, a fire circle of life.  
See death without death, the herald of sunrise.”

A flame of late twilight, of the last rim, also remains.  
The first ray shows that all generations are neighbors.

MENKE

## *An Orange*

Today for the first time in the Land of Israel,  
I saw a simple orange on a tree,  
I saw the first orange in the Land of Israel  
As God's first creation, as the light of Genesis.

With the same trembling for the first time in New York,  
I tasted a first kiss on the stones of Delancey Street  
With the same curiosity as Adam first hearing Eve's voice,  
Paying with the Garden of Eden for the taste of an earthly fruit.

I tore up the orange as if with eternal fingers,  
The tree suddenly transformed into the Tree of Life,  
The orange — a round key to the sun,  
To open all the stars of blessed years.

All the light of the End of the Days shines toward us,  
Jerusalem will drive Sodom off the earth,  
Isaiah will break the sword forever,  
And the Garden of Eden will stay a bright earthly road.

L'chaim — to life!  
The darkness of yesterday no longer can block our morning.  
Jews with the scent of fresh-plowed desert soil  
Glint like all the stars of Abraham.  
As juice is to the orange, full joy will flow to my people.

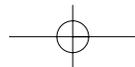
Today for the first time the Land of Israel  
Gave me a simple orange in an orange grove.  
Today for the first time in the Land of Israel,  
I made the *Shehechiónu* blessing over life itself.



*SAFAD*

## ***An Abandoned Vineyard***

Ungathered grapes flow out in wine alone,  
Feed the barren earth with ripeness.  
Only the nails of the thorn are destined for these grapes.  
A last ray remembers the forgotten wine,  
Smooths every anguish with its own death, the brightest end.  
As through a mirror, the grapes are due one last kiss.  
The night smells of the carnage of wines leaked out.  
The drunkenness of grapes becomes the weeping of the earth.





*MENKE*

## ***A New Field***

Thorn and stone, the stubborn earth is plowed,  
The desolate field cleansed of stinging generations,  
The earth of this stiff necked nation is so yielding and soft.  
Dust of ancient days glows through and through with first love.  
Like Sarah, the earth is a pregnant grandmother,  
Young as an unborn child, ancient as Abraham's tribe,  
The blessings of life are destined even to the stones.  
The field is encircled by stone guards, a fence against fences.



*SAFAD*

## ***The Pomegranate in the Yard***

Of what does the tree in our yard, the pomegranate tree, remind us,  
If not that my people will be full with thousands of years,  
With blessings of man and earth, with work and plenty,  
As the ripe seeds of the fruit on our pomegranate tree.

If Abraham rested now by the pomegranate tree,  
Maybe he would not see the Jews as stars  
But as the countless seeds of the pomegranate.  
Each seed teaches eternity.

O how many times my people in death and grief,  
Curled threefold like a mourner with ash on his head,  
As if God created my people of pure tears —  
Only our pomegranate tree can now curl threefold.

See, the ripest pomegranate bends the branch down.  
A sunny pomegranate is a child's morning on every branch.

MENKE

## ***A Birthday in the Immigrant Camp***

Where does poverty live, if not here in the gray hut?  
Poverty is father, mother, eight little kids,  
But today the crowded hut knows only riches.  
Yea, poverty will be chased out, laughed out.

Happy birthday, Gila, on your seventeen years!  
Young and old dance a *hora* in the Maabara,  
Seventeen beauties dancing — seventeen years,  
Every tear becomes a pearl in the Maabara.

Gila, yearning, plays on her shepherd flute  
Songs of light, plenty, hope.  
The poor party is rich in joy.  
The ancient land as young as her eighth brother.

The soda water and rolls are tasty.  
Behind the hut is the eternal blue of the Sea of Galilee.  
O what wine sparkles like soda water?  
O the joy in the hut and the Sea of Galilee.

Jewish valor in the hills of Galilee  
Warns the enemy of yesterday, today and tomorrow.  
Evening. The sun embraces the hills of Galilee.  
Night. What remains of the day is good luck for the morrow.

The pining flute carries the Maabara far away.  
The hut is now an imaginary castle.  
The next morning is King of the Maabara.  
Gila in her dream is Queen of the Castle.

*SAFAD*

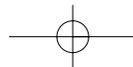
## ***Under the Almond Tree***

Sitting under the almond tree facing the Sea of Galilee,  
The surrounding mountains show how simple eternity looks.  
The Sea of Galilee floats up from Rachel's poems.  
In the calm of the mountains, Rachel dies of beauty.

All becomes maybe: the children, the birds, the evening.  
And poet Rakhel's Perhaps I don't really sit under the almond tree?  
Real is merely the Maabara, a camp — a wound of the evening.  
O from such a reality, even the almond tree becomes a ghost.

Am I sitting under the almond tree in Shvat the coldest month?  
Over me, the tree is like a bright fresh snowy field,  
A Tamuz Tammuz wedding canopy of almond blossoms in Shvat  
Or have my winters snowed me under the tree?

The bright dazzle of almond blossoms plays like a frost.  
The night frames gray windowlets with stars of Galilee.





*MENKE*

## ***New Year of the Trees***

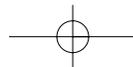
Jewish saplings, just planted  
In the hills of Galilee, you must grow up  
To be heroes, to struggle with gangs of thorn bandits,  
Silence the demonic dance of storms.

Don't play with those goats,  
Even a bird might peck away at your life.  
Play with the courage of the mountains,  
Learn from rocks how to outlive death.

