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**THE POWER OF LAMENTS IN
ALLEVIATING DESPAIR:
REVISITING HEBREW LAMENTS**

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**Thesis presented for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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For

Lewis & Elias

University of Cape Town

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ABSTRACT

THE POWER OF LAMENTS IN ALLEVIATING DESPAIR :

REVISITING HEBREW LAMENTS

Poetic laments are an expression of sorrow, fulfilling a human need to share loss with fellow humans, and is a genre found as far back as Mesopotamia. The Jewish people are a group that have historically been exposed to a continuing cycle of victimisation, loss and death and have a long literary history of laments.

There have been several studies of Hebrew laments, but most examine them as a response to catastrophe or for their literary merit. This thesis has revisited Hebrew laments looking at them instead from the perspective of their power to alleviate despair. The thesis starts with Biblical laments. Special attention is given to the Book of Lamentations, as it is seen as the archetypical representation of this genre. It is dealt with first, although it is not the first in time.

The thesis examines the characteristics of the laments, chronologically, following with David's lament over Saul and Jonathan, the *payyetanim*, the poets of the Golden Age of Spain, the Eastern European Enlightenment, 20th Century poems including Holocaust poetry and some poems from South Africa chosen to illustrate that the genre is even produced here far from the font of Hebrew creativity.

This thesis has shown that the poets have an innate insight into the psychological stages of coming to terms with loss, and, through their ability to verbalize their feelings, provide the listener or reader with the opportunity to gain comfort through sharing vicariously in the feelings expressed by the poet. The opportunity to express grief in a formal and structured way by chronicling the despair in itself is a healthy way to respond to loss.

Through my study I have been able to show that lamentations alleviate despair by accentuating the positive and finding light in the darkness and by recognizing and addressing the realities of the feelings of the mourners.

Furthermore laments can provide spiritual comfort through a strong emphasis on faith and prayer and a belief in redemption through the return to Zion.

This thesis has also noted the remarkable continuity of Jewish traditions in the genre of Hebrew laments through the ages not only in format and reflection of Jewish beliefs and

writings, but also in the repetition of and allusion to certain traditional motifs, such as the motif of light, children, cyclical renewal of nature, the *Akedah*, tears, and taking positive steps.

As a result of the analysis it was observed that the differences in the laments conform to the paradigm of socio-cultural beliefs prevalent in the world in which they were composed. However, the intention of the lament writer to alleviate despair through providing emotional and spiritual comfort remains constant, and the similarities over a period of 3000 years are more striking than the differences.

The poems have been analysed in the Hebrew original (for copies see appendix) but the language used in the thesis is English.

Submitted by -

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“I had to confide in someone, so I confided in paper. Paper is silent, it can take anything. I could pour out my anger, I could weep, and I could rejoice. For me poems are what friends are to other people. They are what I cannot tell anyone. I wrote them so that they could only be fully understood by someone who was somewhat like me, or who had similar experiences”.

Hanush Hachenburg
(aged thirteen)

In Zedem Children's Magazine, Terezin Ghetto 1943

University of Cape Town

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INTRODUCTION

THE POWER OF LAMENTS IN ALLEVIATING DESPAIR: REVISITING HEBREW LAMENTS

In my great grief and for my heart's ease I begin this book in the year of Creation 5451 [1690-1691]. I began writing it, dear children, upon the death of your good father, in the hope of distracting my soul from the burdens laid upon it, and the bitter thought that we have lost our faithful shepherd. In this way I have managed to live through many wakeful nights, and springing from my bed shortened the sleepless hours.

[The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hamelin]

For my thesis, I have chosen to examine the power of laments in alleviating despair. I shall be looking at them not from the point of view of theological significance, poetic genre, or rhetorical strategies, although these will be mentioned briefly, but for their role in providing psychological comfort to the mourner.

When I lost my husband, my companion of 45 years, I felt bereft and alone. I found comfort in reading the Book of Lamentations, which the philosopher Moses Hess described as “the moving Hebrew prayers which express pain and agony; prayers which have created and preserved over thousands of years the unity of our traditions and are even today the link that binds all Jews together all over the world” (as in Ausubel, 1964:209).

I began to wonder whether comfort could be found in other laments, the function of which is traditionally regarded as the depiction of loss and disaster, and consequently decided to undertake an examination of the role that the lament has played in Hebrew literature past and present in alleviating despair. Many laments have been written in Hebrew. For the purpose of this thesis, the lament is defined as an emotional expression of grief, sadness, sorrow, shock, distress, adversity, anguish and regret. Laments may be national, personal or universal. As the quotation above indicates, the art of writing itself can help to distract the mourner and alleviate despair and this may be one of the reasons why lament poetry has come down to us from earliest times.

Laments do not only deal with the trauma of death and the anguish of the bereaved, they also provide comfort for the mourners and this aspect of lament poetry drew my attention.

I have chosen to examine laments drawn from different periods covering nearly three millenia, to illustrate my contention that in all periods laments have been designed to alleviate despair.

To choose was a hard task in view of the vast number of laments which have been written, many having been written as a response to Jewish catastrophe. My intent is to find the *rote farbe*, the recurrent thread, that gives meaning and purpose to this written testimony covering so many years.

I first briefly identified the history and tragedy behind "the lament", the rationale underlying its composition. I then examined the devices within the poem designed to provide some solace out of the grief mourned, which I have called the light which could be drawn out of the darkness.

I refer briefly to the Mesopotamian laments and then analyze the archetypal Book of Lamentations, followed by David's lament over Saul and Jonathan. I look at the *Piyuttim* era, and the Golden Age of Spain, the Eastern European Enlightenment, the Holocaust period and post-Holocaust Israeli laments.

I have chosen to include in this thesis lesser known poets as well as poets of international recognition. It is not the talent of the poet that is at issue, but the power of their words to provide comfort during grief. I have included two South African Hebrew poets as I am writing this thesis in South Africa, and am studying under the aegis of a South African university which collects and studies Hebrew literature. By so doing I wished to demonstrate the universality in time and place of the need to compose laments to alleviate despair. Even here, on the outskirts of the Jewish diaspora, Jews have been drawn to compose laments in Hebrew to express their grief.

The poems selected come from the various eras of Hebrew creativity in order to demonstrate that the themes of alleviating comfort were found in all these periods, irrespective of the socio-cultural or religio-political background. Short historical summaries of these periods have been inserted purely to contextualize the poems selected from each period, not in order to provide a literary history but merely to provide a better understanding of the milieu in which they were composed.

In this examination I have recognized several different approaches designed to alleviate despair and I have traced the application of those techniques in the laments.

This thesis is not intended to be a critical analysis of the literary history of the lament genre, nor is it intended to provide an examination of the religious or hermeneutic underpinnings of laments. The lament poetry will be examined from the specific perspective of how the methods used in these poems provide comfort.

In other words, unlike the efforts of Mintz (1984), Roskies (1988) and Young (1988), who studied laments as a response to catastrophe, or as an examination of the theory of the poetic or rhetorical discourse, this dissertation aims to find the positive light-giving aspects. In Roskies' recent book, *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past* (1999), Roskies argues that the past must die before it can be made to live again in the present. Instead of viewing the modern Jewish experience as a series of seismic breaks, he looks at it as Jewish memory sites that were structured precisely from a prior and profound sense of loss and reveals the creativity with which Jews have coped with loss and catastrophe. This dissertation aims to study what gives the lament the power to do what they do, i.e. to alleviate pain and despair. Roskies' work confirms that the creativity of the Jews helped them to cope with their torment. This thesis examines the ways this is achieved. Roskies' view of Jewish memory sites is similar to Young's view of historical memory and ritual commemoration in which laments play a big role, as a refiguring of present lives in a light of a remembered past. Young holds that Jewish memory and tradition depend explicitly on the capacity of figurative language to remember the past. A word or expression gives life or emphasis to an idea of our heritage and civilization. I shall be focusing on words and expressions that provide comfort.

Hebrew literature is full of reactions to loss. It acknowledges and recognizes the pain and grief that accompanies loss and tries to provide healing comfort.

In this thesis I shall be looking at the power of Hebrew laments to alleviate distress. I shall not be looking at the laments as having a purpose and subject matter that is exclusively grieving, but rather as literary texts for the light, inspiration and comfort that the text affords.¹

¹ Brann "We read the Book of Lamentations on *Tishah B'Av*, not to cry, but to uplift and strengthen ourselves" (1987:330,331).

As this thesis revolves around the response of the reader to the text, I feel it is necessary to clarify the basic notion of reader-response theory:

Iser (1974:274-275) who lays the foundation for this method of literary criticism proposes that the work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore, the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader. The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence.

Whereas the traditional view is one of two separate and discrete objects, called text and reader, Iser accentuates the communication process, and not the constituents in that process. Meaning occurs as a result of communication, and communication is never simply a one-way process. The reader must take a text, black characters on a white page and give it a meaning doing it. Readers' response involves not so much the poem, but the readers reading a poem.

To come back to the heart of this thesis, according to the reader-response theory reading is both subjective and objective.

Grief on the other hand is subjective because grief affects people differently. In some it precipitates a deep depression. It drives others to shorten wakeful nights by writing memoirs like Gluckel of Hamelin, or by composing beautiful lament poetry like Hanagid or Greenberg. Freud (1973:291) said that "it is an inevitable result ... that we should seek in the world of ... literature compensation for what has been lost in life..."

I maintain that part of the compensation, i.e the response, is controlled by the poem, part by the reader (Iser, 274-275). The effect of the lament on the reader and his/her response is what gives it its power. The reader is regarded as one of the constituents of literary meaning. Interpretation is seen as an act involving the reader. Often, readers read and interpret books differently, and this interpretive difference can be traced to the varying backgrounds and perspectives of the reader.

Tomkins is adamant that meaning does not inhere completely and exclusively in the literary text. Some reader-response critics regard individual differences as important while others prefer to consider response as common to a class or era (1980:201) and indeed in the case of national laments it could be suggested that the Jewish nation has the ability to respond as a community because they are responding as a common unit that is identifying collectively with the underlying literary meaning. This may be

because, as Ausubel (1964:209) argues, “the chief preoccupation of Hebrew writers has been with the survival of the people, with its physical and spiritual regeneration, and with the healing of the many grave wounds and warpings that have been inflicted upon it by persecution, poverty and social pariahism”. Thus the work is more than the text, and has a meaning and purpose deeper and more significant than its surface meaning and purpose.

Laments are written by the poet out of a specific feeling of grief yet the authors make meaning and the readers, though by no means unanimous, also make meaning (Suleiman, 1980:164), and this I believe is what gives laments their power, because the readers bring their own pain into the interpretation of the text.

If literary meaning can be regarded as the product of the interaction between text and reader, then the meaning is not ‘in’ the text, but can be located in the relationship between text and reader and this relationship is what this thesis is focusing on.

The text is a “full” object, all the more full and rich for its ability to accommodate a number of different readings and approaches (Suleiman & Crosman, 1980:40).

Many readers respond to laments from the point of view of sadness, tragedy, catastrophe. I maintain that within the core of lament lies a positive side, the seeds of hope and it is this hope that helps readers to find light within their own grieving.

The many varying Hebrew lamentations covered in this thesis have emerged from different causes and are read by people with different states of mind and as a result the interpretation may be greatly varied.

Earlier literary critics would have argued that a poem cannot be understood without the interaction of reader and writer within the text. This thesis puts emphasis on the reader. It stresses that the reader has to be taken into account as well as his/her personal response as one can never have knowledge of a thing without that knowledge being influenced by one’s own perspective.

DIVISION OF THE THESIS

In **chapter one**, I deal with the genre of lament, touching on the poetic form of the lament in its general historical context in pre-Biblical literature, particularly in the Mesopotamian form.

In **chapter two** I examine the lament as a way of healing, recognizing that the act of writing itself is therapeutic, and that laments focus on the universal experience of loss and grief.

In **Chapter three** I deal with some of the laments in the Bible, viz, the Book of Lamentations and the lament of David on the death of Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:17-27), the earliest Hebrew lament on record.

In **chapter four**, I examine the laments of the liturgical literature of the *payyetanim*. I chose Kallir, (circa 700 - 800 CE), as the representative par excellence of the *payyetanim*. Kallir's poems have often been included in our liturgy, and although he "moves forward" in the synagogue, he "goes back" and draws heavily from Biblical and traditional texts. He can be considered as a bridge between the past and the future.

In **chapter five**, I study poets of the Golden Age of Spain. These poems deal with deaths of patrons and family, and in the case of Judah Halevi, a longing to embrace the ruins of Jerusalem.

In **chapter six**, I examine the Hebrew laments of the representatives of the poets from Eastern Europe like Bialik and Tchernichowsky, who wrote about the losses caused by the pogroms such as that in Kishinev, Russia.

In **chapter seven** I analyze literary responses to the Holocaust mourning the destruction and deaths of six million Jews in Europe and include laments by Katzenelson, Greenberg, Shlonski, Alterman, Gilboa and Gouri.

In **chapter eight**, I deal with contemporary laments. These are still being produced today even in South Africa and have been written in response to deaths of friends and leaders like Prime Minister Rabin.

These representative samples of poems are enriching, and as I work through them, I see them as an illumination to Jews in their socio-cultural, political, physical and spiritual world.

Chapter nine contains the conclusion.

In this thesis I use the standardized Hebrew transliteration (as is utilized in academic studies and in Jewish writings, see for example Encyclopedia Judaica.) Certain differences such as between a *khaf* and a *chet* are not discrepancies or typing errors but indicate differences in the original Hebrew lettering.

THE POWER OF LAMENTS IN ALLEVIATING PAIN LOOKING AT HOLOCAUST LAMENTS AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE GENRE

In my study of these poems and the power of words, the evidence emerges that lamentations are an expression of grief and fill a universal need in helping people to come to terms with disaster and despair. This observation makes me oppose the statement of the philosopher T.W. Adorno that, “to write poetry after Auschwitz is a barbaric thing” (Langer, 1975:1), a statement interpreted by Ben Yosef as meaning that, “poetry is out of place against the backdrop of the contemporary dehumanization” (1988:16-19).

It is understandable that Adorno should have believed that the suffering during the Holocaust was incommunicable, culturally unacceptable and unassimilable. Holocaust survivor, Primo Levi in a catalogue for a photographic exhibition of life in the camps explained that “in all of our accounts, verbal or written, one finds expressions such as indescribable, inexpressible, words are not enough” (Young 1994). But the experience has to be written down and sublimated. Only by writing it can many people manage to come to terms with what they suffered.

I feel empathy when I read George Steiner's words that “The world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason and to speak of the unspeakable is to risk the survival of language as creator and bearer of humane, rational truth” (Ramras-Rauch, 1998:493). Although I can appreciate the reasoning behind the statements of Adorno and Steiner I maintain that they are overlooking the fact that although words are inadequate, they are the best means we have to express human experience, even the inexpressible.

Inadequate as they may be, words provide what Amichai describes as a kind of remedy or homeopathic medicine that poets use to cure themselves of the pain in their lives and as a personal release. It must be said that Adorno later modified his statement and in his

concluding portion in “Negative Dialectics” he says that “perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream” (N.Y 1973). Adorno knew that despite the inadequacy of words, language is all we have to give voice to our grief, our outrage, our kinship, with those who suffered more than we can ever imagine. Since Adorno made this statement in 1949, a whole generation has tried to face up to the problem. It was movingly verbalized by Eli Wiesel who wrote

How is one to speak of it?

How is one not to speak of it?

(Wiesel, 1965)

Auschwitz has itself become a new metaphor for the extremes of depravity and unspeakable degradation, the hell to which some humans subjected other humans (Striar, 1998:xxi, xxii).

Like Amichai, Mintz implicitly recognizes that even if the metaphors are “inadequate” they possess consoling powers (1984:29), and I shall try to examine in this thesis, the means of providing the consolation.

Mintz (1984:x) and Roskies (1984:21) speak in terms of a survival literature, not in terms of a “barbaric thing”.

Ezrahi (1982:97) recognizes that the survivalists are motivated largely by the need to convey and legitimate their own sufferings and commemorate the particular lives and deaths of their companions. When we hear Holocaust poetry read at Holocaust commemoration ceremonies, we can appreciate the power of the word to bring about group solidarity in much the same way as the Book of Lamentations read on *Tishah B’Av* brings about group solidarity. The lamentations also help to reaffirm the collective memory, transcend the suffering, and propel the survivors ahead. The strong sense of community keeps at bay the forces of disintegration that could accompany disaster.

Writers of laments bear witness, document and memorialize the catastrophe, and console and heal its victims. The only means available to them is through the ministry of language (Mintz, 1984:29). It is ultimately an attempt against all odds to give verbal expression to an experience that challenges and defies the boundaries of language yet emerges through it (Ramras-Rauch, 1998:493).

For Bialik writing was an opportunity to bring about change. He wrote subversively where he thought it necessary and brought about a forward change in the poetry. Yet in

this forward movement, he always came back to traditional allusions and the themes of the fathers.

For the diarists who participated in Emmanuel Ringelblum's communal *Oyneg Shabes*² in the Warsaw ghetto, bearing witness was a "biological necessity", a spiritual resistance to the forces of evil overwhelming them (Conway, 1991:287). This was a new way of writing and also constituted a discontinuity, a new pattern, in the long chain of laments and their involvement enabled the participants to take comfort in an act of passive resistance. They were doing something illegal in keeping records, but it was something that might help the later conviction and punishment of the Nazi forces. It was an act that brought comfort to these historians, although it was perilous to the participants.

For historians, psychologists and poets, the writing and recording of Auschwitz and the unspeakable is important. Every effort has been made and is being made to record and preserve the recollections of survivors, and living witnesses of the concentration camps have been encouraged to chronicle their sufferings so that future generations will have as complete an account as possible.³

Katsch, quoted in Young (1988:17), recognizes the need to bear witness, since he feels this need and survival become one and the same longing, and he re-affirms that the desperate need to testify cannot be underestimated. As Leveson (2000:50) says "some of the poets find that their poetry is a remedy used to cure themselves of the pain they feel, or it can fulfil the need to fight back by letting the world know". It becomes a challenge to make voices heard and try to break the pattern of evil and bestiality of human behaviour. Literary testimony for many victims may be the sole reason to continue living and, as Viktor Frankl has pointed out, survival often depended on having a meaning and purpose to one's life (1988:vii,ix).

Reality itself could become so extreme as to outstrip language's capacity to represent it altogether. However, Young maintains that we cannot know this or any era outside the ways it is transmitted to us in its representations. Poetry has the ability to convince

² A clandestine word for the underground organization which at peril collected written testimonies of victims and survivors of the Holocaust.