Clouds promised to quench your thirst,  
To let you suckle the earth with all her wealth.  
I hear your destiny in the mountain wind,  
Blessing each sapling with prophetic tomorrows.  
The freedom of Isaiah's skies is above you.

Isaiah's light will dawn through you:  
O saplings in the wind — fluttering wings,  
As if eaglets came flying here.  
The sun sets in the Galilee like honey in a jug.

Night.  
One mountain nudges another, as in a tale of Chelm.  
In a dream, an insolent starry Lilith  
Seduces the trees into the wonder of wonders.  
The Galilee smells of the Genesis of saplings.  
The Galilee is drunk on the light of mountain stars.



*SAFAD*

## ***Flowers in Safad Ruins***

Flowers in gardens, petted and shampooed,  
Recall the beauty of lazy, snobbish women,  
In the sad light of a artificial day  
That never savored the taste of dew.

Flowers in gardens, dressed up parasites,  
Never stuck a finger in cold water,  
Protected from any pricking or passion,  
Never to be seduced by a naughty wink of the thorn.

The scent of the wild field flower is sharp as Yiddish:  
Modest grass, even David's pebble is a friend,  
The flower embraces thorns like lovers  
Sinful, against the lust of the Tree of Knowledge — Eve.

Who, if not my people, is destined for the fate of the flower  
That breaks out through the cracks in Safad's ruins:  
Against tearing hands, the rage of life — an eternal flower  
Which can prick all the stupid pampered roses with one gaze.

*MENKE*

## ***In the Rainy Season***

It is good that the summer has faded with full beauty.  
At the glowing tea is a dear friend, Sorrow.  
It is good that the dream changes a hump into a crown.  
In the Safad winter, it is good to be King of Sorrow.

Clouds come to Safad, so close, so intimate,  
They seem to belong to the earth more than to the sky.  
Clouds, like old people bent over their sticks,  
Come from Heaven to hear news of the earth.

To honor the long-awaited guests, the blessed rains,  
I play odes to yearning on my mandolin.  
The days come in vain to ask for a ray.  
The wind is a hoarse organ grinder through the nights.

As in a dream, rains prattle long-forgotten words.  
In the oven, a flame blues, a piece of hopeful sky.

*SAFAD*

## ***On Joy and Sorrow***

The world's first crying was perhaps the wind's.  
Without the wind's cry, there could not be the sea's laugh.  
Listen, crying is also hopeful as spring wind,  
Free laughter on our earth, unfettered as the sea.

As the grapes on our vine, demand a holiday in the world —  
In the youngest leaf is the smell of ancient wine.  
But without the blessed workdays, there would be no holiday.  
After all the sorrow, who knows like us how bright joy is?

With thorns in our steps, who longs like us for the flower?  
Without the crow, who would enjoy the nightingale's song?  
Who would have heard laughter if stone were not silent?  
The dawn would go down if the sun never set.

See, after the Holocaust, light of Genesis, a child's first joy.  
The last sorrow, as the first joy, is all sunrise.  
The last joy of an old man as the first joy of a child  
Knows no end, is all beginning, eternal rising.

*MENKE*

## ***Clouds Over Safad***

Autumn.  
in mountains,  
Safad — clouds, valleys,  
and jackals. The clouds  
long ago grew weary  
of the high skies, they came back  
from their long wandering, falling  
and hugging the grandfather mountains.  
The clouds, the sinners, are eager to leap,  
embrace the simple earth, be comrades with all  
the houses, the people, the stones. Not in heaven,  
far from holiness, distant from God, they tell that man  
himself escaped from the Garden of Eden. Longing, they  
call home, to Earth Without Form and Void, chaos before Genesis.

*SAFAD*

## ***What a Sky over Safad***

I see the end of the world in the sky over Safad.  
A cloud nestles the sun: let us die, my love.  
Lightning bolts like burned stars fall over Safad.  
In abyss upon abyss, lands upon lands turn over.

Clouds — pillars of mourning, embers of towers,  
Sole remnants after a nuclear war.  
A single gust of wind crumbles tower after tower into ash,  
Of man: sorrow and joy. Of the world, not a trace is left.

Now clouds gather up all their darkness,  
Build a past world of extinguished generations.  
Lightning hurls generations back into the fire.  
And now, after the Flood, a new Genesis — a world again!

My people's promised happiness is as near as day.  
Milk will flow from the stars, honey from the sun.

*MENKE*

## ***A Grandfather Dance over Safad***

Midnight vigil. Jews — prayers, Jews — oaks dancing in a ring.  
Fur hats dance with stars, gabardine coats swish in the wind.  
Bright beards, woven by generations of the moon,  
Hands — questions in the night, feet — an eternal ring.

The narrow alleys of Safad are paths of heaven now.  
There is no evil, a devil looks like an angel.  
You want to know what joy is, ask the joy!  
Sorrow? Ask God.

My grandfather dances, trampling death under his light feet,  
The Queen of Times, the young moon, dances too.  
Angels sing in the sky in Yiddish,  
What is Yiddish if not God on a crooked little alley?

Yiddish is holy as the Torah, as the Creator of the Universe.  
The Holy ARI dances too, and Himself, the Creator of the Universe.

*SAFAD*

## ***Autumn in Safad***

O what  
can be more  
crooked than the  
crooked alleys of  
Safad, what can be even  
more twisted except for the  
ancient, lame beggar with his begg-  
ing hands counting down the sunsets like  
effaced old coins in his white night garment,  
as if a sleepwalker strayed here wandering  
from a moony land. Clouds, immigrants from the days  
of Genesis, lay down, gray and weary, on the  
mountain opposite, the mountains like caravans of camels  
on their endless, eternal route. Through my body, the twilight  
expires in longing. A donkey hums under his load  
as through the cave of Shimon Bar Yochai. The wailing  
wind will not scare leaves off trees as if a stranger  
miser went out to count them. Autumn screams O Woe,  
Through the ruins sound voices of New York  
steel edifices. A star lost his  
last ray, as Amnon lost Tamar.  
The distant generations  
become close tales of once  
upon a time. Not  
autumn, God is  
Galilee's  
splendor.

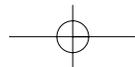
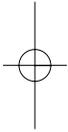
*MENKE*

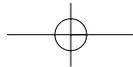
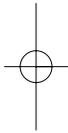
## ***Safad***

Crown of  
Galilee,  
Safad, your alleys  
twisted by gene-  
rations of poverty,  
carved in the mountain by the  
wisdom and steps of Messiah.  
Barefoot beggars, earliest risers  
facing the sky, as close as the heaven  
which the Holy ARI planted here in stone  
and in thorn. O when I see the sun dying  
in the wonder of wonders, I know that beautiful  
as you, even Death can be, and I hear the wind swearing  
that my people is eternal, eternal as Rabbi  
Akiva tortured in iron vises, as your sky  
that will be endlessly blue. The living legends  
resound here with the scents of our shepherd race.  
Your dawns tell the tale of eternal life,  
Safad, sister of the flame that never  
will be burned. It is good, in your  
twilight teaching to die so  
beautifully, and good  
to learn from your  
morning how e-  
ternally  
to live.



# Struggling Angel





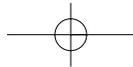
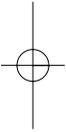
*SAFAD*

## ***A Jew in the Negev***

### **1**

Days in the Negev, pining for a shadow.  
Everywhere, like a curse, the sun in the middle.  
Nowhere to hide from death and the sun  
Unless in your own shadow.  
The darkest vision is covered by light.  
Earth, man, sky — fettered to the sun.  
Days in the Negev, yearning for a shadow,  
Everywhere, like a curse, the sun in the middle.

A Jew goes to the Negev as a cursed Jew,  
His tongue of fire, his blood of sand.  
The land is waste and void, chaos before Genesis.  
A Jew goes to the Negev — an invented Jew,  
As if he sowed with a wanton hand  
Sands of destruction, grains of death.  
A Jew goes to the Negev as a cursed Jew,  
His tongue of fire, his blood of sand,



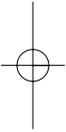


*MENKE*

**2**

A Jew goes to the Negev— a shining Jew,  
The song of victory, Deborah's song is in his steps.  
All the deaths of the Negev yield under his steps. OK?  
Hundred-mile pipes, blessed with the blessing on rain,  
Like dew and rain bring bloom to careless generations.  
From a distant forest, the wood of huts sniffs at his steps,  
The beehive is blessed with bees, the flowers with nectar,  
And the song of victory, The Song of Deborah is in his steps.

The plow advances, enemy of the desert.  
The rooted trunk against the wanton thorn.  
The song of the hammer against the jackal's wail.  
A tree greets a tree like a new acquaintance.  
The pricklier the cactus, the sweeter its fruit.  
The rake combs the disheveled earth.  
The plow advances, enemy of the desert:  
The rooted trunk against the wanton thorn.



*SAFAD*

## ***At the Gallows in Acco***

I am  
standing now  
at your gallows,  
eternal children  
of my people, here in  
Acco: What distant generation  
have your last gazes seen?  
From what future, Jew yet unborn,  
have you perceived your own believing voice?  
In what sunset have you seen all the gallows  
burning in the conflagration that will leave of  
all the long, choking nights only an infant morning?  
The hangman laughed here with his horrid, demonic laughter,  
the victorious laughter of Titus, Hitler, Torquemada.

Of such demonic laughter, not even a bird, an infant  
or a flower remains, and all that is left of the sun  
is a black year, the rage of roaming tornados, which  
brings to a boil the might of perilous cliffs  
The gallows are silent, the sated silence  
of a skeleton. Even a tear in  
paper recalls the cut in the garb  
of mourning. Our ancient land is  
reborn all around us,  
bears days you have not seen  
in the Burning Bush:  
the destiny  
of eternal  
Jews.

*MENKE*

## ***Shalom?***

Shalom is a weary man after work in the shadow of a tree.  
Shalom a brotherly hand from nation to nation, generation to generation.  
Shalom is an ox harnessed to the plow, smoke in a chimney,  
A child, a grandfather's starry hair — the light of years.

Shalom is the evening kiss on the sweat of man and beast,  
A distant ray hidden in the fingers of a blind man,  
A man condemned to death who hurls his gallows into the fire.  
It looks like a broken sword, a star in a wellspring.

Through the drum's roar and the flute's longing, let us call Shalom —  
But if the enemy regards my people only with gunpowder eyes,  
Then be like dawn against a long night: a rock against a feast,  
Against rage — courage, against death — victory: shalom.

If our lives must sting him like a nettle in the eye,  
Let our words become stones, our shadows — flames, our stars — bullets.



SAFAD

## ***Evening in Hula Pond***

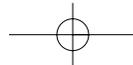
The evening adorns swamp after swamp with all its splendor.  
Mildew gleams like suspicion in the enemy's eyes.  
Colorful birds circle sick colors.  
In the dusk, the ancient mildew is like magic green,.

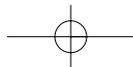
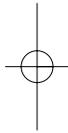
The sun falls, pouring fire and brimstone on the swamps,  
Waters stand frightened in late evening.  
The wild boar, King of the Swamps, trembles.  
Man is so close to the spirit kingdom.