³ In Cape Town too, Holocaust survivors have gathered their stories and published it in *Sacred Memory* of those who did not survive (Schrire, 1995).

readers and reaffirm the enormity of the horrors that took place, even though the writers were not there (1988:16) and this will be noticed in the poems that have been selected. Scholes said "It is because reality cannot be recorded that reality is dead. All writing is construction" (1975:7). Poetry is not an historical fact, but a figurative composition designed to focus on the effect that the horror had on the writers, who may not have been there physically to record the events, but were there psychologically and emotionally and have felt moved to express their feelings through poetry.

Conway agrees with Young that many of the survivors strove to recall every possible detail of their persecutions, and a study was made of the different ways through which the Jewish catastrophe became part of the collective memory. The manner of expression was important, as it seemed to clear the air to an extent and give a better understanding of their surroundings (Conway, 1991:293).

Like Young I observed that the creative artistic mode, especially in poetry, becomes a personal, vital, ever-present experience and this expression is what is important. The expression is a healthy release of feelings, not only for the poet but also for the reader as it helps provide a catharsis and a comfort.

Lament poetry reflects people's creative strategies for confronting spiritual and psychological deprivation and overcoming physical destruction at its worst. I suggest that the emphasis is not on destruction but on *creative survival* through the efforts of the Hebrew literary imagination.

Mintz in his study of *Hurban* (1984) investigates the interplay of the literature of catastrophic contemporary events and longstanding literary traditions and finds that the lament forms part of what he calls a vertical axis of literary tradition extending back to the Middle Ages and the Bible. He states that in the course of the study background became foreground, the pre-Holocaust literature of catastrophe in Hebrew proving to be so rich and elaborate that it claimed equal footing with the contemporary materials. Jewish society, he states, is unique in this respect. It has had many massive national catastrophes visited upon it and still survived, and in each case the reconstruction was undertaken in significant measure by the exertions of the Hebrew literary imagination as expressed in prophecy, liturgy, exegesis and poetry. Mintz suggests that it is the story of the *transcendence* of catastrophe, rather than of the catastrophe itself, which is compelling (1984:x). The insights provided by Mintz have enabled me to view the

laments as a story of transcendence rather than a story of catastrophe. This can be clearly noted in the poems that I have selected.

Mintz observes that responses to catastrophes varied at different historical periods and that the destruction of the First Temple circa 586 BCE was followed by Biblical responses; the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE by the *Midrash*; the massacre by the Crusaders of the Jews in Europe and the Rhineland in 1096 by synagogue poetry; the pogroms in Russia in 1881-1882 and 1903-1905 by modern Hebrew poetry. The attitude of the victims and of the poet who described the destruction was affected by the current religious ideas of G-d, guilt and responsibility.

Roskies like Mintz, noted that there has always been a dialogue between history and literature and an understanding of the ideas underpinning that dialogue enables the reader to understand the literature it produced. In his monumental *Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe* which examined Hebrew and Yiddish literature concerning catastrophe, Roskies observed that Jews perceived the cyclical nature of violence through their literature of destruction (Roskies 1988:9). The Holocaust, Auschwitz included, does not fall into a special category of literature but fits into this ongoing saga of a living and suffering people.

Barzel (1992), in his study of poetry⁴, similarly observed that Holocaust literature is a part of the sequence of history and that, while the Nazis' wholesale destruction of Jews in Europe is unique, it is at the same time a link in a chain of afflictions of the nation. The validity of this observation is demonstrated throughout the thesis.

In 1998 Striar published a book of poetry of the Holocaust containing 280 poems selected out of more than 1000 poems written in German, Yiddish, Hebrew, Greek and Russian which have defied Adorno's injunction. Striar said that most poets do not choose to write about the Holocaust. It chooses them (1998:xxii). This is what gives the poems a genuineness of expression that I believe contributes to their effectiveness.

I looked at the power of laments to alleviate despair through the centuries and realized that destruction and personal grief and mourning cause people to write and to read laments.

⁴ *Shirat Ha't'chayah-Shaul Tchernichowsky.*

I noticed like Mintz, Roskies and Barzel, that there has been a similar continuing thread of theme, emotion and response through the ages. My examination was more specialized as I studied how the poet tried to find comfort, to produce light from darkness. There is in the Hebrew lament genre a basic vertical consistency. The unifying use of Hebrew helped the Jews to preserve their identity. Hebrew was for them the language of prayer, the language of their creative impulse, and the language in which they expressed their deepest feelings of grief.

Laments were originally written for public mourning and were frequently sung at public ceremonies and were meant to give strength and courage to the audience of mourners.

The Book of Lamentations is recited publicly on *Tishah B'Av*. With the spread of printing and literacy most subsequent laments were intended for private reading. It is rare to find a modern lament written for public ceremonies.

In 1963 the lamentation *Tikkun Hatzot* "Midnight Vigil" by the Israeli poet Mordecai Tabib, won the First Prize in the Prix Italia Radio Competition in Verona. This was a libretto for an oratorio, possessing many of the elements of the traditional *tikkunim*, the midnight prayers which were composed by the Safed Kabbalists in the sixteenth century to keep alive the memory of the Temple that was destroyed.

This *Tikkun* was a product of the modern world yet its roots were firmly in the past. For instance, the choir repeats:

Woe is me, Woe is me...

Woe is me that I have destroyed My house,

And burnt my Temple

And exiled my children

Among the nations... (*Tikkun Hatzot*: Tabib c. 1963)

Tikkun Hatzot, despite sharing common features with most lament poems, also goes back to the original intention of the laments which were meant for public performance. It is interesting however, that although the laments examined in this thesis cover a wide range of time and place, the responses to catastrophe should be so similar. Through their laments poets enable the readers or listeners to share in the poet's feelings, and thus lighten the grief caused by the catastrophe.

The poet becomes the mouthpiece for the speechless unutterable grief.

Unfortunately the Jews have a history endowed with catastrophe; catastrophes that have led creative poets, stricken with grief, to put their feelings - anguish, anger, loss and longings - into words that have maintained the power to tune into readers who are experiencing the same feelings.

Of all the ancient tribes and kingdoms, only the Jews preserved their identity from civilizational dawn to the present, despite such national traumas as the Fall of the First Temple in the sixth century BCE, the Roman conquest and destruction of Judea in 70 CE, periodical massacres and most recently the *Shoah* [Holocaust] (Rubin, 1995:5). Six hundred years later, we still echo the words of Avigdor Kara who, in his lament on the pogrom of 1389 which forms part of the Prague *Yom Kippur* service, wrote:

How long still O Lord

Has there still not been enough? (Rybar, 1991:23)

Franz Kafka, in his story "Josephine the Singer" about hunted mice, symbolizing the Jews, writes:

When we are in a bad way politically or economically,
[Josephine's singing] is supposed to save us ... and if it does
not drive away the evil, at least gives us the strength to bear it
(Kafka, 1981:259).

This is much the same role that the genre of lament poetry has played in Hebrew literature, past and present; if it does not drive away the evil, at least it gives us the strength to bear it. More than that, laments have within them an element of a light-giving, healing and uplifting encouragement. Out of the darkness comes light as this dissertation endeavours to show.

THE GENRE OF LAMENT

DEFINITION

A lament is defined as a crying out in grief, an expression of grief or sorrow.

Grief has many causes, the greatest being bereavement, which is conclusive and final and leaves behind a sense of deprivation and emptiness. Laments are poems which deal with the grief and by expressing it helps the writer or listener to come to terms with the loss.

The word “lament” comes from the Latin *lamentor* meaning “to bewail”, to “weep over”, as when Cicero wrote *plangore et lamentatione complere forum* : to fill the forum with a noisy striking, beating of the breast or head as a sign of grief.

Laments can take several forms including dirges and elegies, a dirge being shorter, less formal, and usually sung at a burial, while an elegy is a formal and sustained lament (usually of consolation) for the death of a particular person (Abrams, 1988:47). Today, the elegy or lament is considered to be a short poem, usually conventional, and based on a mourning ritual for a death.

In music it is known as a requiem. There is also the threnody, (a wailing ode) and the obsequy (funeral rite). In Scottish and Irish it is referred to as a coronach. In German it is called a *Klagelied*, the most important element in it being praying to G-d, and looking forward to the future and hope (Tigai, 1976:125,126).

Laments were often associated with funeral conventions. In antiquity the main responsibility for mourning rested with the next of kin, and the professional women mourners played a large part. “The true lament is women’s poetry...” says Levi (1984:11), and adds that lamenting women are more intimate and more lyrical, as laments recited by male mourners for dead heroes contain boasting and praises and usually some talk of vengeance. These laments composed for the dead became a literary genre.

Laments could be recited over a communal leader or a private person, over many or over one individual. These poems could also be repentant and peace-making, or

expressed over sickness and suffering. Laments could be national loss such as for the fall of cities and temples or other major catastrophes, personal or universal.

The shortness of life and the reality of death are universal subjects. The power of fortune over all men and the weakness of the human race is set forth. The lamenter is trying to come to terms with, and understand, or to cope with a difficulty or hardship, whether vocalized or unvocalized; the poem is a cry from the heart.

The earliest laments are cultic songs, belonging to a system of beliefs and rituals connected with the worship of a deity, spirit or a group of deities or spirits, or the rites, ceremonies and practices of a religion. These took the form of royal prayers and individual prayers in which the deity is first invoked, then praised, there is a complaint, and eventually thanks are given.

Part of the artistic economy in the language of folk tradition is the allusive method; the mourner explicitly tries to avoid reference to death, making use of striking images and elaborate metaphors and similes (Alexiou, 1974:205).

There are certain common characteristics in lamenting and a similarity in the way emotions are expressed. The usual characteristics of laments include a summons to the mourners, usually accompanied by a hesitancy, and the questioning of the mourner's ability to honour the dead adequately. There could be elaborate praise, which may turn into reproach or even blame. There are contrasts between past and present, and the imagined future. There can be a wish that things could have been different, with a possible curse on the dead man's enemies, complaints about the cruelty of fortune and the purposelessness of life and regret at the finality of life. In pastoral laments nature is often portrayed as participating in the mourning. Another convention was the rhetorical repetition and evocation of the name of the deceased. This was to raise the spirit of the dead from the grave.

There is the *ubi sunt* theme, "where are they" or "why did it happen?" and the inadequate feeling of "how can adequate words be found for the occasion?"

The contrast could be made between the "you" and the "I", between the mourner and the dead.

Animals could also be mourned, and laments for animals have survived, such as written by Agathias Scholasticus (born in Greece, 536 CE) who wrote “On the Death of a Partridge” one and a half thousand years ago (Hornsby, 1993:296).

Poetic lamentations or elegies over the dead are found in virtually all languages and all periods.

As written language is thought to have originated in Sumeria about 4000 years ago (Hillers, 1972:xxix) it is not surprising that the earliest laments we have come from there (Fohrer, 1968:257).

Laments from early cultures in Egypt, Greece and Rome have also come down to us as well as later laments from Germany, Greece, Italy, France and Britain¹.

Certain common characteristics are found in these laments. Hebrew laments date back to the Bible and may have been influenced by the cultures around them.

The meter used depended on the characteristics of the poetic style of the culture in which the laments were written. The Mesopotamians had a system of parallelism which influenced the main body of Biblical poetry as well as Western European writers.

The Greeks had a much more sophisticated concept of meter. The Book of Lamentations or *Eichah* was written in a special meter which will be discussed later.

The long evolution of the lament contributes to the richness, complexity and interrelationship of the different themes as a universal feature of folk poetry.

As Alexiou (1974:205) says, and as Mintz and Roskies demonstrate, and as is clearly seen in the modern poets, there is a constant re-handling of traditional beliefs and practices. Threads of the pattern of the lament weave their way through time and cultures.

The meaning of the English word “lament” (or “dirge” or “elegy”) is different from the Hebrew word *kinah* and has a wider meaning. In its largest sense, a “lament” is an expression of grief at misfortune, especially at the loss of someone or something. A

¹ A recent example in Greek is the *Evraioellenikoi Threnoi* (Judeo-Greek Dirges for the 9th of Av) by Joseph Matsas, published in Thessaloniki in 1983 which was originally presented at the Fourth Symposium of Laography of Northern Greece held in Janina, Greece in 1979. This is a clear indication of the continuity of lament writing in both Hebrew and Greek literature. Amongst more recent poems is a poem written in Crete, called “Sacrifice of Isaac,” in which Sarah mourns Isaac first as her eyes, and later as her only candle (Alexiou, 1974:189).

“lament” is not always a *kinah*. A *kinah* is more specifically a crying for the dead, or for a state of destruction and the distress caused.

I am endeavouring to work from the standpoint of the Hebrew word, *kinah*, a lament for death or destruction. The lamenting words “*ni*” and “*n’hi*”, (connecting with the word *kinah*) designate “crying”.

Nevertheless I lay strong emphasis on the fact that a seed of hope is found in the laments or *kinot* and in this thesis I shall try to show how this seed has been planted in the poems.

COMPARISON BETWEEN EARLY MESOPOTAMIAN LAMENTS AND THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

As there are certain interesting similarities between early Mesopotamian laments and the biblical Book of Lamentations, I feel that it is relevant to include a short outline of these laments. Dobbs-Allsopp ascribes nine major generic features to the Mesopotamian city-laments, many of which occur in the Book of Lamentations. Because of these generic features the Book of Lamentations is to be classified as a city-lament.

Some of the features assigned are subject and mood; subject and poetic technique; divine abandonment; assignment of responsibility; destruction; the divine agent of destruction; the weeping goddess; lamentation, restoration and return of the gods.

In both the Mesopotamian laments and the Book of Lamentations dealing with the destruction of a city or cities, the mood is usually complaining, protesting and mournful. Both make use of an interchange of voices, which deepens the subject, and gives the author the ability to express different feelings from different angles, or to change his point of view. This technique of different voices is widely used in literature. The poet is sometimes an impartial narrator, and sometimes an internal observer and he can project himself into the different voices that he has created. In the Book of Lamentations these voices cumulatively add up to the collective voice of Zion, or the Widow Zion, as Jerusalem and the nation are called, and constitute the collective subconscious of the Jewish people. There are rapid and sudden changes of voice, changes from the voice of the poet to that of the personified city and from the individual

to the community. This community characteristic, however, is not so frequent in the Mesopotamian laments. Ezrahi (1982:102) believes that for the writers in Hebrew, it is not the odyssey of the self but the history of the people that constitutes the matrix of continuity between past and present and possible future.

There are many other similarities in the Mesopotamian and Israelite laments. There are also similarities in the addressing of a male deity, giving a description of the ravished city or temple, and begging the god to stop the destruction and not to be angry (Dobbs-Allsopp, 1993:30).

Rhetorical questions are asked, such as:-

What shall I take to witness for thee?
 what shall I liken to thee,
 O daughter of Jerusalem? (2:13)²

These are also found in the Mesopotamian laments.

A further element relevant for structural considerations in both Mesopotamian laments and the Book of Lamentations involves focus. Certain topics are particularly focused upon; that is to say, certain topics provide the recurring central binding theme, the core theme.

In the Mesopotamian laments, there is focus on the god or goddess and simultaneously on his/her destructive powers and the stress. This is also the case in the Book of Lamentations in which the daughter of Zion, (Mother Zion or Jerusalem), too, is focused upon, the focus being in conjunction with subjects such as the fall of the city, exile, disruption of religious festivals, profanation of the Temple, soldiers being killed; and babies dying of starvation (2:12).

Chapter 5 is similar to the Mesopotamian in style.

Verse 1 speaks to the deity:

Remember O L--d what is come upon us; (5:1)

Verse 19 praises G-d (5:19)

Verses 2-18 tell of the destruction (5:2-18)

In verse 20 there is a lament (within the lament);

² All Biblical quotes in this chapter will refer to the Book of Lamentations unless otherwise stated.

Wherefore dost thou forget us forever? (5:20)

In verse 1, G-d is asked to look at the destruction;

Behold and see...

Dramatic contrast is a frequent technique in Mesopotamian lament; also in the Israeli lament, particularly comparing past and present.

How is the gold become dim!

There is also a motif of reverse, showing the unnatural reverse order of things, as in mothers' despairing, frenetic treatment of their own children (2:20).

The motif of divine abandonment is another link between the Mesopotamian and Israelite lament (Dobbs-Allsopp, 1993:45);

He hath drawn back his right hand

From before the enemy; (2:3)

He does not take the part of Jerusalem in the enemy's attack, although He is their divine protector. On the contrary, He withdrew his power.

Why do you forsake us? (5:20)

G-d is asked.

The motif of G-d's anger is pronounced in the Book of Lamentations. In the Mesopotamian laments the destructive agent is the storm, connected with the god Enlil, that does all the damage.

The operative correspondent of Enlil and the storm, in the Book of Lamentations is G-d, the divine warrior. The scholar McDaniel does not accept this view, and considers that because G-d, the divine warrior, is not referred to as the storm in the Book of Lamentations, there is no connection between the Book of Lamentations and the historical city laments. However, in the Bible generally, G-d is often associated with storm, as coming out of storm clouds or in connection with darkness, strong winds thunder, bolts of lightning, earth shaking or fire which elucidates G-d's association with storm power.³

In chapter 2 we read:

³ See 2 Sam:8,9,11,12,14,15

How hath the L--d covered with a cloud

The daughter of Zion in his anger! (2:1)

As well as the divine warrior imagery, there is the “day of G-d” imagery, “that day”, a frequent reference to G-d’s day of anger. G-d calls a day of convocation. Many come, and are slaughtered, including those who came from outside of Jerusalem to take shelter. In the Book of Lamentations, G-d, like the god Enlil in the Mesopotamian laments, is the one who is seen to be the cause of the destruction. He is like the destructive storm which comes “on that day” (Dobbs-Allsopp, 1993: 65).

Kraus, Westermann, Hillers & Dobbs-Allsopp recognize many similarities between the Book of Lamentations and Mesopotamian laments (Dobbs-Allsopp, 1993:68,69,70,71). We find similarities in the portrayal of the situation of the city’s population, the famine, boys and old men lying on the ground (2:21), piles of corpses heaped up, children faint with hunger (2:11,12) the people “esteemed as earthen pottery” (4:2), the exile of citizens and the king (2:9; 4:20; 1:18). The social fabric of the community is destroyed. Religious festivals are no longer carried out.

In the Mesopotamian laments the goddesses are frequently called *ama*, “mother”, similar to the Hebrew *ima*. Kramer draws attention to the presence of the “weeping mother” motif throughout Sumerian literature (Dobbs-Allsopp, 1993:82). The citizens of Jerusalem are Mother Zion’s children. Mothers are supposed to protect their children as goddesses were supposed to protect their cities. The hypothetical “two women” respectively constitute a vastly complex literary figure, “a city and its population” embodied in a “feminine persona” (Dobbs-Allsopp, 1993:85).