The morning resounds hammer and spade, rake and chisel,  
The distance booms with the courage of excavators.  
In the grounds of the Hula, villages wait for creation.  
All the frogs scream *Gevald!* against the promise of life.

The malaria mosquito is still lonely in its sticky crying,  
With man's rise, it dies of longing for malaria.  
O to those who can still bemoan the demise of the swamp,  
Send them the flower of calamity, the pest of malaria.

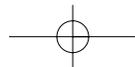
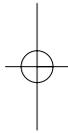
Tractors whisper to yet unborn fields.  
In the hopeful wind, hear the laughter of children.  
The evening smells of the freshness of fallow fields.  
The smallest grain of dust has all the wonders of the sun.

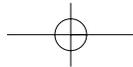
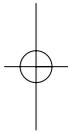
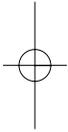






# The Clock Ticks





SAFAD

## ***The Clock Ticks***

***My father (1879-1951), the preacher, preaches on his 25th Yortsait***

My child, the clock ticks on and on, Woe the clock ticks!  
The clock is eternal, only God can tick like this.  
Even the echo of a sound will still resound,  
But a day that never faded will decline and set.  
The dawns like children will tick on like this forever.  
My child, the clock ticks on and on, Woe the clock ticks!  
The clock is eternal, only God can tick like this.

Stars are little watches in a straying night,  
Even a rock can tick on, though no one can see its ticking.  
The valley goes to the mountain, the mountain will go to the valley.  
In my grave, too, time ruffles through the eternal night.  
Like grass in the wind, like longing, I am ever awake.  
A tombstone cannot stone a single beam of light.  
Messiah will come like sunrise after the longest night.

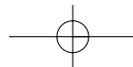
My child, even death grows old, as night grows old.  
In the End of the Days, even time will die,  
All clock hands will stop, like fingers of death.  
Night is older than sky and earth, man and sun.  
Be strong, like hope facing the sadness of the evening.  
Listen to the laughter of a child's first cry.  
Listen to the crying in your own last laughter.  
My child, the clock ticks on and on, Woe the clock ticks.



*MENKE*

## ***Messiah***

I know, father, Messiah will come from Michaleshik,  
Riding a donkey through Svir and Svintsyan,  
Where there is the holiest soil in the world.  
I know, Mother, Messiah will come from Michaleshik,  
For Michaleshik stayed in the Garden of Eden,  
And with roots upside down, Svintsyan lies in heaven.  
Where longing is like God, with no beginning, no end,  
Messiah will come, O Michaleshik, O Svintsyan.

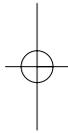




*SAFAD*

## ***Eltshik, My Brother***

If I am destined to die in Jerusalem,  
Eltshik, my brother, from the Michaleshik cemetery,  
Bring me a handful of Michaleshik soil,  
And I shall be like you, the sadness of the Michaleshik cemetery.  
But if the German also lashed the cemetery to death  
(O what is holier than Michaleshik soil?)  
Bring me, from the Michaleshik cemetery, a handful of sky.



*MENKE*

## ***Children of Safad***

Children,  
barefoot kids  
in barefoot Safad,  
their mouths full of a  
tasty, gourmet Yiddish,  
as if you shook the rustle “bustle” ?  
of my little town over Safad,  
I believe you are the children of  
Ponar, my friends from heaven, entirely  
Yiddish, stripped now of death, Germans and fear,  
the soil under you becomes sky. From a neighbo-  
ring old graveyard, the Holy ARI glides out, follows  
you in the late sunset, step after step, teaching a new  
Kabbalah of Mother Yiddish. Over Safad now, Yiddish is

the eleventh Sefirah. Yiddish: the sorrow, joy, dream,  
reality of my people. See, my little town falls  
into sunset, as into a bonfire. My brother  
Elijah flies in a fire chariot to the  
Shechinah of Yiddish. Through his crying, through  
God’s name, children come back from the ovens  
of murder. A slice of moon is the  
mail from a child’s hand leafing through  
the skies of Safad, as through the  
white leaves of a starry  
new Book of Splendor,  
only the dead  
children un-  
derstand.

*SAFAD*

## ***Twilight in Safad***

All the  
alleys of  
Safad become in  
the sunset holy  
meandering paths where  
stray angels beg each dying  
ray of the sun: O take us with  
you, O lead us, dying brother, back  
home to the Garden of Eden. O hear  
the angels lamenting in the wind. Angels  
are children slaughtered young, dawns that have never dawned,  
brothers and sisters of the cemetery grasses.  
Of their unhealed wounds, God creates the saddest sunsets here,  
and I, on the eve of my own decline, on the eve of my

eternal night, pray a prayer to my father and mother:  
O Tatte, O Mama, I am so happy that my night  
stays without a single star, but not here at the grave  
of the Holy ARI but at your graves, longing  
for me in the mundane, workaday earth of the  
smoke-polluted New Jersey, I shall hide  
from the humans, serpents, and eagles.  
(The last light of this poem too  
will dissipate into dust like myself.) Not the sun,  
heaven falls into  
your open mouth  
down from hell.  
God cries.

MENKE

## *Jubilee*

My hut across from the *wadi* is lonely in the moon night,  
Only the wailing of nearby jackals vibrates on windowpanes.  
Opposite, the emptiness of an abandoned village is painfully awake.  
The jackals, in shining fear, never stop wailing for prey.

Hey, jackals, glowingly I heard your call for prey.  
Not the slightest echo of our wail will be lost.  
For my fiftieth birthday, a fat feast awaits you — No, not man:  
The wild *wadi* becomes mountain and valley, light and space.

The silence of cactus and thorn bursts with ancient force  
To break the locks of eternity, all that is mute whispers secrets.  
Will I become the dark before Genesis or the light of a far generation?  
Mountains condemned to stand still tread like liberated giants.

Dawn. My fifty years are lost like pieces of night.  
At the first light, what am I if not the last ray?

*SAFAD*

## ***Song of a Litvak***

To King  
Solomon:  
poems of the  
vineyards, even a  
silly person can hear  
and perceive. O I sing the  
song of all songs to the Bulbe,  
a song of songs to the potato,  
the holiday of my erstwhile small town.  
O Bulbe, of all fruits the most bashful fruit.  
The apple does not hide from the eyes. The pear,  
the scarlet cherries, shameless, tasted by every  
ray. Any bee can seduce every flower like a  
street whore. The Bulbe, like a Litvak, studies the deep  
secret of becoming, hidden in the earth. Yea,  
that a Bulbe has more mystery than all  
the stars, that knows even the smallest grain,  
the greatest sage on earth. And if in  
the vineyards of King Solomon  
happy drunken songs resound,  
in Bulbes is the taste  
of my villages,  
shtetalach: Svir,  
Michaleshik,  
Svintsyan.

*MENKE*

## ***In the Clearest Land***

Clouds are boats waiting for us in the sunset.  
Let us travel, my dear, into the clear land:  
Take off your dress, take off your body for the sunset,  
Let us come clear to the clear land.

The land is Michaleshik, the light of my eyes,  
So hurry, girl, hurry, choose a boat, my love,  
Before the only oar — the rainbow — falls,  
Before the sunset capsizes the last boat,

Before night covers both of us with all its sorrow,  
Let us run, run, overtake God himself in His path.  
Look, my little town casts away all sorrow,  
In the Galilee, every streetlet floats toward us.

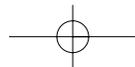
Night. My little town is paved with stars instead of stones:  
Hurry, my bride, the saints will lead us to the wedding canopy.

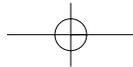
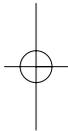


*SAFAD*

## ***Epitaph***

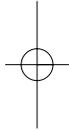
Where Yiddish is silent  
As the dust of my grave,  
There I never lived. There (?), Here?  
I am the dust of my villages:  
O Michaleshik, O Svintsyant!  
Where Yiddish lives  
Brave as spring buds,  
I shall live forever.

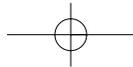






## **Against Lock and Rhyme**





SAFAD

## *Against Lock and Rhyme*

Brother  
poet, see  
the poem lies  
behind rhymes like bars,  
wants out of age-old yoke.  
Poems still sit in the rhymes  
like man, bird and animal in  
cages. I saw Samson the Hero,  
with feasts and mouth of a raging lion, AWK  
writhing and twisting under the burden of  
rhyme. Courage enmeshed, ensnared in the sonorous  
chain of rhyme, languishing for the fire of the word,  
the word that will burn off the rust of rhyme forever. Rhyme  
stays mouldy, even when filed by the subtlest syllable file.

Let the word dazzle free, a lightning flash through clouds, crash rhymeless  
as thunder over a languid field, a blessed herald  
of rain. An antelope pursued through the fear of  
the forest will not escape the hunter through rhymes.  
Tombstones, gloomiest stones on the face of earth,  
do not mourn their dead in chiseled rhymes. Hear,  
laughter will not ring free, like the spring,  
through rhymes, even if reflected  
through the transparent crystals  
of the most chiseled verse  
and refined. The rhyme  
smoothed out, rounded,  
and polished  
still cuts

*MENKE*

the flesh  
of a word  
like a wound, like  
a precise, choking  
hoop. If the poem is  
eternal as thirst, a spring,  
the sun, the storm — who would lock up  
the sun in the cell of a rhyme, or  
sentence eternity to a measure,  
lock up the storm in tight, quantified unrest?  
For man, garbage, roses, scabies, God does not give  
the light of May in measured cups, so poems need no  
measure as beauty needs no scale, as the roaming wind and  
wandering bird need no compass. A dawn locked up behind rhymes

will not stop longing for a rhymeless ray of light. O let the  
word be as tasty, as in my hungry childhood, a fresh  
slice of bread. O let the word roam infinitely  
through time and space, talk face to face, heart to heart, with  
men of the farthest, brightest generation.  
Conflagrations of war, burning nations  
do not combust in matching rhymes. An  
airplane shot down to the ground, a  
wounded eagle, do not fall  
into rhyme. No storm will  
uproot a flower-  
bed in rhyme,  
O brother  
poet.

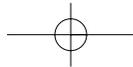
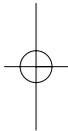


*SAFAD*

## ***Resumé***

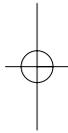
The sea  
in full rage  
is certainly  
a bold rhymeless call  
for the faraway day  
with no prisons, locks or bolts,  
with no fetters, no chains, no rhymes.

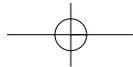






# Back in New York





SAFAD

## ***My Three Day Old Boy***

***for my son Heershe-Dovid***

You are three days and three nights old, my boy.  
You're all the gold of three twilights, three dawns.  
You're all Genesis, the whole world is three days old.  
A newborn son learns to dawn.