The city has suffered or is about to suffer. The grieving does not concern life in the past and death in the present, but glory in the past and humiliation and destruction in the present.

The fact that both the Mesopotamian and the Israelite Book of Lamentations mourn deaths or destruction, does not prove literary interdependence, however, Kramer says that the Book of Lamentations owes much of its form and content to its Mesopotamian

forbears and carries a direct influence of Sumerian laments (Hillers, 1972:xxviii,xix). The literary similarities do indicate some cultural interchange.

Dobbs-Allsopp (1993:92,94) says that both the Mesopotamian and the Israelite are genre-marked city-state laments, both have a restoration theme, which I agree with, but when Dobbs-Allsopp claims that in the Book of Lamentations the theme is “only implicit, Jerusalem’s restoration is nowhere in sight”, I cannot agree with him because the Book of Lamentations ends with the explicit verbal promise of restoration with the repetition of

Turn Thou us unto Thee, O L—d, and we shall be turned;

Renew our days as of old (5:22)

It is difficult to argue that no hope is in sight when this prayer is repeated at the end of the Book of Lamentations and could be understood to mean

Let us return to each other.

You cannot really be so angry with us!

Restoration has been mentioned above in this thesis as one of the nine major generic features of the Mesopotamian city-state laments and therefore it can be clearly seen that both the Mesopotamian laments and the Israelite Book of Lamentations, amongst other features, have a positive restoration theme in common.

THE LAMENT AS A WAY OF HEALING

INTRODUCTION

Folk wisdom long recognized the importance of ventilating feelings and expressing them through laments. A *Talmudic* lament acknowledges that it is the mourner, not the bereaved, who requires comfort.

Weep for the mourners

Not for what is lost

He found him rest

Tis we are left distressed

(Moed Katan 25b)

The lament has psychological benefits both to the poet who composes it and to the people who listen to it or read it.

“It needs the eloquence of a Jeremiah to picture the horrors, the human anguish of this new dispersion; a new Book of Lamentations to depict the present plight of Israel among the nations”, said Dr Chaim Weizmann president of the World Zionist Congress as he opened the 21st Zionist Congress in 1939 a few weeks before World War II began, unleashing the Holocaust (Aliav & Mann, 1974:223).

Evidence from support groups and psychologists strongly suggests that language, under the right conditions, can have healing powers. Writing the lament could help mourners to express their grief, and the act of writing itself acts as a catharsis. The value implicit in the act of writing has been attested to by countless letters, diaries and journals written by sufferers both famous and remote, from Keats to unknown slaves and soldiers (Morris, 1996:32).

This value was recognized as much in Jerusalem in Jeremiah’s time as it is in the modern day. When Jerusalem suffered a triple suicide bombing in Machaneh Yehudah in 1997, the head of the Child Guidance Clinic recommended that people should write poems. (A study in the Journal of the Medical Association found that sufferers who wrote about their problems improved twice as quickly as others). After a helicopter crash in northern Israel

that same year, poems by children were published “which combined in their fragile stanzas their personal and national grief” (Gilbert, 1998:599-600). These words could just as aptly apply to many of the laments selected for this thesis, particularly the Book of Lamentations. One modern lament which has been included in this thesis was written as a response to the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin. An early lament included is the more familiar one written on the deaths of King Saul and his son Jonathan; the same underlying need was responsible for the composition of both these lamentations.

On a popular level, after the tragic death of Princess Diana, her family received more than 300,000 letters and poems of lament written by grieving individuals. The deaths of Durban teenagers in the year 2000, in a nightclub fire disaster resulted in many poignant poems being affixed to the fence outside (Cape Argus, 27/3/00).

Studies of the lament genre seem to focus on the work as a literary form or as a response to catastrophe without acknowledging the psychological need which provoked such spontaneous outpourings of lament poetry in times of despair.

Many writers including Henry Miller, Isabel Allende and Alice Walker have noted that writing helped them to overcome difficulties in their lives, that putting their thoughts and feelings down on paper was an effective way of dealing with them. De Salvo wrote that “in exploring a trauma in our lives and putting it into words we stop seeing it as a random unexpected event. We begin to understand the order behind experiences. Expressing it in language robs the event of its power to hurt us. It also assuages our pain” (De Salvo, 1999).

Griefstricken at the death of the poet Katzenelson in Auschwitz, someone wrote to his sister in Palestine. “We furnished him with the debris of our misery, and he made it eternal, sang of it, it was our common property”.¹

As grief is common property, reading or hearing laments helps people who have experienced similar feelings of loss. This is why poems like the Book of Lamentations still have the power to move and why the Book of Lamentations still forms part of the *Tishah B'av* service.

¹ Tenenbaum quoted in Ezrahi (1982:107)

The S.A. writer Pam Jooste expressed the power of the lament as a way of healing when she wrote that “literature quietly orchestrates a deliverance from shock, trauma, denial and immobility and can support and restore in a particularly useful way. Reading allows the privacy, space and freedom of pace for thought, assessment of one’s own experiences and sometimes even the process of understanding or transforming these experiences”. Jooste believes that works that live on are those that illuminate the human experience (Cape Times, 19/2/00). This is why laments retain their power over the years.

The examination of the role the lament has played in the expression of grief in the poetic mind through the centuries provides us with a perspective from which to appraise the relationship between language and human psychology.

However, by making a study of a lament, instead of merely reading it to share the feeling, empathy may easily become diluted. The readers must be aware of the authorial voice and the relationship between language and that grieving voice, and their own response.

The self is affected by language, but must try to retain a true sense of the experience of loss and the pain that went into the structuring of the lament. Counter-balance is necessary for one’s own loss; empathy is required for the grieving voice.

EXPERIENCE OF LOSS AND GRIEF

Loss is a constant universal pattern and mourning ceremonies exist to help the bereaved to find closure.

Mourning is an acknowledged natural part of the adjustment process from loss to healing. It has been described as the normal, healthy process of withdrawing attachment or investment from the lost person or object that offered love and security. Mourning is the reaction and adaptation to such loss and is reflected behaviourally, emotionally, physically and spiritually. [It is] the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of a loved person, one’s country, liberty or an ideal (Freud, 1973:243).

This loss could be a personal loss, like that of a loved one, a national loss, like that of a city, a defeat in battle or the loss of a large part of a generation, as in the Holocaust.

The mourners must come to terms with their feelings of why did it have to happen to us? and where was G-d?

The Jewish liturgical response to death is the *Kaddish*, the prayer that is recited at the funeral by the mourners in the house of mourning, and on the anniversary of the death. It is not a lament. It is a prayer of praise and a declaration of Israel's national purpose (Scherman, 1991:vii).

At the funeral, uplifting psalms are read. *Kaddish* is said, but it contains no lament terminology. After the funeral, "group therapy" comes into play. People are encouraged to visit during the *shivah* week, "seven days of mourning", to be available to listen to and empathize with the mourner. Twice a day, at least ten men, and often many more, come together to pray with the mourner. To Jews loss is not experienced alone; it is shared in a consoling way with understanding and support. To share pain with those who empathize helps to mitigate the pain (Adahan, 1992:286).

For healing to take place it is important to express and share the pain of grief. The Rabbis of the Talmud seemed to have had psychological insight when they determined the rules of Jewish mourning.

In his guide to Jewish mourning practices, Maurice Lamm counsels that Judaism teaches the aching heart how to express its pain in love and respect, and how to achieve the eventual consolation which will restore us to humanity and keep us from vindictiveness and self-pity (Lamm, 1969:3). Mourners, whether mourning a national or personal grief, go through several stages of grief until they ultimately come to accept the loss. Kubler-Ross (1984) who specialized in the care of the dying said that "mourning is a process that helps a person to readjust to life, undo the ties that once bound them to the person they have lost and learn to live a healthy life without that person" and identified five stages in coming to terms with loss. These are the stages of denial, of feelings (especially anger), of bargaining, depression, and acceptance. "Everyone who suffers a loss, went through similar stages. They started off with shock and denial, rage and anger and then grief and pain. Later they bargained with G-d. They got depressed, asking "Why me"? finally reaching a stage of peace and acceptance" (Kubler-Ross, 1997:166).

Murray-Parkes & Bowlby have expanded this development into additional phases of mourning, which include shock, numbness and disbelief; feelings of anger, guilt, resentment and sadness; yearning, pining and searching; grieving and resolution.² A recognition of these feelings can be found in the Hebrew laments. Long before Freud and bereavement psychology the writers of laments possessed insight into the stages of mourning. They write of shock, of anger, of resentment, of denial. Questions may be asked: “Why? Why?” or “Does G-d really care?” There are feelings of remorse, “if only ...” and there is the grief, the depression and ultimate acceptance. By acknowledging these ideas lament poetry brings comfort to mourners who identify with the feelings expressed, and I have made this clear. This is evident in Genesis 23:2 where Abraham sets about to “lament for Sarah and to weep for her”, clearly showing the relationship between lamenting and expressing feelings.

Laments come close to expressing the real feelings of people in despair, unlike the *Kaddish*. Lament poetry reflects that loss frequently through a repetition of questions and refrains. Such a continuous repetitive pattern counterbalances the extreme discontinuity that is death. Through this counterbalance death becomes a natural part of life, and as Sacks says, “Time itself is thereby structured to appear as a familiar, filled-in medium rather than as an open-ended source of possible catastrophe” and death gradually comes to be regarded as a natural phenomenon. It is as if the grief might be gradually conjured forth and exorcised. Sacks affirms that repetition itself creates a sense of ceremony and by repeating the form of the ritualistic rites associated with the death of gods, an individual or collective lament may make use of the ritual context of consolation (Sacks, 1985:23). This becomes an aid in overcoming grief. In addition it must be remembered that many laments were recited aloud and as such were a sign of oral literary tradition.

Lament writers do far more than describe or represent affliction. They help to release the tension, and recreate suffering and in the process help to mobilize the will, passion and intelligence needed to control the situation (Morris, 1996:42).

They attempt to provide comfort. Comfort is associated with *light* and *dark* with despair.

² Worden (1991), Young (1997)

Light signifies happiness, health, prosperity, peace and goodness. It also dispels darkness which represents violence, evil and despair. The writers want to give the readers the message that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Kubler-Ross remembered a poem that hung in her grandmothers' house -

Always when you think
You cannot make it any more
From out of nowhere
Comes a little light.
This little light
Will renew your strength
And give you the energy
To go one more step

(Kubler-Ross, 1997:166)

This same poem written in pencil on a scrap torn from an exercise book was also treasured by a Cape Town Holocaust survivor. It had been slipped under her door at Theresienstadt to cheer her up when things were bad fifty years earlier (Schrire, 1995:116). This little light to renew one's strength is what many laments give to their readers.

In my thesis I will be attempting to show the techniques with which the writer hopes to provide the light.

THE LAMENTS IN THE BIBLE

THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

a) INTRODUCTION

The Book of Lamentations is known in the original Hebrew as *Eichah*, an onomatopoeic word meaning "How", "Alas!"

It is one of the five scrolls of the Hagiographa *Ketuvim* section of the Hebrew Bible, and consists of five chapters, lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE and its aftermath. The Book is read each year in the synagogue on *Tishah B'Av*, "that day that was designated for punishment" (Zlotowitz (1977:xxiii), citing Maimonides.

The Book of Lamentations is a wide embracing prototype of Hebrew laments. It is the archetype, precedent and prime example of all Hebrew laments.

Although the Book speaks of sin, suffering, famine, death, destruction, exile, alienation, disorientation, spiritual bankruptcy, it also promises enlightenment and hope.

G-d is never forgotten. He is mostly a hostile G-d, but His hostility, it was believed, was deserved and the punishment inflicted was due to the sins of the people. In this justification lay a profound and deep-seated hope that repentance, redemption and restoration would return the Jews to their land.

The number of distraught verses in the Book outweigh the number of constructive verses, but the Book carries in its core the seed of hope and faith and the light shines through the darkness, particularly in the final conclusion of the repeated:

Turn Thou us unto Thee, O L--d, and we shall be turned;
Renew our days as of old.

b) HISTORICAL SETTING

The book relates the horrors and miseries that occurred to the citizens of Jerusalem during its long siege and the spiritual shock caused by the destruction of the city. It was probably written soon after its fall in 586 BCE. Eissfeldt points out that the state of Jerusalem is described with such intensity and realism that one would think that the

poet was there. Kaufmann (1960:591/593 vol. 6-7) supports this thesis but says it is after the enemies entered Jerusalem and the walls of Jerusalem still stood, and that “the city was still full of inhabitants”. However, Eissfeldt (1965:504) claims that the memory of a devastating trauma was so vivid that it could have been imprinted on the mind as an unforgettable experience.

A verification of the historiographical dating of the book is out of the scope of this thesis but I would like to take the view of Gottwald (1962:19-22) that what counts is the meaning and message of the book that has been conveyed to us throughout the ages.

c) ABOUT THE POET

Although the synagogue tradition maintains that the book was written by Jeremiah¹, the author is anonymous (Hillers, 1992:138).

Anonymous works were frequently ascribed to prominent figures, David, (the Psalms), Solomon, (Song of Songs, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes) and Jeremiah (the Book of Lamentations) (Hillers, 1992:138).

Critics like Fries and van der Hardt ascribed different chapters to different authors (Hillers, 1972:xix note 3,4); others like Kaufmann, Fohrer, Wiesmann and Rudolph do not agree with the above scholars that there are different authors (Fohrer, 1968:299). Kaufmann (1960:594) deduces that the poet was an official in the court of Zedekiah, who is assumed to be young, as he always refers to the old parents, describes himself and the people as “orphans” but does not talk of his children as “orphans”. Whoever the poet, this work still has the capacity to move and uplift.

d) UNITY

Hillers (1972:xxii) believes that the poems make up an intelligible unity. This is established through a number of devices. One is a pattern of alphabetical unity which Mintz traces through the acrostic in which the Book of Lamentations is written, as well as through illustrations of content, namely the situation and state of affairs in Jerusalem

¹ 2 Chronicles (35:25). And Jeremiah sang a lament (or lamented) over Josiah and behold, they are written in the (book of) Laments.

and the suffering of the nation. Mintz (1984:37,38) also accepts that the characterization, continuity of personhood and development of character is unifying.

Another unifying feature in the book is the use of different personifications to represent the one nation. It can be the feminine *widow Zion* and the *gever*, the masculine counterpart and also the reporter. All are figures representing the collective suffering people. The solitary sufferer becomes the people, an "I" through whose singleness the pathos of the "we" becomes evident.

All the figures of speech contribute to the ambivalent and emotional perception of the poem and all the different levels share in the meaning of the text, yet I believe that they contribute to the unity of the book. Gottwald (1962:31) says that although there is a backward and forward movement of agitated thinking, each of the five poems is needed. Kaufmann (1960:591) shows how all the chapters become united through similar consecutive expressions and these follow on, one from the other. Like Hillers, Mintz, Gottwald and Kaufmann, I believe that the book should be regarded as one unified whole.

e) SOURCES

Kramer believes that the Book of Lamentations was influenced by Sumerian models. It owes much of its traditional "city-lament" form and content to its Mesopotamian forebears and the tradition comes from Sumer about four thousand years ago, but there is controversy about this. Kraus in his commentary on the Book of Lamentations agrees while McDaniel, translator of Sumerian and Akkadian lamentations does not (Hillers, 1972: xxviii, xxix).

f) THEME

Although there is no logical sequence of narrative in the Book of Lamentations, there are elements of a scheme that provides a specific purpose, namely to describe the grief and suffering caused by the tumultuous catastrophe of the destruction of Zion. All the poems have a national significance. Each of the poems is a separate poem, and yet there is an inherent coherence and development between the chapters.

Chapter one

Chapter one is partly an individual lament² (1:1) (an elegy), partly a prayer (20:22), and partly a confession of sins (1:5; 1:8; 1:22), depicting the distress and anguish of Jerusalem, the holy city, and its inhabitants (1:6). There is a strong sense of the grievousness of the sin which incurred the suffering (1:5,8). Jerusalem, personified as Mother Zion, a desolate widow, is in a state of abject loneliness (1:1); her inhabitants (her children) are in exile (1:3), and she is abandoned by all allies (1:2; 1:19).

She is humiliated, abused and laid low (1:9);

the speaker tells us:

She who was great among the nations,

How is she become tributary! (1:1)

This is a continuous lament:

She weepeth sore in the night,

And her tears are on her cheeks;

She hath none to comfort her (1:2)

This once alluring, now statusless woman, is forever defiled and despised (1:9).

There is hunger in the land (1:11). She feels ill from stress:

...He sent a fire down

Into my bones.. (1:13)

Her best soldiers are crushed (1:15). G-d is angry (1:5). The enemies make fun of her (1:7,21). They have laid violent hands on her treasures (1:10). Her glory has gone (1:11). The woman mirrors not only the city, but also the exile: the city was razed and the woman remains despoiled while her sons are led away (1:18). This represents a dispersion that was Israel's destiny, an incapacitating breakdown (Mintz, 1984:28,32).

In verses 11 and 12, the city itself speaks, in the first person, declaring the severity of her affliction, describing her sorrow:

See, O Lord, and behold,

How abject I am become (1:11)

² All Biblical quotes in this chapter will refer to the Book of Lamentations unless otherwise stated.

And ...see

If there be any pain like unto my pain. (1:12)

In verse 17, events are described in the third person. In verse 18 the speech is again in the first person. The city is telling of her disaster, admitting that G-d is righteous and asking G-d that the enemies' wickedness should be requited (1:18-22). Mintz (1984:25) takes it even further and suggests that she herself was not altogether innocent:

Her filthiness was in her skirts (1:9);

and he gives further details.

The chapters of the Book of Lamentations are cinematic, and for ease of reference, I have chosen to give summaries of the important features of each chapter.

Summary : The mood of the book is set by a cry of anguish in the first word, *Eichah*. The city of Jerusalem is compared to a weeping widow, deserted by those who loved her (1:2). The place is desolate; the enemy has carried off all her people (1:3-6). She remains only with memories of how wonderful everything was in the past. Now she is degraded, the victim of her enemies (1:7-10). There is hunger everywhere. G-d has inflicted sorrow on her and deserted her (1:11-13).

Jerusalem feels guilty about her sins (1:14). Her best men can not stand up to the invader (1:15). There are none to comfort, and the adversaries despise her (1:17). G-d is just because Jerusalem has rebelled (1:18). She calls for help from her allies but in vain (1:19). She is sorry for having sinned, because now there is death and destruction everywhere (1:20). The enemies gloat over her and she wants them punished (1:22).

Chapter two

Chapter two is very much like chapter one but deals in greater detail with Judea's disaster. The technique of personification of the city or community as a suffering individual does not occur here. G-d is the destroyer, and has become the people's enemy. "He hath bent His bow like an enemy" (2:4). The desolation of the city and the horrors of the siege are again rehearsed and made more bitter by allusion to the joy of

the enemies of Israel! Kaufmann calls this chapter “the desecration of the kingdom.” The whole chapter is “fury” (Kaufmann, 1960:589).