A three-day butterfly would have been a grandfather,  
Would have made a bed of glass for himself on a window,  
Thinking: you frolicked with the sun enough, saw enough,  
Weary of too much day, God, give me a bit of night.

Who speaks through silence like you, the language of thorn and stone?  
In your cry every demand of the first man:  
Maybe Adam cried like this for the first time.  
O what laughter is as blessed as your cry?

Be fantastic as a deer, a *heersh*, be a poet like David.  
From the very beginning learn to scrub shadows from sunbeams,  
Let your mouth be full of Yiddish as the creek is full of rushing.  
My child, be worthy of my father's name.



*MENKE*

## ***Yiddish***

Mother, in what language does the brook chatter?  
Who will, like Solomon, understand the tongue of the brook?

Like you and me, the brook will chatter in Yiddish,  
Like Yiddish, it's easy to understand the tongue of the brook.

Mother, how long will Jew speak to Jew in Yiddish?

As long as the brooks will carry their water,  
As long as a brook will noisily chatter to a brook,  
As long, my child, as the brooks are alive with water.

Mother, how much water can a brook carry?

As many stars as Father Abraham discovered once,  
As many years as our people will dawn, fresh and merry,  
Through so many mirrors seven suns are mirrored.

Mother, yes, I hear the brook murmur in Yiddish.  
My child, no sea will flood the brook with its surge. OK?

*from my eighth book of poetry: Midday*

*SAFAD*

## ***To a Butterfly***

See, the  
butterfly  
is ready to  
pass away at its  
first blush of being born.  
O so many shadows rush  
in the twilight to assault a  
single butterfly. Your only day,  
your great life: the world sets with your evening.  
O butterfly, at the end of your day, I  
become like you an unbelievable world,  
where there is no sky, no earth, no life, no death, a world  
of nothing. Butterfly, we two will remain in the wind  
chasing yesterday's day. Such a night is waiting for us, blind  
barren female, that cannot give birth anymore to a dawn.  
O butterfly, I too rose in a beginning like dawn  
And like you, with hands like yearning wings, at a window  
pane, I shall expire. Without you, without me,  
the darkness will grow even darker. Like you,  
I shall become a twin brother to the  
high air. What will remain of me is  
my love at a cedar tree with  
the kisses of my mouth,  
and she will dream of me.  
And I will be the  
brightest tear in  
her deathful  
wide eyes.

*MENKE*

## ***A Lonely Hour in New York***

Babel upon Babel, rising against God: New York.  
A night from the Book of Splendor lit its worlds.  
The Moon — a coin of the Golden Calf, over New York.  
The Stars — suspect jewelry of a rich whore.

In the small room, the noise of the city beats at the windows.  
The loose panes push away every blossom from my childhood.  
The towers are warning monsters through the windows,  
The glass cuts the moon into sharp hoops.

I'm assaulted by as many years as the stones of New York,  
Days starving for light and dream, bread and poems.  
Sleepless nights, when loneliness undresses every reality,  
New York remains a desolate dream, an unwritten poem.

And sometimes when night stifles the weary noise of the city,  
Then the wind on stone becomes the cry of uprooted races, OK?  
I hear the graves of my mother and father scream through the city,  
Then New York is holy as the dust of my mother and father.



*SAFAD*

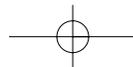
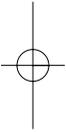
## ***The Key***

Longing for your touch, my abandoned hut in Safad stayed lonely  
On a mountain top across from the grave of the Holy ARI.  
You remind me of the long, wailing, rainy nights of Safad,  
When the blind rains are taught light by the Holy ARI.

On the streets of New York, you open every charm of the Galilee.  
Broadway flashes all about with the mystery of Safad's Book of Splendor.  
The noise of the subway is an underground waterfall.  
A beggar on Hester Street contains a homeless wayfarer,

All the crookedness of a Safad alley in his riches.  
A drunken whore on a street corner is a disheveled palm tree in the wind.  
As in a tale of giants, the night is lost among the towers  
Now when I conduct the midnight vigil in the streets of New York.

Key, you bone of my bones, disquiet of a New York night,  
My subtlest tremor through your iron, all my joy and crying,  
You open a longing in my senses like needles through my body,  
Through you, God's name, so the walls will not stone me.



MENKE

## *Rose of Sharon*

Suddenly on a New York street I saw the Rose of Sharon:  
What are you doing here among the stones of the city?  
Why did you escape from the eternal Song of Songs?  
“I grew tired of the kisses of Solomon  
the King, weary of my own beauty. And now  
I don't want any King, let a beggar  
in the streets of the city play out  
a love with me. Listen, you hear  
the cry of generations  
deafening the song of  
all the songs. Now I  
want to be a  
tear of my  
people.”

Now the Rose of Sharon among the stones of New York is the  
crown of loneliness. And, O wonder of wonders, under  
the hail of steps the Queen of Roses is not trampled.  
Not a beggar, the wind comes to ask the rose: say,  
my love, do you love me? And the rose ponders  
under the beating steps of the city,  
she kisses the kisses of the wind,  
plays “Odds or Evens” with herself,  
she counts her own petals: Love?  
No! and the wind dances  
a sulking dance, so  
coquettish: say  
three times love,  
or I

*SAFAD*

dash like  
an arrow  
from a taut bow.  
says the rose: take off!  
Come, O thorn, let us  
play together such a love  
that hatred will fall forever.  
Then comes the thorniest thorn, man,  
tears off the rose limb after limb and still  
she's not naked, but the rose remains in stone  
like a goblet of fear. Who can hear through the screams  
of the metropolis her silent scream if not her  
loneliness, her faithful friend? And now the rose knows: higher  
than all the wailing is only the crying of someone mute.

Against the wantonness of the city, the Rose of Sharon  
found a twin brother in the courage of stone. Now the stones  
cannot stone her, and the Rose of Sharon has the strength  
of a giant, small as David's pebble against  
the dwarf— Goliath the Philistine. Stronger  
than man, stone, death—is the child of the Song  
of Songs. O rose of the Last Days, you  
are eternal as sorrow, dust,  
joy, stars, alive as the death  
in Ezekiel's valley.  
O Rose of Sharon,  
God's eye, desti-  
ny of my  
people.

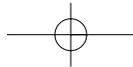
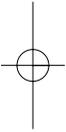


MENKE

## *On the Road to Sodom*

Kingdom  
of sun. Not  
of clay and bricks,  
not by hands — Sodom  
built by the sun, leaves no  
caress of a shadow, no  
kiss of dew allowed. Lot's Wife is  
no more a pillar of salt but a  
pillar of sun. The Negev — a garden  
of flames. A ray is a cursed rose. The most  
gruesome of all kingdoms is the kingdom of the sun.

Kingdom  
of dust, see,  
magic mountains,  
the worlds that dust  
invented. Laughter and  
wind, rage and crying of dust,  
saints and evil persons of dust,  
Garden of Eden and Hell of dust.  
the kingdom of dust is more eternal  
than all eternities, eternal than sun,  
O even more eternal than heaven, than God.



*SAFAD*

See, a  
camel, a  
Bedouin, as  
out of a Fata  
Morgana. The thorns  
of the Negev, the evil  
men of Sodom, lure the weary  
wanderer into a Sodom bed,  
cutting the visitor's too-long legs short, TR  
still pointing with their broken, ashen fingers  
at the devastated, burnt desert of the sky.

See, a  
Jew, Jacob's  
struggling angel.  
Here is a Jew with  
a flute in his mouth, a  
shepherd with his sheep, as if  
strayed from Father Abraham's flock.  
Evening. A neighborhood in sunset  
is my village hovering on wings,  
ready to fly home, but my village falls,  
crumbles the Negev night into thorny pieces.

*MENKE*

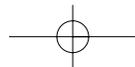
Shadows  
striding with  
the steps of my  
slaughtered uncles, each  
one of them, a body  
of rage, eyes — fire and brimstone,  
caressing the cursed fires  
and begging the languid spaces for  
evil: O dear, lovely Sodom, give us  
one last alm, one and only in the cosmos, Correct?  
Death. For the light is more gruesome than any darkness.

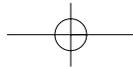
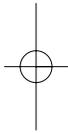
Night. God  
in the i-  
mage of man, shakes  
off the curses of  
generations. He blesses  
Sodom too with the blessings  
of the eve of Genesis. The  
earth is a virgin bed, teasing the  
untouched generations. A lunar girl,  
unborn Eve in the arms of a desert tree,  
eagerly waiting in a dream to be born.



*SAFAD*

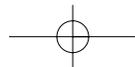
Girl,  
my not yet  
day rising sun,  
my yearning world,  
you have waited for me from  
the first Creation, patient  
as time. Wait, O wait from root to  
the lonely crown of a Negev tree.  
I shall come to you, as sure as the light  
of a distant morning. I shall be near you,  
a legend the wind is not yet finished telling.

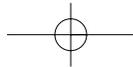
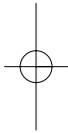






***The Last  
Menke Sonnets***





## ***Holy Yiddish***

Yiddish, like my mama's beautiful face never sets. Yiddish  
Residing in her old gray house, the shining Sabbath Queen,  
Over all her poor treasures, she is the blessed light.  
Yiddish, my father's heaven, as close as the earth,  
Talmud-melody of a Yeshiva student,  
My grandmother's tear of hope, the sadness  
Of my Aunt Beylke Beilka, wringing her hands.  
Who can love as deeply as an  
Abyss, with no hatred for  
The enemy, without  
Grandpa's cutting morals:  
Mama Yiddish,  
Oh, holy  
Yiddish.

MENKE

***May in Mikhalishek Michalishek or Michaleshik***

***To my son Hirshe-Dovid,  
Who visited my town Mikhalishek in 1990,  
Seventy years after I left it for America***

What does the month of May do in Mikhalishek, if not to  
Show lilac, the first flower of loneliness. David's harp  
Plays in the wind an ode to Yiddish, without Jews. Oh,  
Mama Yiddish, mocked by many, lamented, as  
Simple as the stones that raged through Vilna  
And Warsaw Ghettos. In the evening here  
The sun sets like a brushfire spreading  
From auto-da-fés. Night. The stars  
Kindle yortseit yortsait candles in  
Ruined narrow alleys,  
For the slaughtered saints.  
Yiddish, my first  
Scream, and my  
Last – kiss.

SONNETS

## ***After a Slaughter in Svintsyan***

***On the fiftieth anniversary of the nine thousand Jews  
Of Svintsyan and Svintsyan District, October 1991\****

Si—lence! Woe, the horrifying silence after a slaughter.  
Here a toy longing for a child, there horrible emptiness  
Of a vacant cradle. Words are hovering as on  
The wings of a devoured bird. Here a word is mute  
As a lopped off tongue. There a word lamenting,  
Not quite finished off by the butcher's knife.  
Here a word explodes, a curse that stops  
The heart of the enemy. There  
A word dawns, a tear, a flame,  
A pillar of fire: an  
Awesome light. Such fire  
Leaves no trace of  
The butcher.  
Amen.