G-d has rejected His people, with the result that

All thine enemies have opened
Their mouth against thee; (2:16)
the perfection of beauty,
the joy of the whole earth. (2:15)

The enemies gloat, and are delighted to see Israel overcome. G-d is angry!

In blazing anger He has cut down
All the might of Israel. (2:3)

The prophets and priests have deceived and let down the people, in that they did not chastise them, while repentance was still possible (2:14).

There is famine, babies are consumed (2:20); priests and prophets are slain. Those passing by rejoice. G-d is indicted:

See, O Lord, and behold
To whom you have done this. (2:20)

No hope remains save in tears and supplication to stir the compassion of G-d for the terrible fate of his people (2:19,20,21). There is vivid presentation and dramatic life in the chapter.

Summary : This chapter can be divided as follows :

- a description of the destruction of the land and city (2:1-9).
- the emotional and physical results of the siege (2:10-12).
- the speaker discusses the situation with Jerusalem (2:13-19).
- an appeal to G-d to be aware of what is happening in the city (2:20-22).

The Temple, G-d's dwelling place, where the people felt protected, is ruined and deserted. Its walls are broken. G-d has destroyed the city, forts and palaces. The gates of the city where justice was administered and where the people met, are smashed (2:1-9). Old men and young girls seem stupefied from sorrow (2:10). The speaker weeps copiously (2:11). Babies are dying of hunger (2:12). The prophets and priests had deceived (2:14) and were being slain (2:20). Enemies sneered (2:15,16).

Chapter three

Kaufmann says that chapter three is an allegory on the catastrophic fate of the last king (Kaufmann, 1960:590).

This elegy takes a human turn, and describes the affliction of the individual Israelite, in darkness, terror, disease, imprisonment, ambush (3:1-20). This is the nation typified as a single individual, (I am the man) (3:1), suffering under the sense of G-d's just but terrible indignation.

G-d does "not afflict willingly. Nor grieve the children of men" (3:33). G-d punishes the people, but this punishment encourages the speaker to self-examination and a belief in G-d's everlasting preservation:

It is good that a man should quietly wait
For the salvation of the Lord (3:26)

One must be patient.

G-d will save.
For the Lord will not cast off for ever (3:31).

This suffering is merely a passing phase. G-d will yet plead the cause of his people.

This lament is about life. The *Gever*,³ once a hero, now humiliated, has been ill or injured and come quite close to death.

He has walled me in and I cannot break out (3:7).

He cannot pray.⁴ G-d attacks him as a wild beast (3:10). G-d aims His arrows into his vitals (3:13). He goes through a period of despair.

I thought my hope and strength had vanished before the Lord (3:18).

In the depths of his bitterness he remembers:

Chasdei Hashem ki lo tamnu
Ki lo kha'lu ra'chamav.
(Surely the Lord's mercies are not consumed,
Surely his compassions fail not).
G-d's mercies never cease (3:22).

³ a "man", Lam (3:27) related to the word *gibor*.

⁴ Lam (3:8) - "He shuts out my prayer"

He reflects. He thinks to himself:

The Lord is my portion ...

Therefore I will hope in Him (3:24)

He emphasizes patience (3:25-26). There is a shift from singular to plural (3:41-42). The speaker previously spoke of "I", "I will hope in him". Now he changes his way of thinking; "I" becomes "we":

Let us lift up our heart with our hands (3:41).

We have transgressed (3:42).

This is an important change, a definite identification with the whole nation. The letter *nun* is significant because *nun* in Hebrew is the future of "we". It is a collective and has a future.

Nachp'sa

Nachkora

Nashuva (3:40)

Nisa l'vaveinu (3:41)

Nachnu fashanu (3:42)

The people (and not only the speaker) should admit their sin.

Let us search and try our ways,

And return to the Lord our G-d. (3:40)

This chapter could be the experiences of one man, or a personification in one individual of the experiences of the whole people. It is a continuation of the themes of chapters one and two which concern the sufferings of Jerusalem and her people. The fact that "we", "us" and "our ways" are spoken of in verses 40-47 indicates that the speaker is referring to his people.

Now that he associates himself in his mind *with* his people, and cries *with* them, he is able to pray *with* them. He cries bitterly:

Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water,

for the breach of the daughter of my people (3:48).⁵

The poet is heart-broken at what the women have to bear (3:51). He prays to G-d:

Hear my plea; Do not shut your ear (3:56).

Chapter Three as Centrepiece

This central chapter is an elaborate centre; it is what Mintz (1984:33) calls "the monumental centre of the Book of Lamentations" and Kaufman (1960:590) calls it the "vital centre".

Mintz also calls it "the theological nub of Lamentations". In the centre of the middle panel of this middle chapter there is a "grappling with the pre-eminent questions of relationship that elsewhere in the book are avoided or pre-empted". These are the relationships between the individual, the collective and G-d. There is a recovery here. Previously the past and the future seemed to be hopeless. Now there is the realization that G-d's punishments are meted out only to the deserving; one had to acknowledge one's sins, repent and return to G-d. The sufferer could then reach a point of self-understanding (Mintz, 1984:35).

Kaufmann maintains that chapter three is the only chapter where there is a belief in G-d's mercy (3:22-50) and writes that this "is the Book's ideological core". I believe that it is this core, with the belief in G-d's mercy, that provides the comfort. No matter the suffering of the people, a belief in G-d's ultimate mercy gives the sufferers a hope for the future.

Gottwald (1962:30) says that "it is both the spiritual decimation and the spiritual conquest of the third poem [third chapter] which makes it such a towering achievement."

This spiritual conquest is what I term the light in the darkness, the spiritual comfort found in the poem.

This climactic scene in chapter three has a combination of three poems, welded into one triple alphabetic acrostic. Each set of three lines starts with a different letter of the alphabet.

This chapter is a three-fold stereoscopic mirror depicting the experience of the people from different viewpoints. The chapter is comprised of a single poem divided into three panels in which the shift from the singular to the plural in the use of the personal

⁵ These words are inscribed on Cape Town's Holocaust Memorial in Pinelands No.2. Cemetery.

pronoun shows the evolvement of the individual, his development and growth. The scene of hope takes place in the very centre (the letter *Khaf*, the middle letter of the alphabet) of the incisive middle panel of chapter three, that is in the precise centre, alphabetically and geographically speaking.

The centrepiece of chapter three concerns the recovery of faith, and the side supports bordering on it in the same chapter give the actual experience of the people, namely

- the alienation before the recovery of faith and
- the experience of affinity or bonding afterwards (Mintz, 1984:33).

G-d is good to those who trust Him (3:22-26). One must be patient. G-d has allowed pain and sorrow, but that was not His desire: The people had to confess their sins and mend their ways. The poet complained of the treatment by his enemies, but G-d answered that he would be rescued:

Fear not! (3:57)

Chapter three is an individual lament; but although the form as a whole is individual, the intent is national (3:40,41). The narrator speaks for and with the nation.

Summary : "I am the man" (3:1) could easily be read as "I am the people." We are not sure who the sufferer is, but he represents a spiritual progress; first he is an individual sufferer; either the "widow" or the "male" figure or the "speaker". Each voice plays an important part, all complementing each other. The sufferer, whichever garb he or she wears, achieves patient faith (1-39), and then calls on the people to join and share together in the return to G-d (3:41). Having "grown" into one community, the sufferer, ("Everyman") (Mintz, 1984:39), ends with a prayer for the whole community for relief of suffering (3:42-66).

Chapter four

This chapter begins in a conventional lament way:

How is the gold become dim

How is the most fine gold changed!...

How they are esteemed as earthen pitchers

In verses 17-20 a group speaks in the style of a community lament. A description is given of the hunted state of the remnant who remained in Judea under Babylonian occupation (4:18,19):

They hunt our steps (4:18)

They chased us upon the mountains (4:19)

The language is in the first person plural:

As for us, our eyes do yet fail

For our vain help (4:17).

Harrowing details are described: the plight of the babies (4:3,4,10); the princes withered and become like sticks (4:8), G-d "hath poured out His fierce anger" (4:11).

In this poem Zion's past and present are contrasted. There is a vast difference between the past glory and present debasement of Zion (4:1-11). The people are reduced to naught; everything has lost its value. The rich have become poor, and starvation ends in death (4:7,8). The guilty prophets and priests are scorned even by the heathens (4:15). There is no escape from their distress (4:17). The allies do not help:

In our watching we have watched

For a nation that could not save

Bitter sorrow bursts forth in passionate wailing:

Our end is near, our days are fulfilled;

For our end is come (4:18).

The images of horror imprinted on the poet's soul during the last months of Jerusalem's death-struggle and in the flight that followed are described even more vividly than in the previous chapters :

Our pursuers were swifter

Than the eagles of heaven (4:19)

The national climax is reached when the poet describes the capture of the king, "the breath of our nostrils, the anointed of G-d", on whom the people centred their hope. Of him they said: "Under his shadow we shall live among the nations" (4:20).

Israel has by now had more than her fill of disaster and she has fully paid for her iniquity (4:22). The day of captivity is over, and the wrath of G-d is now ready to pass from His people on to Edom, the most merciless of Israel's foes (4:22).

Summary : Israel's iniquity has been fully paid for (4:22). However, in chapter four of the Book of Lamentations, the belief in G-d's compassion which is described in chapter 3:22 is not evident. G-d will punish the iniquity of the daughter of Edom (4:22).

In the punishment of his enemies, Israel will see a sign of the restoration of Divine favour (Goldman, 1946:98). Kaufmann (1960:591) does not discuss the punishment meted out to Edom, but rather Edom's joy in the destruction of Judea, which the people found humiliating as it discounted G-d's protection over them.

Chapter five

Chapter five is much like the other four chapters in stressing the persistence of the present misery, the cry of a nation in distress. The poet says:

Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us;

Behold and see our reproach (5:1).

It is a communal lament, similar in form to Psalms 44, 60, 74, 79, 80 and 83. It takes the form of a prayer; it is not an acrostic; it has a straightforward meter and does not follow the scheme common to the laments in the other four chapters. The laments usually begin with the utterance of grief, as *eichah* in chapters one, two and four. In this case the first words are a petition, "Remember O Lord what is come upon us" and the picture of Israel's woes come in to support the prayer.

It is regarded more as a prayer than as a lament. It is a sorrowful account of the condition of Judah, laid before G-d in order to secure His compassion (Goldman, 1946:99). The poet no longer recalls the last days of Jerusalem, but there is a sense of awareness of continued anger on the part of G-d. The poet dwells on the long continuance of divine indignation (5:20):

Wherefore dost Thou forget us forever,

And forget us so long a time?

There is still on-going subjugation and humiliation at the hand of the enemy:

Servants rule over us;

There is none to deliver us out of their hand (5:8).

The attitude is now one of humility and remorse:

Woe unto us! for we have sinned (5:16).

The chapter ends with a prayer of hope for the return to their Maker.

This chapter gives a picture of the affairs of the suffering post-Destruction Judea, and endeavours to gain G-d's compassion and ends with a prayer for the *shvut*, for the return.

g) LITERARY ANALYSIS

A piece of writing is only as good as its power to move the reader. A mutual relationship exists between the writer, the audience and the text. This is a fundamental basis of rhetoric. All three aspects are important in affecting the reader or listener - the style, the choice of words, the use of figurative language and the sound effects chosen are significant factors in determining the effectiveness of the communication (Gitay, 1991:7). In the Book of Lamentations these rhetorical stratagems still have the power to move the audience to tears.

Through the use of the rhetorical techniques of gapping, repetitive techniques, metaphorical language and a structural unity, the Book of Lamentations reaches out to the hearts of the audience, makes a huge impact and affects them emotionally. We can empathize with the plight of the starving children and the humiliation of the defeated Jews, and with the abject loneliness of "Mother Zion" who has nobody to comfort her.

As all these situations have recurred to the Jewish people over the years it is not surprising that the power of the Book of Lamentations to move one has remained strong and its effective communication persuasive, making an impact on the listener. This is why it has retained its meaning and significance as the national lament read on *Tishah B'Av*.

The Book of Lamentations and its horrors is written with a *furor poetarum* (Heschel, 1962:375). The poetic function of the Book of Lamentations includes a copiousness of literary forms. It is a short book and has many poetic devices which can be discerned in several ways. Great regard is given in the Book of Lamentations to structure,

intensity and coherence in a high pressure way, and there are complex combinations of image, sound, word, rhythm, theme and idea.

h) **REPETITIVE TECHNIQUES**

These techniques are so abundant that owing to the limited space of the thesis I give only one or two examples of each technique.

Repetition plays a diverse role in Old Testament writing because it accentuates the focus of the poem, it indicates the progress of thought, provides clues to the structure of literary unity and may serve rhetorical ends (Odendaal, 1991:17).

Repetitive techniques can take the form of a repetition of ideas, of words or of sounds. Repetitions can constitute dwelling on the subject of similar or dissimilar ideas, like parallelism and paradox, a significant feature of Hebrew Biblical poetry and of the Book of Lamentations. They also can include anaphora, alliteration and assonance (Gitay, 1991:3). These figures of speech not only unify but serve to strengthen the ideas and are persuasive. Combined with a terseness these devices mark the poetic expression of the Bible.

As an example there are many repetitive techniques in the six words in Lam 1:2:

Bacho tivke balaila
v'dimata al lechya

including parallelism, (a repetition of the idea of crying), alliteration, (repetition of the *b* sound), and assonance, (repetition of the vowels), all of which emphasize the crying.

i) **Parallelism**

A prime example of repetition is parallelism, the most salient feature of Hebrew Biblical poetry and one which had been noted by medieval scholars and formulated by Bishop Lowth in 1753, who called it *parallelismus membrorum* or the parallelism of cola (phrases or clauses). The "parallel" section with slightly different wording may reinforce or negate or contradict or modify the meaning. "The general term in the first half of the line is typically followed by a specific instance of the general category in the second half, or a literal statement in the first verse becomes a metaphor or hyperbole in the second" (Alter, 1987:615).

The Book of Lamentations is replete with parallelism from beginning to end.

ii) Anaphora

Parallelism can take the form of a repetition of the same words at the beginning of successive lines. In this case it is referred to as "anaphora", as in:

How hath the Lord covered with a cloud (2:1)

The Lord hath swallowed up unsparingly (2:2)

The Lord is become as an enemy (2:5)

The Lord hath cast off his altar (2:7)

The Lord hath purposed to destroy (2:8)

This structure enhances the sense of the line even as it foregrounds the larger enumerative sequence, and uses repetitions to bring the metrical and syntactical frames into alignment. "The Lord" is repeated over and over again. There are many other examples as in 2:13. Anaphora has been a favoured device in the poetry of many cultures.

iii) Wordplay and Puns

There are many levels of design and creativity and a masterly play on words. The expression *ta'aniya va'aniya* (2:5) (translated in Goldman as "mourning and moaning") has intentional assonance in the words, which have the same root, emphasizing the sorrow (Hillers, 1972:44). The sorrow is further emphasized by *ni* in itself meaning a "lament" or "cry" (Ezek, 27:32) and having a lament sound, as does *ta'aniya va'aniya* (Isa, 29:2). The use of *l'haglateikh* and *gila* (4:22) (to "put into captivity" and to "uncover") has been described by Gottwald (1962:61,62) as "a prankish play on words"; *l'haglateikh* and *gila* can both mean to reveal nakedness. They should be read according to the intertextual method in association with their different uses in the Book of Lamentations and other books of the Bible. In this case, in the Book of Lamentations, the words illustrate what Mintz (1984:25) calls the illicit aspect of womanhood. In the previous verse Edom is told:

The cup⁶ shall pass over unto thee also;
 Thou shalt be drunken, and shalt make thyself naked.

In Gen (9:21-23) when Noah was drunken he made himself naked. *Va'yitgal* "uncovered", or "revealed" is used and *erva* "nakedness" is repeated three times. In Lam 1:8:

Jerusalem hath grievously sinned,
 Therefore she has become as one unclean;
 All that honoured her despise her,
 Because they have seen her nakedness.

Here *niddah* translated above as "one unclean", "menstrual" is used. In Lev 20:21 *niddah* and *ervah* "nakedness" are associated together.

In Lam 4:22 we read :

Bat-Tziyon lo yosif l'haglotekh
Pakad avoneikh bat-Edom
Gilah al-cha-to-ta-yikh
 O daughter of Zion;
 He will no more carry thee away into captivity;
 He will punish thine iniquity, O daughter of Edom,
 He will uncover thy sins (4:22).

Instead of "He will no more carry thee away into captivity", an implied meaning could be that "He (G-d) will no more reveal the nakedness", of the "daughter of Zion", a great shame being attached to nakedness at that time. Thus *l'haglotekh* and *gilah* are used to describe the punishment of the nations, they would be taken into captivity and their sins revealed; but the words also have a secondary meaning, they would be stripped and disgraced.

We see it also in the phrase "He will uncover thy *sins*", "sins" could easily connect with acts of immorality, taking the cue from Lam 1:8, "Jerusalem hath grievously sinned, therefore she is become as one unclean".

⁶ the cup of G-d's wrath

Thus when the author says "He will no more take thee away into captivity", he is also saying he will no more reveal your nakedness, and will no longer humiliate you for all to see.

In Lam 2:11,12 there is another play on words in *nishpakh la'aretz k'veidi* and *b'hishtapeikh nafsham*. In *nishpakh* (Lam 2:11), the speaker's "liver" is "poured out" (2:11) whereas in *B'hishtapeikh*, the soul "pours itself out" from the babies suckling at their mother's breasts (2:12). Milk, the source of life, should be poured into these little ones from their mothers' breasts, but here we have a different situation of "tragic reversal" (which will be discussed below), the soul is poured out as the little ones die.

Concept of Time : In the repetition there are elements of forecast, "...the Lord will not cast off for ever" (3:31). Here is hope, a constant enactment of the present and a recalling of the past (Sternberg, 1985:376-7). One of the recurrent motifs of the book is that of contrast of the beautiful past with the distressing present. These are juxtaposed against one another throughout the book. I agree with Gottwald (1962:56) when he says, "the past and the present" are painfully at odds with one another.

i) **GAPPING**

Sternberg remarked on the importance played by what is omitted and what these omissions reveal. The control of poetic function lies in the rhetoric of a skilful blending of gaps in the text, repetition, metaphor and other devices which tie up into an organic structural unity and mode of arrangement. The reader then fills in what is not written. This, however, is not an arbitrary process because literature is "remarkable for its powers of control and validation". It follows that not all gap filling will be equally valid. Moreover, one must distinguish gaps that were left "for the sake of interest or for the lack of interest" since not all gaps need to be closed. Sternberg (1985:188-250) undermines "the common approach that ascribes gaps in the text to error", seeing such gaps rather as intentional features of very well executed literature.

Gap Concerning G-d : Gapping can be carried out in various ways. In the Book of Lamentations a crucial turning point in history has just occurred, but the book tells nothing of this history. G-d is the G-d of history, the main *persona* in the plot, from

whose iron hand there is no escape but He is conspicuously silent, a gapping caused by G-d's silence.

j) **METAPHORICAL LANGUAGE**

The Book of Lamentations describes the Destruction of Jerusalem, the Mother City. There appears the image of the *almanah*, "the widow", and the *gever*, "the strong man". Mental imaging must be understood in the context of cultural history in which Zion, "the widow", representing Jerusalem is a "real" "flesh and blood" woman with the attributes of womanhood. She can be visualized. One realizes with difficulty that "she" is a city. The *gever* represents the people.

The pain the woman suffers is too much for the speaker:

"There is none to comfort me"

says Mother Zion (1:21).

The comforter is far from me

What shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee,

virgin daughter of Zion? (2:13)

There is a gap. The speaker feels inadequate to comfort. What can he do? Something must be devised in this emergency. There is a resort to metaphors. If her pain can be compared to something familiar, something easily understood - something immeasurable "like the sea" - that can help her to feel a little better. "Thy breach is great like the sea" says the speaker. These metaphors become her comforters. They become *personae*.

Imagery and metaphor link up and unify the different elements of poetry, and their use endows special powers of communication and persuasion. Alter (1985:157) says by presenting something in terms of something else, the modes of existence are transformed and perceptions are changed and become new.

This being the case as a bold figure, the Almighty, in His affliction of Israel is likened to a beast of prey:

He is unto me as a bear lying in wait,

As a lion lying in secret places.

He hath turned aside my ways
and pulled me in pieces (3:10,11).

In the above quotation the simile becomes a metaphor. Before He was *like* a bear and a lion. Now He *is* the animal, tearing the person into pieces. The imagination is extended.

The metaphor is created as a strategy for expressing the inexpressible. The greatest "inexpressible", "unknown" and "invisible" in the Bible is G-d, and the Bible through its use of metaphor and imagery is able to conceptualize and realize G-d to some extent. The invisible is a part of poesy and imagination and an enrichment of the soul.

According to Mintz (1984:29-30, 34-36), metaphors can be used in interesting ways, not only as ideas or objects compared between tenor and vehicle, but withheld material can also be a form of metaphor. An example of this is the sudden appearance of the woman's voice in Lam 1:9. She appears as a surprise and corresponds to the woman who has thus far been described, who has been withheld and has not previously appeared in person.

In chapter three, G-d is spoken about, but He is never addressed until verse 40. This is a new "appearance". He has been an invisible absent G-d, withheld material and this withheld material is a type of metaphor.

Another type of metaphor is in the form of a diminishing "trick". According to Alter and Kermode (1987:332) the figures of speech in chapter 4 are more "comparison" than "metaphors", as in the first two chapters. This is a distancing device:

Mothers are as cruel [to their children] as ostriches.... (4:3)
Jerusalem is as Sodom.

k) STRUCTURE

Structural unity can support or enhance the message or meaning of the writer. In the Book of Lamentations this is maintained through the *kinah* meter and the acrostic form.

Kinah meter : In 1882 Budde observed that the *kinah* is often distinguished by a particular meter, the limping or elegaic meter which he named the *kinah* meter. He noticed that in chapters 1-4 of the Book of Lamentations each poetic line of the poem

had two unequal parts, the first hemistich (or colon or half-line) is at least one word longer than the second half-line (which was a group of two or more words): the lines therefore are usually of the pattern 3+2, 4+3, 4+2 although it is not always easy to recognize the meter.

The first line of Lam 1 is a good example of *kinah* meter:

Eichah yashva vadad ha'ir

Rabati am (1:1)

The first line is longer than the second. This meter in short clauses is supposed to give a sobbing effect. There are exceptions to this structure of the lines, but usually the unbalanced line is dominant (Hillers, 1992:139).

Hillers does not agree that the *kinah* meter, described by Budde as “rhythm that always dies away”, is constantly definable and can be used to identify every lament, as it is found in a number of Hebrew laments⁷ but also in poems which have nothing to do with laments such as Ps 19:8 and Song of Songs 1:9-11, 4:15, but he recognizes that it seems appropriate for poetry of a sombre character, (Hillers, 1972:xxxi-xxxiii).⁸

The *kinah* meter speaks to the ear and to the feelings; and its dirge-like rhythm helps to convey the feeling of grief and drives home its message with short, sobbing lines, such as-

Vayeitzei min-bat'tziyon

kol-hadara

And gone is from the daughter of Zion

All her splendour. (1:6)

Bila v'sari v'ori

Shibar atzmotai

My flesh and my skin hath He worn out;

He hath broken my bones. (3:4)

⁷ It is found in laments such as Is (1:10-12), Is (14:4), Jonah (2:2), Ezek (19), Amos (5:2); 2 Sam (1:19ff); and the first four chapters of the Book of Lamentations. Chapter five has the more familiar 3 + 3 rhythm (Gottwald, 1962:23).

⁸ Kaufmann (1960:59) feels that Budde's terminology of *kinah* as a crying meter is a misnomer for the same reason.

The Acrostic : In the Book of Lamentations all five poems are formally related in some way to the alphabet. It is likely that Biblical alphabetic acrostics owe their origin ultimately to Mesopotamian acrostics. (Lam 1-4, Psalms 9-10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145 and Prov 31:10-310 are complete or nearly complete acrostics.)

The acrostic form is least noticeable in chapter five, which conforms to the alphabet only in having 22 lines, one for each letter of the alphabet.

In chapters one and two, each stanza has three lines, and the initial word of the first stanza begins with the first letter of the alphabet, *aleph*; the second stanza begins with a word starting with the second letter of the alphabet, *bet*.

The most elaborate acrostic is chapter three with three-line stanzas, in which each line begins with the appropriate letter: three *alef* lines and three *bet* lines and so on.

Chapter four follows the same scheme, but has two-line stanzas.

The purpose of the acrostic form in relation to the Book of Lamentations is uncertain. It has been proposed, on the basis of observed use of acrostics in literature generally that it is

- an aid to memory, which is useful if the text is to be recited orally
- a display of artistic skill or
- an expression of completeness, as if to imply that everything from start to finish has been said.

This sentiment underlies the Jewish *vidui* or listing of sins used for confessional purposes which is also set out in alphabetic form (Gottwald, 1962:28). This is the prayer *ashamnu*, *bagadnu*, *gazanu*, continuing alphabetically and it is an important part of the Yom Kippur service.

Hillers (1972:139) maintains that the somewhat rigid bounds which the acrostic pattern sets, contribute a desirable limit to a subject matter which might otherwise run on and on.

The order of the letters in chapters two, three and four is different from the usual Hebrew order; here *pei* comes before *ayin*, instead of the other way around as in chapter one.

Gottwald attributes a philosophical reason for the external acrostic tallying and suiting the internal spirit and content of the poems. Every aspect of the grief had to be ventilated from A to Z (from *Alef* to *Tav*), encouraging completeness in the expression of grief, confession of sin and the instillation of hope.

"The poet does not linger sentimentally over the scenes of horror he describes. He passes quickly from vista to vista and from thought to thought." The acrostic, combined with the clipped *kinah* meter, has left the impression of deep feeling that is disciplined and restrained. This method was the foundation of the structure of many of the *piyyutim* or religious poems from the Talmud period onwards (Gottwald, 1962:29,32).

l) **ATMOSPHERE**

The atmosphere conveys a pervasive dominant mood. The Book has a psychological setting, about a people suffering from guilt, depression, powerlessness, rejection, humiliation and shame. The "Widow Zion" has become desperate. The people are filled with self-pity.

A moment of time is described in the history of an on-going covenant-people, the pause between a corrupt and irrecoverable past and an unimaginable future (Lanahan, 1974:49).

m) **POETIC DEVICES**

Apart from the repetitive devices already discussed like *parallelism*, *anaphora*, *paronomasia* and *wordplay* and the *alliteration* and *assonance* associated with repetitive techniques, the book also uses *personification*, *juxtaposition*, *synecdoche*, *metonymy*, *onomatopoeia*, *apostrophe*, *distancing*, *archetypes*, *anacrusis*, the use of *different voices* and constantly *recurring motifs*. These fill the body of the text serving to flesh out the framework, enriching and linking times and places and thoughts. They are an aid in communication and the vivid, graphic "known" helps to clarify the "unknown".

Personification : The Book of Lamentations on a large scale uses the device of personification of inanimate objects. The traumatized relationship in the espousal of

Israel and G-d in the aftermath of the Destruction, is expressed through the stratagem of personification. We are aware of the personification of "the widow" (and "her sons" and the "daughters of Zion") and the *gever* representing "the city" or "the nation". The city, "Mother Zion", and the *Gever* express physical pain in its lived immediacy. This gives credibility to the drama, not only credibility, but also tensions and contradictions. Not only is G-d an "adversary" (11,12) and a "bear" lying in wait, and a lion in secret places (3:10); but the L—d is good unto them that wait for him, and "it is good that a man should quietly wait for the salvation of the L—d" (3:25,26).

Contrasts and Rhetorical Questions : The dramatic contrast and rhetorical question together can be powerful:

Is this the city that men called
The perfection of beauty,
The joy of the whole earth (2:15)

The question "Is this the city?" - a taunt of jeering irony arouses the audience to take notice.

Reversals : Another motif which is central to the book is the theme of tragic reversal, that is the reverse of what should normally be the case. It is treated grotesquely; G-d becomes cruel, mothers become cannibals, religious leaders are killed in G-d's sanctuary; the city's population is slaughtered at what they thought would be a jubilant feast of celebration. The holy becomes profane. What is most hurtful is that the fall of Israel is the exaltation of the enemy.

The tragic reversal of Zion's fate⁹ involves a destroyed people; the hiatus between the "then and now", *einst und jetzt*, is abysmal. The peculiar effect of the poem is derived from the juxtaposition of a constant move between the "then and now". "He hath cast down from heaven the beauty of Israel" (2:1). In poem 3 "the man" has suffered pain, loneliness, rejection, "the man" who once had peace, *shalom* (3:17) hope, *tochelet* (3:21) and eternity, *nezakh* (3:18).

⁹ Mintz (1984:26); also Gottwald (1962:53)

In Lam 2:11,1, instead of life (milk) from the mother to the child there is death, which is written in the reflexive form, *b'hishtapeikh nafsham*; the little souls "poured themselves out" as though there was no longer a desire to live.

The speaker too has a breakdown, a collapse, when he sees the children dying, as though his soul, too, is also pouring itself out. Words fail him (2:13).

Mintz (1984:28) calls this linkage between the speaker and the children, and the words describing it, "an empathetic vibration of the terminal fate of the children whose life pours itself out in this way." He goes on to say that the linkage is significant because it signals a reversion to the rhetoric of personhood.

As long as the poet has been lamenting the ruin of the Judean state and its institutions he has kept firm control of his voice.

The breakdown only comes when the monumental height of the song is undercut by the sight of a child suffering. In other words, the human sentiments are more easily expressed.

The only hope is that of "tragic reversal in reverse" (Gottwald, 1962:55), that the victors should become the vanquished.

Synecdoche and Metonymy : In the verse "The Lord has purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion" (2:8) the wall is part of the city (from a military point of view the most important part of the city) (Goldman, 1946:79) and signifies the city as a whole. This is an example of synecdoche. In "the breath of our nostrils, the anointed of G-d",¹⁰ we have a change of name, a metonymy.

Onomatopoeia : The name of the book *Eichah* is in itself an onomatopoeia, the word *eichah* sounding like a heartfelt sigh. The Midrash Rabba Lamentations (Cohen, 1951:66) comments that three people prophesized using the word *Eichah*, Moses, who said *Eichah esa l'vadi...?* - "How can I alone bear...?" (Deut, 1:12); Jeremiah, who began the Book of Lamentations with *Eichah yashva vadad ha'ir rabati am* - "Alas, how doth the city sit solitary/That was full of people!" (1:1); and Isaiah, who lamented, *Eichah ha'y'ta l'zona kirya ne'e'mana* - "How is the faithful city become a harlot!" (Isa, 1:21).

All of them were using the term to indicate distress at what they were reporting.

There are other instances of words being used for their sound effect, for example:

Safku kapa'im - they clapped their hands; *Sarku vayani'u rosham* - "They hissed and moved their heads" (2:15). *Sarku* conveys a hissing sound; *Sarku vayacharku shein* - "They hissed and gnashed their teeth" (2:16). The words make the hissing and gnashing audible: *Patzu alayikh pihem* - "They opened their mouths against you" (2:16). In uttering the syllables *pa* and *pi*, the mouth must be opened for the sound to be heard.

Archetypes : The Book of Lamentations itself is an archetype, a model of collective memory. Edom, the enemy is an archetype, a symbol for enemies throughout history. Every phrase and verse is archetypal.

Anacrusis : The Book starts with the word *Eichah*, an exclamation of suffering, a groan, which since it stands "outside" the metrical scheme (See 1:1 sic *Eichah* \) is known as anacrusis. This gives emotional emphasis to what follows. The first line gives the key to the whole poem. The city that was once so great and beautiful, the place that once stood so high in the esteem of the peoples, has now fallen to the depths.

Eichah | *yashva vadad!*

How | she sits solitary!

Different Voices : The poet of the Book of Lamentations does not sing in solitude but with his nation, and finds a large audience through history. Such poetry exerts a powerful and convincing influence on the readers and is written using different voices in the text.

In the first four chapters, there are the male voice, the female voice and the speaker's voice. In chapter five, the chorus of the entire corporate voice speaks and unifies all the voices. This corporate voice was withheld until now.

According to Lanahan (1974:41-49), the unity of the various *personae*, which emerges as a single controlling awareness, is a rhetorical device by which the city's tragedy is intensified. The escalating tragedy of individual persons to whom the reader-listener can relate is more moving than that of an "abstract" city. The city becomes "alive"

¹⁰Lam 4:20; probably referring to the king, Zedekiah

through its "people". Ultimately the "widow", the *gever*, the poet-prophet, the nation, and the city become one.

The city's tragedy is intensified by the inability of the narrator to aid and console, his self-imposed task. The human heart is too sensitive to cope with what is seen - such as babies dying of hunger in the streets. So the narrator withdraws into the background (2:11) and allows the other *personae* to fill in what needs to be said.

n) SUMMARY OF THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

The Book of Lamentations is not simply an expression of grief and a crying out against suffering; there is betrayal by human beings and by G-d, and as a result, spiritual desolation. There is a recurring theme of set-backs and reversals written in the style of the secular funeral song, which has been adapted as a tool for teaching theological ideas which Gottwald (1962:53) calls "tragic reversal in reverse". It is hoped that in the future when the people have confessed and repented and have returned to G-d, the wrong will be righted, and the roles of victor and vanquished will be reversed.

Israel will emerge victorious. This is the resolution of the tragedy of Israel's history. In this way the profane funeral lament such as that to the destruction of the city of Ur becomes a religious song of encouragement after the destruction of the city of Jerusalem.

The literary genre of lament involves death or destruction, but the Book of Lamentations in addition, an exhortation to life.

G-d's promises of love and justice can never be erased, so there is hope in a restored Israel. An "implied combination of faith and social morality is one of the gifts of Judaism to the world" (Gottwald, 1962:70).

The contradictory suffering could have ended all faith, and yet, that very suffering reaffirmed the faith. This could be the message of the Book of Lamentations.

o) ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE

Although the Book of Lamentations has five chapters of suffering and lamenting, the mainspring of the book is one of hope, courage and faith. The book has particular

relevance for the survival of the Jewish faith. It has a communal function for the nation, to teach it faith capable of adaptation to the most difficult of catastrophes and to keep alive the memory of Jerusalem as a focal point of their faith.

Gottwald in his book “Studies in the Book of Lamentations” has devoted a whole chapter to the theology of *hope* in the book (1962, Chapter Five, 91-111).

Despite the catastrophes that took place in 586 BCE, Cohn (1986:272) affirmed that the prophet believed in a vision of a new life in the future and saw exile as a temporary punishment preceding the return to the land. G-d’s past goodness was not forgotten. The covenant between G-d and Israel had been broken but not destroyed.

The “tragic reversal”, (Israel’s setback), will be reversed again, to become the “tragic reversal in reverse” (Gottwald, 1962:60), that is the direct opposite of the current state of affairs shall prevail in future time in accordance with G-d’s will.

Recall of the past has been the major factor in recognizing unity, continuity and the destiny of the nation. When we read the Book of Lamentations on *Tishah B’Av*, the day on which traditionally the scroll is read, we sit on low stools and sob. But we do not forget the last three verses, in which the mood changes and which is a major element and aspect of the process of healing.

Turn Thou us unto Thee, O L—d,
and we shall be turned;
Renew our days as of old.
Thou canst not have utterly rejected us,
And be exceeding wroth against us!
Turn Thou us unto Thee, O L—d, and we shall be turned;
Renew our days as of old.

Hashiveinu Adonai Eilekha v’nashoova

Chadeish yameinu k’kedem (5:21,22,23)

This healing is repeated the following week, on *Shabbat Nachamu*, the “Sabbath of Comfort”, when the theme and words are repeated, this time in Isaiah Chapter 40:1,2:

Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people,

Saith your G-d
Bid Jerusalem take heart,
And proclaim unto her,
That her time of service is accomplished.

These encouraging words are a Divine instruction to the prophets to comfort Israel and to announce the end of the Babylonian captivity.

There is a past, a present and a future. The “present” has been severe and hence the reason for the writing of a lamentation. The people are bankrupt, physically and spiritually. But they are convinced that G-d will not punish them for ever.

The future holds promise of restoration and therefore provides the basis for hope and it is this hope that has given the Book of Lamentations the power of alleviating despair.

The poet-speaker struggles to relate the individual sufferings of maidens, mothers, young men, children, old people and leaders, as is depicted by the suffering Mother Zion. These different mingling voices bring the whole text to life and represent the whole collective community. The book speaks from the heart. We hear the “voices” of human beings telling us what they are experiencing. They could have given up every bit of hope and perished. They had no food, the city and Temple were destroyed, young soldiers were killed, citizens exiled, yet the instinct to survive was strong.