*\*The poem was read aloud after the poet's death at the memorial assembly at the mass grave in Svintsyanke, Lithuania, early October, 1991.*

*MENKE*

## ***In My New York Street***

Pri-  
Meval  
Walls, weary  
Of standing here  
For generations,  
Condemned themselves to death,  
Strive to scatter the bricks by  
Themselves. It's autumn. The wild wind  
Tears the trees in mourning. The beggars  
Stooping in the street seek their good fortune  
On stony makeshift beds, abandoned ruins.  
White underwear like shrouds. Clotheslines with underwear  
Stretch like charmed snakes. The metropolis climbs through iron  
And dream, through sky and steel. Evening. A prostitute, a doll  
On display, a beggar's penny, in the twilight, she becomes  
All gold. In longing, my fingers grow gray. Even God, in my street, dies  
Of eternal loneliness. A butterfly caught in a spider web  
Says his confession with my poems.



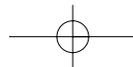
*SONNETS*

## ***A Little Room\****

My three-legged table, like a limping beggar on crutches  
In one of my poems. Through the window, an abandoned  
Ruin, where stars wallow in the cracks of a prosti-  
tute's bug-infested bed. A man at a garbage  
Barrel, seeking food with the taste of fine  
Marzipan



*\*The beginning of a Menke sonnet the poet was working on in the last days of his life.*



*MENKE*

## ***The Last Will\****

All my love goes out to you, even to my softest teardrop,  
Hirshe- Heershe- Dovid, my son, tread softly on dust, each grain aches  
Like a wound. The dust under your feet is silence of  
The wailing slaughter in Svintsyman, a mute last will  
Of graveless Jews: brother, we the pulverized  
Ash, fire and brimstone, smoke of gas ovens.  
May our rage at the enemy grow  
Through you forever. In Yiddish  
You can hear our voice. Let us  
Not become a tale of  
Once-upon-a-time,  
A Kaddish for  
Your holy  
People.

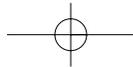
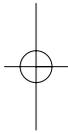
*\*Written three days before the poet's death.*

SONNETS

## *Night In Night Out\**

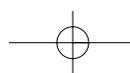
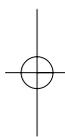
Night in,  
Night out, I  
See in my dream  
Dveyrke, Dveirka, my brother  
Elsik's dead bride. I see  
Her sneaking out of her mass  
Grave and blooming with her sixteen  
Springs in flower-twined braids and moon-  
Shine dresses. I see her lover coming  
Toward her and saying to her: The seven  
Seas and the seven skies are fated, but we are  
Eternal like the eighth sea and the eighth sky

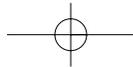
*\*Unfinished Menke sonnet, written in the middle of the night before the poet's death on April 24, 1991. Dveyrke was the beloved of Menke's brother Elsik in Svintsyman. In his childhood, Menke witnessed Elsik and Dveyrke's swearing vows of eternal love for half a night at the open Ark of the Covenant in the "old synagogue" in the Svintsyman synagogue courtyard. Elsik died at the age of 17 (circa 1917) in a barracks in Buvitz, while engaged in forced labor for the German army in World War I. Dveyrke remained faithful to him until the Nazis and their collaborators shot her along with nine thousand Jews of Svintsyman district in Svintsymanke (new Svintsyman) in October 1941, and were buried in the mass grave named Polygon.*





***From the papers on  
Menke's Desk  
on 24 April 1991***





## *Who is Paragoolt?*

Paragoolt my lover  
Lives in a dream within a dream.  
God created her  
From first falling snow.

So she is all that's white  
In the white of a wedding dress  
In the white of death shrouds  
In the flutter of a white flag.

In Lilith braids and moonlit clothes  
She raises children in imaginary cradles  
And mourns, on fly paper  
The maddened buzz of glue trapped bugs.

She walks the crooked path of back alleys  
In backyards  
She bundles her unborn children  
In white laundry, as in shrouds

End of summer  
She performs the rite of rending garments — on trees  
And sees everyone's days  
Like plucked-off leaves.

*MENKE*

## ***Seven Seas, Seven Heavens***

The eighth sea and the eighth heaven  
Are full of the tears of my people.

How many tears in the ninth sea  
And in the ninth heaven?  
So many Jews will yet give a laugh in Yiddish  
Free and loud  
As in May waterfalls.

Yiddish, the wonder  
That has upon all the earth  
Like the rod of Moses  
After each hurl blossomed forth, and  
Will again, with wisdom of sayings  
And spungold of folksong.

## *My Threefooted Table*

My threefooted table  
Like a limping beggar on crutches  
Is a poem of my poems.  
Through the foggy panes I see  
In a forsaken hut stars lie around  
In the cracks of a whore's bedbug ridden bed.  
A man over a garbage can  
With a piece of food with the taste of Eden,  
With eyes staring at the seven heavens  
Blesses God for his Mercy  
For feeding him like a worm no one cares about.

Autumn.  
I take to the wind a song of mourning  
Like the maddened buzz of glue trapped bugs  
I hear in the wind the screams of my town Svintsyan  
O, Woe, Svintsyan where my cradle stood.  
Day in day out she comes to my dream,  
Dveirka, my brother Eltshik's dead bride  
Sneaks out of her mass grave  
And comes over to me like way back when.  
In flowered braids and moonlit clothes  
She walks through the reverie of New York backyards  
And demands of me a trace of her eternally destined man.  
My fluttering candle — a flickering angel  
Goes out, in Paradise.  
But I, in the flames of Hell  
Hurl curses.