In the heart of the Book of Lamentations lies the message: Do not fall into total self-righteousness or total despair. There is hope beyond the disaster.

p) **EXPRESSING FEELINGS**

The Book of Lamentations expresses the feelings of a people suffering from guilt, depression, powerlessness, rejection, humiliation and shame. There is bitter sorrow and passionate wailing, and many references to tears, for example:

She weepeth sore in the night,
And her tears are on her cheeks; (1:2)

There is self-pity:

How abject I am become. (1:11)

See if there be any pain like unto my pain. (1:12)

All these are feelings with which the mourning readers can identify.

q) **FAITH AND PRAYER**

The participants begin to feel better when they are able to pray together. They have a feeling of the element of G-d's mercy and compassion and in the last chapter they are encouraged to pray as one. Group prayer such as in the Book of Lamentations has an important motivating force.

When they pray they do not lose hope. The indestructibility of G-d's love and justice is felt, and the seed of hope in a restored Israel is sown. The nation despite everything recites together: "Renew our days as of old." (5:21). The poet-speaker has for his basic purpose the mastery of pain and doubt, in the interests of faith. G-d and G-d's actions are continually referred to. G-d is never forgotten.

Thou, O L—d, art enthroned for ever,
Thy throne is from generation to generation.

.....

Turn Thou us unto Thee, O L—d, and we shall be turned;
Renew our days as of old.

G-d is enduring, and as He is enduring, so is his promise (to restore Israel) enduring.

The everlastingness of G-d and His constancy is re-assuring, because the people saw it as a guarantee of his promise. Here a seed of hope for the future is sown by commemorating Israel's past greatness. The glory of the past, frequently mentioned, will be restored. This is a light for the people written for them in their dark existence.

It has been the immemorial tradition in Jewry that at the very moment that G-d punishes His people he prepares for their healing. In most prophetic books, oracles of promise follow oracles of doom.

r) **FAITH IN REDEMPTION THROUGH THE RETURN TO ZION**

The Book of Lamentations begins with Jerusalem, "How doth the city sit in solitary". The book mourns the destruction of Jerusalem and ends with the hope that the Jews will return to Jerusalem and be returned and restored.

s) **CONCLUSION**

The literary form corresponds to the content which the poet wishes to communicate. By going back and forth, the fluctuations of grief and guilt are expressed more adequately in the sum of all five poems than in any one single poem, and a completeness is thus reached with a compactness of lines and an economy of concentrated expression. Hillers (1972:xxiv) has noted that although each poem has its own individuality, there is a coherence between them. There is, writes Gottwald, (1962:32) a novelty in the artistic idea, in what he describes as a radical subject communicated in a radical form by an "artist of the finest rank". This is a short book intensely powerful in content, with prolific use of artistic devices as shown above, to aid the expression of such a traumatic event in such short form .

I propose that the seed of healing is found in the core of this Book, even though it describes a devastating catastrophe.

DAVID'S LAMENT OVER SAUL AND JONATHAN

No selection of Hebrew laments would be complete without the inclusion of David's lament, possibly the best known and loved of the laments. It is so popular that a recent South African novel referred to it as "the most beautiful poem in the English language" (Freed, 1986:120) ignoring its Hebrew origin. I am naturally including this Hebrew lament in my thesis and including it after the Book of Lamentations, my basic standardized prototype for the genre of laments, although it was written earlier.

a) INTRODUCTION

The Book of 2 Samuel has a description of the death of Saul and Jonathan in battle and the defeat of Israel by the Philistines which ends with David's lament.

Although it is likely that the Psalms were the collective work of composite authors, the authorship is ascribed to David. The psalms probably formed part of a collection of ancient poems commemorating events of national importance" (Goldman, 1964:190) intended to preserve historical traditions among the people of Judah.

b) HISTORICAL SETTING

It is out of the scope of this thesis to verify historical details, therefore it conveys the historical background as it appears in the Biblical text.

Saul had been anointed king about 1020 BCE when it became apparent that the Israelites needed a strong centralized political and military leader to oppose the invading Philistines who represented a powerful economic and military threat (Goldman, 1964:x). The Philistines were organized into a federation of five city states and were advancing from the narrow coastal strip into Israeli areas, destroying cities like Shiloh and capturing the Ark (1 Sam, 4:11). Saul succeeded in pushing back the Philistines and brought a degree of unity among the tribes.

The Philistine army attacked Saul's army at Gilboa, defeated and slaughtered thousands of Israelites, including Saul, his son Jonathan and Saul's other sons (1 Sam 31:3; 2, 1:5), exhibiting the decapitated royal bodies at Beth Shean (1 Sam 31:9).

			17		
	את הקינה הזאת	ויקנן דוד			
	ועל יהונתן בנו.	על שאול			
	ללמד בני יהודה קשת	ויאמר	18		
	הנה כתובה על ספר הישר.				
	על במותיך חלל	הצבי ישראל	0	v. 19	
	איך נפלו גבורים				
<i>strophe 1</i>	אל תכשרו כחוצת אשקלון	אל תגידו בגת	1	v. 20	
	בנות פלשתים	פן תשמחנה	2		
	בנות הערלים	פן תעלזנה	3		
<i>strophe 2</i>	ואל מטר עליכם ושדי תרומת	הרי בגלבע אל טל	4	v. 21	
	מגן גברים	כי שם נגעל	5		
	בלי משר/יח בשמן	מגן שאול	6		
<i>strophe 3</i>	מחלב גבורים	מדם חללים	7	v. 22	
	לא נשוג אחור	קשת יהונתן	8		
	לא תשוב ריקם	וחרב שאול	9		
<i>strophe 4</i>	הנאהבים והנעימים	שאול ויהונתן	10	v. 23	
	לא נפרדו	בחייהם ובמותם	11		
	מאריות גברו	מנשרים קלו	12		
<i>strophe 5</i>	אל שאול בכינה	בנות ישראל	13	v. 24	
	שני עם עדנים	המלכשכם	14		
	על לבושכן	המעלה עדי זהב	15		
	בתוך המלחמה	איך נפלו גברים	16	v. 25	
<i>strophe 6</i>	על במותיך חלל	יהונתן	17		
	יהונתן נעמת לי מאד	צר לי עליך אחי	18	v. 26	
	מאהבת נשים	נפלאתה אהבתיך לי	19		
	ויאכדו כלי מלחמה	איך נפלו גבורים	20	v. 27	

STANZA

STANZA

STANZA

After the death of Saul, David became king and ruled over all Israel from about 1000-960 BCE (Albright, 1957:290).

c) ABOUT THE POET

The ascribed poet David, is portrayed as a good looking young shepherd (1 Sam, 16:12; 16:18), the eighth and youngest son of Jesse the Bethlehemite and grandson of Boaz and Ruth, who had been secretly anointed by Samuel for future kingship. When Saul began to suffer from depression David was brought to the court to relieve the king's moods by singing and playing his harp to him and "Saul found relief, and it was well with him" (1 Sam, 18:11; 15.).

He became friendly with Saul's son Jonathan, and married Saul's daughter Michal (1 Sam, 18:27). After Saul's death he was himself crowned king (2 Sam, 2:4), united the clans, defeated the Philistines (2 Sam, 8) who were forced to pay him tribute, and established a united kingdom over Israel with Jerusalem, previously held by the Jebusites, as its capital (2 Sam, 5:6,7). His reign lasted about forty years, until about 960 BCE. Not only was David a musician, soldier and leader, he was also a poet and composed laments on the death of Saul and Jonathan, on the death of his son Absalom (2 Sam, 19:1) and on the death of his general Abner (2 Sam, 2:8).

d) LITERARY ANALYSIS OF DAVID'S LAMENT OVER SAUL AND JONATHAN

Fokkelman (1986:658) tells us that David's lament is so varied that practically everyone sets out the verses differently. I shall be following Fokkelman's system of numbering the stanzas in David's lament. (Refer to A1).

Fokkelman is mistaken in that the lament does not start on verse 19 Chapter 1 as is commonly thought, but on verse 17.

The verse says

And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and
over Jonathan his son, (v 17), and said, To teach the sons of
Judah the bow. Behold, it is written in the book of Jashar
(v 18).

Verse 17 clearly says "David lamented with this lamentation" and therefore it is obvious that the lament starts here. Kimchi says 'Before David began his lament, he said to his men : Do not despair, for the Bow of War (ultimate victory) is in the hands of Judah (Goldman, 1964:x-189).

This elegy was written in the book of Yashar to teach the sons of Judah the bow, that is, these words turn the lament into a message of hope.

e) **USE OF LANGUAGE**

This poem is well supplied with literary devices and I shall give a few examples.

Parallelism : There is some parallelism in the poem as in

Tell it not in Gath,
Publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon,
Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
Lest the daughters of the Philistines triumph.

Metaphor : In the beginning of David's lament (2 Samuel, 1:19), there is a most compelling metaphor:

Thy beauty, O Israel, upon thy high places is slain!
How are the mighty fallen!

Hatz'vi Yisrael al bamotekha chalal eikh naflu giborim

Hatz'vi could have many meanings. "The beauty goes back to a homonymy," and "the ambiguity takes its rightful place as an important characteristic of literary language, as a

source of semantic enrichment" (Fokkelman, 1986:652). A *tz'vi* could be a "gazelle" or figuratively it could be a "handsome boy", "glory", splendour or beauty, a "prince" (Ackroyd, 1977:25), a "jewel" or an "ornament" (Fokkelman, 1986:652). If *tz'vi* is taken to be a gazelle, the poem links up later with nature, the mountains and the fields in 2 Sam 1:21, and with the lion and the eagle (2 Sam 1:23). The word could also mean an "ornament" or "jewel", connecting with 2 Sam 1:24 where there is a parallelism, speaking of adornments with which the king adorned his women after battle;

"Who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights

Who put ornaments of gold upon your apparel".

The poet is addressing Israel. "The 'gazelle' (or 'jewel'), O Israel, has been slain on your high places"

Hatz'vi Yisrael al bamotekha chalal

He immediately makes his hearers anxious by referring non-specifically to death and annihilation, using the word *tz'vi* that could refer to a "deer", to a "jewel", to "splendour" or a "beauty", followed only afterwards by -

How have the heroes fallen!

Eich naflu giborim!

David, having first given his listeners or readers a positive message for learning the bow so that they could protect themselves for the future then puts his audience in suspense; it is not clear why he has given that information to them or what he is going to tell them through use of the metaphor, *hatz'vi*. He does not break the news in an explicit way, but as though he is impeded by the emotional pain, trying to repress his feelings, not wishing to break the news at once. *Al bamotekha chalal* does not give the answer as to who are the slain ones. Fokkelman (1986:653) asks the question, "Is the location of *tz'vi* at the beginning an iconic sign of what/who is the closest to the poet's heart?" and maintains that it is written in a "strange, different, awkward way".

The "heights" are usually considered a place for victory, but here, the gazelle, on her "own heights lies slain" (2 Samuel, 1:19), *Al bamotekha chalal*. This represents disaster. If you fight from a superior height, the victory should be yours. The poet then says in a straightforward way, "How are the mighty fallen!" *Eich naflu giborim!* but he still does not tell who the *tz'vi* or the fallen ones are.

Verse 19 can also be read chiastically, that is the inversion of the order of syntactical elements, the singular verb can be applied to the plural noun, and the other way about; so the "fallen heroes" could apply to one person, two persons or many.

Hatz'vi Yisrael al bamotekha chalal eikh naflu giborim

Pairing : As Fokkelman (1986:657) says, it can be clearly noticed that words frequently appear in pairs, and this is important to the construction of this lament. There are about 20 pairs, mostly in verses 20-23. An example of this is seen in the two *magen's* in verse 21. Fokkelman states that rhythmically this unit of two beats is a dominant phenomenon and provides the metric cell of the poem and he points out that more than 70 years ago, Albright noticed this two-beat pulsation of the heart, as a drum-beat of mourning and he based his scansion on it. Not only is the poem composed of word pairs; it also deals with one of the greatest pairs in Biblical history, David and Jonathan. In stanza 3 line 13 (2 Sam, 1:24) *B'not Yisrael el Shaul b'khena* - Saul is the focus, rather than the weeping. This is a progressive line. In this line there is a phonetic chiasmus, a crossing over:

B'not Yisrael / El Shaul b'khena.

B'not pairs up with *b'khena*; (the "daughters" were the professional wailing mourners, the *m'kon'not*); *Shaul* pairs up with *Yisrael* (Saul and Israel were closely associated). The names, *Yisrael* and *Shaul* come in the centre, "the daughters" and "cry" bordering the names.

Keywords : David speaks of the heroes Saul and Jonathan, and in speaking of them he refers to the word *giborim*. *Giborim* is a keyword and words derived from the same root, appear six times in the poem, in different forms: *giborim* (2 Sam, 1:19,21,22,25,27) *gaveiru* (2 Sam, 1:23). These mighty ones were, "swifter than eagles and stronger than lions." With each use of the word, the name of "Jonathan" or "Saul", or both, are linked. The first and the last lines of stanza 2 have the keyword *giborim* or *gaveiru*, and this is a cornerstone (line 7, 12), a strong basis, just as the examples of the word "from", *mi'dam challalim*, *mei-cheilev gibborim*, *mi-n'sharim kalu* and *mei-arayot gavaru* underscore the strength and bravery of the heroes.

Motifs : The moisture motif is played on considerably with variations of characteristics (isotopy). The moisture on Mount Gilboa must be stopped; but the sword should be oiled, and the reference to "the blood of the slain and the fat of the mighty", emerging as a result of the flowing wounds caused by the weapons, is powerful. "The arrow drinks the blood and the sword devours the flesh" (Deut, 32:42).

The feature of "covering" is a further motif. In the first verse of the poem the "high places" are covered with the "slain ones" (verse 19). In v 21, Mount Gilboa is cursed to lack a covering or moisture, *Al-tal v'al-matar*, and in v 22, Saul's shield, with the predicate *lo tashuv reikam* or the predicate *lo nasog achor* (as part of a chiasmic construction) could be covered with blood.

An additional "turning away" motif, turning away from the subject of death, to the Philistines, nature, weapons, is that of turning to the past: "They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions" (2 Sam, 1:23). For a moment the genre of mourning becomes a song of praise.

Contrasts : In the eight words of v 19 we find a range of emotions, glory, war, the nation, pride, sorrow, disaster, love, a plummeting from the heights to the depths. There are varied meanings of *Tz'vi*, connoting beauty. What has happened to the beauty and splendour of the mighty ones! It has been swept away in battle.

Negatives : In stanza 2, verses 22 and 23, there are a number of negatives, *lo nasog*, *lo tashuv*, *lo nifradu*. There seems to be a continuation of negatives from stanza 1; *al*, *al*; *pen*, *pen*; *al*, *v'al*; *b'li*; but, in fact, it could actually be the use of litotes, the use of the negative to emphasize the positive. David does not want to give the people a negative message but uses litotes to insinuate an underlying positive message. By saying "He did not retreat" he was implying he was a fine soldier. By saying "he did not return empty" he was implying he always brought the spoil. By saying "they were never separated" he is implying they were as one. The use of these negatives is in order to praise and focus on the positive, praise being a frequent characteristic of the genre of lament, in this case telling us that the king and his son were beyond criticism.

Assonance and Alliteration : There is a phonetical progress through alliteration and assonance, for example, in *sham* and *shamen* in verse 21. There is a building up and rhythmical process, through the sounds of the letters, leading up to a crescendo, the

greatness of the heroes, "swifter than eagles, stronger than lions" and the tragedy of the passionate and overwhelming grief in the death of the eternally inseparable father and son (verse 23, strophe 4). The strophe impresses the deep unity between the two.

In *Shaul vi'Y'honatan hane'ehavim v'han'imim* there is an *aleph* in *Shaul* and in *hane'ehavim* and also an *ayin* which is similar to the *aleph* in sound.

There are *mem's* and *nun's* in *han'imim*. "The heroes stand shoulder to shoulder in line 10a, are both equally loved in 10b, and line 11 brings the climax that the formidable opposition of life and death (line 11a) was powerless to separate the two (line 11b)" (Fokkelman, 1986:667). Death separates and death unites.

In lines 14 and 15, verse 24, the women are richly clad in "scarlet, with other delights", with "ornaments of gold". The assonance and alliteration are in keeping:

Hamalbishkhem shani im adanim

Hama'ale adi zahav;

Through the rich and lush sounds the lavish silk and ornaments with which Saul clothed the women are brought into focus.

Sound Patterns : The sound patterns are of particular importance. In the refrain, the syllables of each word increase with intensity: *Eich* has one syllable, *naflu* has two syllables and *giborim* has three syllables. The emotions are played on through these escalating sounds, increasing with momentum.

Eich is a small word, but it gives a depth of feeling; and the repetition of the lines in which it occurs comes as a mournful refrain, in a form of music, whose appeal comes through the ear to the emotions.

There is a narrative development within the poem; the momentum increases horizontally and vertically through a dynamic process (Alter, 1987:620). For instance, we are told, "They were swifter than eagles," and in the same line we are told that, in addition, "They were stronger than lions." This process is increased vertically as one continues to read down the poem.

Gender : The first six lines are orientated in a feminine way, *b'not*, again a second time *b'not*, *chutzot*, *s'dei t'rumot* connected with the *bamot*. The Philistine women are going to be the ones to rejoice and commemorate their victory. They are important: in times of mourning they play a crucial role, in times of victory they sing and rejoice. David did not want the women of the enemy to gloat and rejoice over the disaster of Israel.

Al tagidu b'Gat, al t'vas'ru b'chutzot Ashkelon

Pen tismachna b'not P'lishtim

Pen ta'alozna b'not ha'areilim.

Verse 22 (stanza 2, strophes 3 & 4) is male orientated, taking us to the man's world of war (verses 22, 23).

The last part of the lament is personal and there is no gender focus.

Refrains : There are three large units, verses 17-20, verses 21-24 and verses 25-27 and each is divided by the refrain

Eikh naflu giborim

The poet calls: "Weep for Saul," verse 24, precisely as follows, in these ceremonial farewell words of lament :

"How are the mighty fallen" (verse 25)!

(Also verse 19b and in verse 27)

This links up with the beginning: "How are the mighty fallen!" It is only in verse 25b, line 16, that we realize the importance and function of these words near the beginning of the poem (verse 19b, line zero). Line 16 tells us clearly that these words which are repeated in verse 27, are the refrain and that these words must be used to commemorate the fall of the heroes. It is only now, at the end of stanza 3, that we realize that the poet intended at the beginning to use those words for his main motif (Brueggeman, 1973:216). David uses this as a refrain near the opening and in the last line, to close the poem. The three words of the refrain, *Eich naflu giborim*, make the expression of tenderness and love more poignant with the feeling of grief. These recurring words of finality (2 Sam, 1:19,25,27) with their intense contrast not only stress the feeling, but pattern the sounds in the seemingly simple poem. This attunes the ear, lends emphasis and helps unify the circle of lament which begins with the instruction to learn to shoot and provides a framework, a focal point of reference. The refrain also satisfies the

natural love of repetition, especially in an oral transmission where hearing of every word is of importance giving continuity and enhancing the lyrical quality of the poem (Heese & Lawton, 1983:44).

The refrain is intimately connected with the text of the poem. Meanings and structure may be detected by seeing the relationship between one clause and another, with their interweaving, ramifications and repetitions. "How are the mighty fallen!" comes as an expression of agonizing woe, and in its deep-seated and penetrating misery, it threads its way in and out of the poem, sorrowing from the depths of its being.

Through this refrain David orders the children of Israel to weep:

Hatz'vi Yisrael al bamotekha chahal eikh naflu giborim
(verse 19 line 0)

and

Y'honatan al bamotekha chahal
(verse 25 line 17)

and finally

How are the mighty fallen
And the weapons of war perished!
(verse 27 line 20)

In the repetition of this refrain there reverberates the peak and culmination of the poem.

f) CENTREPOINT

As shown in chapters one, two and four of the Book of Lamentations, the exact centre of this poem is also used here as a highlight. The closeness of Saul and his son Jonathan is emphasized (Kaufmann, 1960:586). This focus on warm human emotions from David the king of Israel also gives it a human resonance to which the reader can relate. It is only on this one occasion, in the centre of the poem that the names of Saul and Jonathan are linked together as follows (Fokkelman, 1986:669,670).

Shaul vi'Y'honatan hane'ehavim v'han'imim
(verse 23, line 10),

Saul and Jonathan, the beloved and pleasant ones

Words of praise and love : In the poem, Saul and Jonathan are extolled. In stanza 2 there is more direct praise, a eulogy, within the heart of the lament. Saul and Jonathan are the heroes, slain, *chalalim* (verse 22, line 7), but heroes - they are *giborim*, *gaveru* (verse 22, line 12).

There are also words of love. We understand that Israel is commanded to bemoan and ululate the chorus of "How are the mighty fallen!" and that the *tz'vi* is Jonathan! "Jonathan is slain on your high places." Jonathan is the surrogate, representing all the mighty ones.

David explains his own intimate feelings. He loved Jonathan, his bosom friend (verse 26). For him, David has reserved that metaphor, *tz'vi*, which connotes splendour and beauty and admiration as a title of honour.

In verse 24 David describes Saul, but there is no special warmth in his praise in lines 14 and 15. He is merely stating facts. But when David speaks about Jonathan, he speaks with love. He comes face to face with Jonathan "me" and "you" and takes his leave of him, "naked and open" (Fokkelman, 1986:670) in his grief.

I am distressed for thee, my brother, Jonathan,
Very pleasant hast thou been to me.
Wonderful was thy love to me,
Passing the love of women (2 Samuel, 1:26).

From the poem (verse 23, strophe 4, line 10), we know that Saul and Jonathan were *ne'ehavim un'imim*.

In 1 Samuel 24:12, David speaks to Saul, who is not his father, as "My father," *Avi*; however he does not do so in this lament, nor does he address Saul directly. This lament is intended for Jonathan, David's "jewel" and he is addressing him.

Metonymy : Metonymy is made use of, referring to the tragedy in a round-about way (apotropaic action), speaking of the weapons¹ in place of the heroes, (the mighty ones), because, grief stricken, he has difficulty in expressing the true situation. "The shield of Saul, not annointed with oil" refers to Saul, "the annointed" of G-d (1 Sam, 16:12,13).

¹ in verse 20, lines 5 and 6; in verse 22, lines 8 and 9; in verse 27, line 20.

g) COMPARISON OF DAVID'S LAMENT WITH THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

Although David's lament has only nine verses, as against five chapters of the Book of Lamentations, they are both reactions to grief that have been turned into poetry. "How are the mighty fallen!" says David three times: *Eich naflu giborim* (2 Sam, 1:19,25,27)! *Eichah!* "How!" ("Alas!") says Book of Lamentations three times, expressing grief at the catastrophic situation (Lam, 1:1; 2:1; 4:1). Both have been designed to help the audience to express this grief. The past has now gone. But it is imperative that the people weep publicly to commemorate the disaster of the heroes fallen in the war!

David's song is a *kinah* but it is not written in the "limping meter" of the Book of Lamentations nor in acrostic form. Funerals and mourning can be hauntingly beautiful, and the greatness of these verses lies in the ennobled poignancy and pathos of the tone of hopeless mourning. David mourns without pretence, he and "all the nation that were with him" (2 Sam, 1:11); "... they wailed and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the Lord, and for the house of Israel" (2 Sam, 1:12).

David says:

Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul (2 Sam, 1:24)

and

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan ... wonderful
was thy love to me (2 Sam, 1:26)

In the Book of Lamentations 3:40, 41, 42, the narrator identifies with his people, "Let us search and try our ways ... Let us lift up our hands ... we have transgressed." That is the turning point of the drama, a oneness with the nation. David, too, identifies with his people; his first thought is of the misfortune which has befallen the nation, Israel. He speaks directly, passionately, from his innermost grief. He alternates between an official, public, and an intimate, private voice, as does the Book of Lamentations. Unlike the Book of Lamentations, there is also a personal human side, the relationship between David and Jonathan.

Very pleasant hast thou been unto me.

There is also the relationship between

Saul and Jonathan, the lovely and the pleasant in their lives,
even in their death they were not divided

(2 Sam, 1:23).

In the Book of Lamentations the relationship is of a more spiritual nature between G-d and Israel.

In both laments there is a lacuna between the past and present. The purpose of the lament is to contrast the then and now, as it was then, and as it is now. Then Israel was mighty; now there is defeat. "The contrast of what was and what is, is deep and obvious" (Brueggeman, 1973:215).

Thy beauty, O Israel, upon thy high places is slain,

How are the mighty fallen! (2 Sam, 1:19).

Here is a marked paradox. The beauty, the mighty ones of Israel, are slain, having fallen from greatness and heights to nothingness. The same pattern is found in the Book of Lamentations. In this book, a notable feature is reference to the archetypal enemy, *Edom* and all "the lovers" taunt and pillory Judea in her fallen state. To make it worse, as Judea falls the enemy rises, and what is more there is the alarming question: where is G-d? On the other hand the poet in David's lament prays that Gath and Ashkelon and the "daughters of the Philistines" might not hear of the defeat and thereby revel in the misfortune of Israel.

In both the Book of Lamentations and the lament of David, there is an abundance of poetic devices (such as parallelism, hyperbole and metonymy; also metaphor, repetition and refrain). These are all used for their persuasive power over the listener to help express what was felt about the lamentable sadness. David describes the great Saul as a noble king, and "mighty", "lovely and pleasant", "swifter than eagles", "stronger than lions". This is a powerful way of speaking.

Nature appears both in David's lament and in the Book of Lamentations: in the Book of Lamentations nature is portrayed as "... the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, / The foxes walk upon it" (5:18); "a river"; (2:18); "a garden" (2:6); "corn and wine" (2:12); "a bear", a "lion" (3:10); "jackals", "ostriches" (4:3); "the eagles of the heavens", the "mountains", the "wilderness" (4:19); "darkness and light" (3:2). In David's lament the

death and loss occurred on the high places, where there was nature, dew, rain, fields of choice fruits.

Both in the Book of Lamentations and the lament of David are responses to Jewish catastrophe; in the Book of Lamentations the fall of Jerusalem is regarded as divine punishment; in David's lament the response is to the deaths of the king, of his sons and the downfall of the nation.

Both describe a precise moment in history; in the Book of Lamentations there are the approximately ten painful years, between 596 and 586 BCE, when Jerusalem was finally destroyed; in David's lament it is the loss of Saul and his sons and heirs to the throne at the turn of the first millenium BCE when they were vanquished in battle with the Philistines which changed the history and dynasty of Israel. By directing their eloquence towards their people despite their own grief, the authors of the Book of Lamentations and the lament on Saul and Jonathan enable Israel to take time to mourn and integrate the irreversible loss and to readjust. "Israel is summoned to provide its best grief for its deepest loss" (Brueggeman, 1990:216).

David's poem of lament expresses his intense response to national and personal grief and he enables the listener to share his response by a careful preparation of the emotions, a preparation which uses the refrain *eikh naflu giborim* which helps to announce the disaster (after Heese & Lawton 1983:4).

In this refrain, David uses the onomatopoeic word *Eikh*, a small word, a sigh, a moan. In the Book of Lamentations this moan is important: it gives the book its name, *Eichah*. These words were used frequently for laments over Jewish catastrophes in the centuries that followed.

The poems of lament, both *Eichah* and David's lament are organically structured, natural and spontaneous, the elements being composed into a natural and harmonious whole in the respective poems.

Scholars stop at the grief in these two poems, but there is more to them than grief. They are both about the future. They are both didactic and look to a positive future.

h) ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE

This lament does not start in verse 19, but in verse 17 with its focus not on death but on using the disaster as a positive learning opportunity.

What determines the character, mood and message of the poem is not the sad refrain, but the message delivered at the beginning, when the audience's attention is the freshest:

To teach the sons of Judah the bow,

i.e. to teach his people to fight, to defend themselves, to attack, to look to the future not the past.

They must be taught military prowess, so that they will not be victims in the future.

i) CONCLUSION

This lament has been called, "the most beautiful heroic lament of all time"; not surprisingly since "David is celebrated not only for his musical ability but also for his powers of expression" (Hertzberg, 1964:238). However, although the lament was for an event which was for the Jewish people a catastrophic disaster this thesis proposes that there is in the core of the lament a message of hope and a call for resistance. This lament has a very positive message – do not give up.

THE PAYYETANIM

INTRODUCTION

Because of the intense scholarship and study in the Galilee, Palestine was the centre of Hebrew letters and remained so until the late eighth century (Carmi, 1981:14). Our sages were involved in liturgical, hermeneutical matters, not in poetry.

In the vast tomes of the Talmud, the number of laments is small, and they are written for individuals, as for example

Ye Palms, sway your heads [and deplore]
A Saint, a noble Palm that is no more
Who days and nights in meditation spent;
For him, day and night, let us lament.¹

which was written on the death of Rabina.

After the Muslim conquest of 636 CE post-biblical Hebrew poetry was affected by the exposure to Arabic poetry and grammar but the Bible remained the model (Waxman, 1938:201 vol. 1).

Viewing a past of catastrophe, Jews in the safety of their synagogues used poetry to express their protest against their oppressors, and prayed for redemption (Waxman, 1938:205 Vol. 1). The hope for redemption alleviated the distress for the oppressed people. There were also frequent and impassioned petitions to G-d for vengeance and numerous instances of desperate and even defiant and angry indictments of divine silence or indifference. All these reactions were part of their coping mechanisms. The motivating factor of the Hebrew poets of this period, known as the *payyetanim*, was the desire to express deep religious emotions and the repeated suffering of the Jewish people. It was both a poetic reflection of and a constitutive response to history (Ezrahi, 1978:138). It was sacred poetry, *kinah*, a lament over the dead, or national destruction, disaster, or catastrophe which represented the feelings of a nation that felt hemmed in on all sides, lived in permanent fear of oppression and cried to G-d for protection and were trying to come to terms with their adversities.

¹ Moed Katan 25b, Trans Lazarus (1938:160)

The *piyyut* was a lyrical composition intended to embellish an obligatory prayer or any other religious ceremony, communal or private. For Sabbaths and festivals the liturgical poets added new compilations to the regular formulas of prayer. These compositions elaborated on the Bible reading of the week or the theme of the festival, and they devised new methods for the further development of the Hebrew language through different stylistic formations, and prayers which had been recited silently since the Destruction of the Temple were once again sung. The communal singing of these prayer-poems has been regarded as apt to plant the spirit of the Law into the minds and hearts of the young and old (Birnbaum, 1979:506). It is my contention that Birnbaum should have also pointed out the emotional comfort gained by participating collectively and enjoying group solidarity.

The daily Prayerbook and the Holy Day Prayerbook, the *Siddur* and the *Machzor*, contain only a small portion of the thousands of metrical compositions that were inspired by the standard Jewish prayers. Birnbaum (1979:507) states that many years will yet pass and much labour will have to be spent before the contents of the innumerable manuscripts will be made accessible.

Although these prayers were written to instruct and uplift the people's mood, they are often difficult to understand because of their brevity, biblical metaphors, strange grammatical forms and allusions to varied legendary *midrashic* allegories.

Texts could be quoted verbatim or merely alluded to. Because the *piyyutim* were often obscure, one can understand why commentaries to the great medieval *payyetan* Eleazar ben Kallir, (one attributed to Rashi) (1040-1105) were written as early as the eleventh century.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING

After the Destruction of the second Temple (70 CE) and the brutal suppression of the Bar Kochba rebellion (135 CE) the Jewish communities of Palestine diminished. So many were sold into slavery that the price of slaves dropped. The name Judea and Jerusalem were blotted from the Roman language to be replaced by *Palestina* and *Aelia Capitolina* in which Jews were barred (Parkes, 1964:39).

The teaching of Judaism was prohibited and many Jews fled to Babylon where there was a large Jewish community. Many more emigrated as the Roman Empire began to collapse in the third century. Those who remained in Palestine settled in the Galilee where scholarship flourished. "It was a melancholy twilight existence eked out by a Jewish minority in what had been their own land" (Goldberg & Rayner, 1989:86).

The loss of a central place of worship and the dispersion of the community led to a change in the form of worship. The laws were codified into the *Mishnah* and *Gemarah* and post biblical poetry began to develop. Instead of the sacrifices which had been brought to the Temple, daily services at local places of worship developed. This was a continuation of the three daily services introduced by the Men of the Great Assembly during the time of the Second Temple.

Hebrew liturgy was developed to be recited at these services (Waxman, 1938:202,203 vol 1). The liturgical poems called *piyyutim* were composed by the early poet-singers, or *payyetananim* (from the Greek word *poietes*). These were known as the "anonymous *payyetananim*" and were generally cantors (precentors).

Texts of some of the earlier *piyyutim* are found in *Talmudical* sources and texts composed at that time seem to have become part of the established system of prayer. With the rise of Christianity at the time of the Crusades persecutions increased. As the oppression worsened, many opportunities were provided for the poets to compose *kinot*, and martyrdom, which Jews had to endure frequently after 1096 (the First Crusades), found its echo in the synagogues. In France and Germany these writings took the form of descriptions of the bloody persecutions and devotion unto death of the Jewish communities.

In some places the *kinot* were recited not in the synagogue but at home. The fathers' loyalty to their faith left a message of inspiration to those who came after them. The works of many of these authors have been found in the storehouse of the Cairo synagogue, the *Genizah*, deposited there prior to traditional ritual burial. Scholars of the Schocken Research Institute for Hebrew Poetry² were chiefly responsible for rescuing the literature of the *payyetananim* and collected many thousands of photographs of *Genizah* manuscripts (Ellbogen, 1993:108,248).

² H. Brody, J. Schirrmann, A.M. Habermann & Mehahem Zulay

Piyyutim were lyrical compilations, public or private, written in various genres of Hebrew religious poetry, in a lofty style, with a particular rhythm, but not at the beginning with rhyme. They were an attempt to alleviate distress in a deeply devout people turning to G-d for solace.

ABOUT THE POETS

The earliest of the known poets was Jose ben Jose ha-Yatom (c 600-640). He is known as “the orphan”, thought to be named after his father’s death. His style is a pure Hebrew, and he hardly uses rhyme (Waxman, 1938:212 vol. 1). He uses the acrostic in a multiple way. In contrast to the later *payyetaanim* he writes simply. After him come Yannai, Simeon ben Megas, Haduta ben Abraham, Joshua ha-Kohen and Joseph ben Nissan. It was Yannai who in about 640 introduced rhyme with the name-acrostic; his works were discovered in the Cairo *Genizah* by Davidson c.1930 and subsequently Zulay discovered eight hundred of Yannai's poems which were published thirteen years after they were found.

The greatest of the medieval *payyetaanim* is considered to be Eleazar ben Kallir (Hakallir) whose dates are unknown, but who probably lived in the sixth or eighth century.

Saadia Gaon, Babylonian (882-942) founded the Saadia school which was the most radical in instituting new uses of language in the *piyyutim* and introduced a highly individual complex diction which reasserted the supremacy of Biblical usages³ and he was the first person to compose philosophical *piyyutim*. The later Spanish poets did not like these exaggerated innovations.

They wrote in a clear and flexible way. Abraham Ibn Ezra, who wrote scores of *piyyutim*, vigorously opposed the style of the Saadia school. Most of the Spanish poets included *piyyutim* in their works, in which they approached the style of secular poetry.

Amongst them were Ibn Abitur, Shmuel Hanagid, Shlomoh Ibn Gabirol (who played a large part in purifying the linguistic style used by the eastern *payyetaanim* and adhered to Biblical frameworks of system and language), Isaac Ibn Ghiyyat (an innovator, who wrote hundreds of *piyyutim*), Moses Ibn Ezra and Judah Halevi, famous for his creation

³ Carmi, (1981:248); Waxman (1938:215 1)

of the "Zionide" genre, in which a passionate longing and admiration for the Holy Land is expressed. Their work will be discussed in the next chapter.

THE PIYYUTIM

The style, content and manner of expression of the *piyyutim* varies, depending on time, place and circumstance. There were many types of *piyyutim* and the *kinah* was one of them. The forms of prayer in verse differed in each community, depending on the standard of the community and what the congregation required (Carmi, 1981:14).

There were two main types of *piyyutim*, the Palestinian - West-European, which is earlier, more impassioned and more national, and the Babylonian-Spanish, which is more individual and accomplished (Waxman, 1938:205 vol.1). Most laments are combined, with both individual and national components, and the many laments written in Spain, commissioned on the occasion of the death of an important person could have been personal, national or a combination.

The style of the *piyyutim* at first was for the most part straightforward and clear. Later on the *piyyutim* became more expansive with wordplay and rhetorical elaboration, including an Islamic-influenced interest in grammar and poetry, and linguistic, allusive *Midrashic* and *Talmudic* bases were used, as in Kallir's *Eim Asher Batzedek*, based on the *talmudic* legend (Baba Metzia 87a) of Abraham, Sarah and Isaac.

Remarkable forms of structure, also found in the Book of Lamentations and many of the Psalms, are different ways of using the alphabet, the basic one being to begin each verse with a consecutive letter of the alphabet: sometimes the alphabet is doubled, or tripled (as in the Book of Lamentations, Chapter 3), or it may be used eight times (as in Ps 119). The early liturgical poetry made frequent use of acrostics in various combinations, such as using the alphabet backwards, the *Tashrak* style *Tav, Shin, Resh, Koof* (Waxman, 1938:207 1). This style was popular, and continued even when the Arab delight in rhyme (single-rhyme, double-rhyme and triple-rhyme) was copied and when meter was used (later introduced by the Spanish Hebrew grammarian, Ibn Labrat) (10th century). The *At-Bash* style (using the sequence of *aleph, tav, beth, shin*) was also used. There were also name acrostics; the first *payyetanim* signed their *piyyutim* only with their names, but later the name of the father was added, and the names of relatives; also

the place where the poem was written, with or without the profession of the writer and a short prayer (Waxman, 1938:207 Vol. 1). The Spanish poets were fond of using meter, but the West-European *payyetananim* did not make use of this style. They enjoyed the old style of acrostic name and alphabet and used rhyme.

The *piyyutim* are everlasting. They have a timelessness that makes them the possession of each generation (Birnbaum, 1951:xi).

As Birnbaum (1979:352) says of the *piyyutim*: "Varied as life, their freshness is never lost to those who are imbued with *midrashic* lore". He also says, "No other kind of medieval Hebrew literature has been so popular as the *piyyut* in the synagogue and in the Jewish home; it shares in joys (in the *z'mirot*, and in welcoming the Sabbath and bidding it farewell), and in the sadnesses that accompany life along the way" (Birnbaum, 1979:352,506/7).

ELEAZAR BEN KALLIR

c. 7th century - 8th century

a) ABOUT THE POET

Eleazar ben Kallir is the foremost Palestinian poet amongst the *payyetaanim*. There are many theories as to the origin of his name, but biographical details are unknown and open to speculation. Some scholars place him between the end of the seventh century and the beginning of the eighth century. Others maintain that he lived between the tenth and eleventh centuries either in Tiberias or Kiryat Sefer. Kallir was one of the greatest and most influential of the medieval *payyetaanim-chazzanim*, who was prolifically versatile and a man of extensive learning. Poems written in his style were called *Kalliri*. He wrote poems for most of the important synagogue services, including prayers for rain (said on *Sh'mini Atzeret*) and dew, (said on the last day of *Pesach*) and also elegies for *Tishah B'Av* (Waxman, 1938:214). Although the poets of Spain, Provence and Africa do not go into great detail about suffering endured, Kallir felt deeply and wrote about it frequently.

Kallir's poetic originality is expressed in his linguistic inventiveness. He evolved his own form of grammar, for which he was later criticized by the Spanish poets, especially Abraham Ibn Ezra. His Hebrew language was not "pure", because he interwove Aramaic vocabulary into it and daringly coined new words. His neologisms suited the text. He chose his language carefully and elaborated his poetic forms with an interweaving of Biblical verses, various rhymes and auditory images. He drew from the *Agadah*, and referred to it. He made use of the devices of rhyme, alphabetic and name acrostics and alliteration. He was skilful in manipulating the language to suit his art. Kallir writes of the wonders of G-d, the union of G-d and Israel, the bitter fate of Israel, their future and destiny.

b) INTRODUCTION

The reason why I chose Kallir to represent the *Payettanim* is because he is the most widely read and because of his inclusion in the prayer book. One must read him with the understanding that he is one of many and is a representative of this genre. Of all his

poems, I selected *Az Bimlot Seifek* for inclusion in this thesis because this poem is not only a lament within itself but using skilful accumulative lamenting devices, calls up other laments and conjures up an unforgettable chain of sorrowful but strengthening memories in the national "collective sub-conscious mind" of the Jewish nation as in the second line *hein erelam tza'aku chutsah*, "when the angels cried without" comes directly from Isa 33:7, and is a lamentation describing the desolation and bitter disappointment and ruin caused to all the fortified cities of Judah, which Sennacherib of Assyria had captured in 701 BCE.

Az Bimlot Seifek

c) LITERARY ANALYSIS

Kallir was the main pioneer of the *payyetananim*. He was a master at weaving seemingly diverse elements into a well-constructed, albeit difficult to understand, unified entity. His new innovations in the language, lay-out and system of writing had an influence on later poets; some poems were simple but others were difficult to understand, because he drew from the Biblical lexicon with its different levels of understanding, and because of their many traditional references and allusions. One of the allusions, for instance, is to refer to Isaac as if he is the *akud*, the "bound one". Such allusions can become very elaborate and are part of the aspect of "hidden meanings" of this literature (Spicehandler, 1993:504).

As the "Kalliri Style" involves an allusive use of language packed with references to written and oral traditions, so we often find that the *dramatis personae* of his poems, as well as various objects and place-names, are designated by epithets and periphrases, many of which become the hallmark of liturgical writing. For example he invents morphological oddities, as in the description of the antecedents in the poem, namely the "twelve" (the twelve sons of Jacob, or twelve tribes), the "sixty" (the "threescore queens": Song of Songs 6:8), and "one" (G-d) (line 12). These probably did not seem odd to his contemporaries. "These are the 'poetic novelties' of the Kalliri style and form; however he also wrote simple and direct poetry" (Carmi, 1981:89). The reader needs to research the original texts. In this lament *Az Bimlot Seifek* there are circles

within circles, laments within the lament. To the reader of today, the poems can be a source of stimulation, since they are intellectually satisfying. Many of Kallir's liturgical poems were published in different prayer books (Birnbaum, 1951:221/3/5,261) and *machzorim* (Birnbaum, 1971:43) have been listed by many scholars.⁴

d) ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE

Dialogue : This poem is one of many acrostic laments by Eleazar ben Kallir. The style of the poem is formal and is an interesting poetic and intellectual concept, and yet the tone is empathic and compassionate.

A significant feature of the poem is the dialogue between G-d and His people with the interplay of the intermediary, Jeremiah, the prophet.

Theme : The poem concerns a woman, as in *Eichah*, representing Jerusalem who has come down in the world. Although Jerusalem is not mentioned, it is replaced with the word *Tirtzah*,⁵ as in the first two lines *Az Bimlot Sefek yafah k'Tirtzah, / hen erelam za'aku chutsah*; she has lost not only her reputation, but everything she had. She asks the prophet Jeremiah to intercede with G-d on her behalf. G-d answers her directly and compassionately, explaining that there is no solution, excepting to repent, and work through her destiny.

The poem starts with a contradictory description of the woman, *eishet y'fat to'ar m'nuvelet ... yafa k'Tirtzah* - "a woman of beautiful form, ugly ... as beautiful as *Tirtzah*".

The well-known quotation concerning *Tirtzah*, is from Song of Songs 6:4: "Thou art beautiful, O my love, as *Tirtzah* / Comely as Jerusalem / Terrible as an army with banners."

The *Midrash*, followed by commentators remarks, "Thou [Israel] art beautiful when thou performest deeds that please me" (cited in Cohen, 1946:23).

As in Proverbs 7:26, "Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners," the power of a seductive woman is compared to an armed host. In this quotation from the Song of

⁴ Israel Davidson, I.M. Elbogen, E. Fleischer, A.M. Habermann, J. Marcus, A. Marmorstein, Murtonen and G.J.Orman, A.Scheiber, S.Spiegel, S. Wieder, M.Zulay

⁵ *Tirtzah* was a city of the Israelites, situated in a pleasant region, the seat of the kingdom. Josh (12:24); 1 Kings (14:17; 15:21); 2 Kings (15:14)

Songs, "the intention of the speaker is to assert that the constancy of this country maiden was as formidable as the might of an army" (Goldman, 1946:23). Here in this poem of Kallir, the constancy is doubtful; *m'nuvelet* and *shoveivah* are not indications of constancy.

So, the use of the word *Tirtzah* indicates that Kallir is referring to Jerusalem, "beautiful Jerusalem", including her people (which has become) *m'nuvelet* (ugly) and *shoveivah* (naughty).⁶

One must bear in mind that the nation, the beloved, Jerusalem and Zion are to Kallir, interchangeable terms.

Power of Allusion : Not only were difficult texts referred to, but the *payyetananim* were enamoured of rare Biblical words, employed Aramaic words and invented thousands of new words. The public of the time "seemed to enjoy these linguistic acrobatics" (Rabin, 1968:57). Kallir evinced great skill in bending the language to his skill and purpose (Waxman, 1938:214 1).

The woman, *Tirtzah*, tells of her forbears; Abraham, the first to proclaim the unity of G-d to the world, known as "the one"; the "three" forefathers; the "sixty" *myriads*; (the six hundred thousand at the Exodus, who acted as "one")⁷ and the "seventy-one" of G-d's *Sanhedri-yah* (the Great Assembly) and "the twelve tribes of *Y-ah*". This is part of the often obscure *Kalliri* style, to describe something in terms of something else (Rabin, 1968:57), as Jerusalem is described in terms of *Tirtzah*.

In Numbers we read that *Tirtzah* and her sisters all married Joseph's great-grandsons (Num, 36:12), and this ties up with these fine antecedents in the poem; the "three", the "seventy one", the "twelve" and the "one" are all important to her. These "forbears" illustrate that the woman was *chashuvah*, as she liked to think, of aristocratic birth, and she sensed that she was important to G-d (verse 5).

e) USE OF LANGUAGE

Kallir uses sympathetic language to indicate that G-d is speaking gently to the woman because she feels she is important, she feels she is "chosen". "Listen to my reason," He

⁶ The words *m'nuvelet* and *shoveivah* could mean of "filthy attire" and "faithless" respectively.

⁷ who left Egypt with one thought in mind (Rosenfeld, 1986:136)

says, "and repent, because you are important. You are a beautiful woman *y'fat to'ar* (line 4) and it will be beautiful *yafe lach* (line 19) for you to rejoice in goodness, and no longer to be called *bat hashoveivah*."⁸ The message Kallir gives is that the reader, no matter how humble, is important to G-d.

Repetition : There is repetition in the word "fled" (left), *nadad*, to indicate that everything that the woman treasured has gone. In the sixth and seventh verses the despair and desolation is portrayed. Everything has "fled" because of her "sin"; her dwelling place has gone; the Temple has "gone", and the tabernacle is pillaged. Who is the Beloved who has fled?⁹ Israel had to pay for her sin - *b'avoni nadad* (line 25). Because of her sin, all have left. It is the Divine Presence which accompanied Israel in exile which has fled!

Change of Voice : There are different voices - G-d speaks gently, the woman questions and pleads, and Jeremiah shouts: In verse 8; the woman speaks to Jeremiah to pray and speak to G-d for her: *Sach leilokekha b'ad makat so'arah aniyah*, "The woman" goes on to say, "Until G-d will answer and say *Daya* - 'Enough!'"¹⁰ Here she is expressing a thought that frequently occurred to the suffering Jews. It is "Enough!"

This has resonance in a poem of 1389 by Avigdor Kara:

How long still O L—d

Has there still not been enough? (Rybar, 1991:23)

By recognizing real issues of the mourning Jews Kallir is providing comfort.

Jeremiah shouted (verse 9), "What sort of father exiles his son, and woe to a son who is not present at his father's table!"¹¹ This, too, by acknowledging the anger is an act of alleviating distress.

The woman tells Jeremiah (verse 9), "Get up! Why are you so quiet? Go and call the forefathers and Moses and Aaron." (They are the shepherds of their people, as David was the shepherd of his sheep). "Let the shepherds raise a lament, for the wolves of the evening have devoured the sheep".¹² Jeremiah enquires, "For those involved in the

⁸ In Jer (31:21) we read, "How long wilt thou turn away coyly, O thou backsliding daughter?" - *habat hashoveiva?*; and in Sotah 22 *almana shovavit* is spoken of

⁹ "escaped" - *nadad*; see Isa (21:15; 22:3); Nahum (3:7; Ps 31:12)

¹⁰ In the Talmud, *Chagigah* 12, there are the words *Ani hu she'amarti l'olam, dai!*

¹¹ See Ps (128:3); also *Tikkun Chatzot* by Tabib in chapter 8

¹² See *z'eiv erev* (*Habakkuk*, 12:8); *z'eiv aravot* (Jer 5:6)

covenant, is there no privilege?" (or more literally, "if like mankind they have transgressed the covenant, what is to become of the merit of those with whom the covenant was made?")¹³ and G-d answers affectionately: "There is no help: it is destiny" - *Ma e'ese lakhem, banai, / gzeira hi mil'fanai!* That is to say, if a covenant is entered into, it involves discipline and responsibilities - and if you sin, you are required to pay for it.

Metaphor : And Jeremiah roars like a lion *sha'ag, v'na'ham* at the Cave of Makhpelah. Jeremiah in no uncertain terms instructs the fathers of the splendid one, *avot hatzvi*,¹⁴ "to give voice in crying" for the sons who have erred and have gone into captivity. His voice is mighty and fearsome, and re-echoes doubly and trebly *al makhpelah*. This vociferous roaring could be as a sign of anger or regret or distress.

"The sheep led to the slaughter" is another metaphor taken from the Bible as in *Kase latevach yuval* (Isa 53:7).

The image of sheep is frequently used as a motif in the writing of laments including in twentieth century laments by Tchernichowsky and Uri Zvi Greenberg.¹⁵

f) STRUCTURE

Acrostic : The poem is written in acrostic form, with the letters of the alphabet following in sequence in every second line, and when *samekh* (the fifteenth letter of the alphabet) is reached, the poet uses his poetic licence to allow the letter *sin* to take the place of the *samekh*. However, in some versions, there is a *samekh* and not a *sin*, so we cannot really know how it was originally written. It could not be conclusive for it must be remembered that there was an era when these letters were interchangeable.

Rhyme : Kallir has ingenious devices for rhyming. Here there are four lines in each verse, and in the poem the rhyming is aabb, ccdd, eeff. The poet uses rhyming extensively, and in the poem *chashuvah* rhymes with *t'shuvah*, *shoveivah*, *b'tovah*,

¹³*Im k'adam avru v'rit
Ayei z'khut k'rutei v'rit?*

¹⁴see *hatzvi Yisrael* (2 Sam, 1:19)

¹⁵Tchernichowsky *Balladat HaZ'ev* and Uri Zvi Greenberg *Kinat Hase L'vadad*. See also Hai - *tatam k'tson ma'akhal* in *Akhen Sar Mar Hamavet* written a millenium earlier.

sh'viah, *yash'vah* and *b'shuvah*. This also brings out the importance of these words, and binds the poem.

In verse 8 *dayah* rhymes with *Yirmiyah* and *so'arah*, *aniyah* and with *shivyah*; this strengthens the *dayah!* - "Enough!" *Ya'ane* is very much like the word *aniyah*, two words before it, and all the words make for a rhythmical sequence.

Assonance and alliteration : The words *pachdeikh* (line 8), *pachat* (line 9) and *nachat* (line 10) inter-relate in sound, and emphasize the fear of this woman.

In line 8 *pachdeikh v'yir'ateikh* is very much like *pachd'kha v'yir'at'khah* in Deut 2:25. The *pachdeikh* and the *yirateich* seem to occupy an important place in the speaker's mind.

Likewise the words *yash'vah*, *b'shuvah* and *shoveivah*, link up, emphasizing the "misbehaviour" of "the woman".

Contrast and tension : The past and present are discussed (verses 6,7), and tension is conveyed through the alternating conversation between G-d and the different speakers.

Double meaning : *Al makhpelah* has a double meaning, being the place where the forefathers were buried (Gen, 23:9; 25:9) *Bamakhpeilah - shekol mi shehu kavur b'tochah batu'ach she's'kharo kaful u'm'khupal*.¹⁶ It could mean Jeremiah roared strongly or "doubly" like a lion, also implying that he roared with his voice for the forefathers to hear his prayer and carry it to G-d. The woman has already said to Jeremiah: "Speak to your G-d about the stormy suffering of the poor woman until G-d says: 'Enough!' "

Allusions to other sources : The poem abounds in Biblical, *Talmudic* and *Midrashic* texts in which a personal and national message is given. The introduction, *Az Bimlot Sefek*, "in the fullness of his sufficiency" from the Book of Job (20:22) tells us more, namely that he shall be "in straits" (this is the "comforter" Zohar's mistaken opinion of Job, who he says will be in trouble, "because he has sinned"; this could be a reference on the part of the poet Kallir to Jerusalem, that she has "sinned"). In Job the verse goes on to say, "every hand of the wicked shall come upon him." Therefore, the short expression from Job, *Az Bimlot Sefek* is foreboding: punishment comes.

¹⁶*Breishit Rabah* (58)

In the second line *ben-Chilkiyahu* "came out from his palace", *mei'armon k'yatza*. *Ben-Chilkiyahu* refers to Jeremiah (Jer 1:1). On coming out of the palace he found the beautiful woman had been "disgraced": *Eishet y'fat to'ar m'nuvelet matza*. In Genesis 39:6 Joseph is described as being *y'fe to'ar* and was "disgraced" and thrown into prison; in fact, he was innocent. In this poem of Kallir's, the woman, the beloved, is beautiful, but not innocent.

There are *Talmudic* references. In line 5 the speaker, presumably G-d, says, "I order you *Gozrani alayikh*,¹⁷ in the name of G-d and man. Tell me if you are a devil of devils or a devil of man. Your beautiful form is of flesh and blood, but the dread and fear of you is like that of angels alone." (This ties up with the *er'elim* in line 2). The "woman" then defends herself: "I am not a devil of devils or a devil of man nor stupid nor of little worth." *Hein lo sheid ani v'lo golem pachat*. It could mean, "I am not a shapeless mass of destruction", *golem pachat*.¹⁸

Y'du'a hayiti b'shuva v'nachat, says the woman, "I was known for sitting still restfully." This appears to be an allusion to Isa 30:15. The text in Isaiah says, *b'shuva v'nachat ti'vashei'un*, "in sitting still" or "in returning peacefully", "ye shall be saved."

The phrase in the poem *Y'du'a hayiti b'shuva v'nachat*, verse 3 could, by allusion, imply the opposite meaning. In Isaiah the addressee could "be saved ... but ye would not." Kallir's implication may be that *Tirtzah* will be punished, yet at the same time there is a suggestion of hope that she could be saved and this alleviates the pain associated with the punishment.

Jeremiah "prayed" to his Maker, "Full of mercy, have mercy like a father on his son" (verse 9). The word used for "prayed" is *pileil* which is a Biblical form.¹⁹ Also the entreaty that G-d should have mercy "like a father on his son" uses the language of Ps 103:13 and the *Rosh Hashanah - Hayom Harat Olam* prayer. This shows compassion on the part of Jeremiah. This is designed to encourage the reader.

¹⁷Tractate *Rosh Hashana* 2:9

¹⁸A *golem* is a legendary shapeless automaton of clay.

¹⁹In Ps (106:30) there is an example of the word being used with a double meaning in the alternate sense of "executed judgement" which seems to be more in accordance with the plain meaning, the pshat of the text. The "execution of justice" and the praying" can be understood simultaneously, as a praying with a hope for redemption. It is a device that can help to alleviate pain.

g) CENTREPOINT

The letter *kaf*, the centre of the alphabet, appears to act as a centrepoint similar to the structure of the Book of Lamentations. In this poem there is the wording *ki-eich* - "a sigh of mourning" which refers to the Book of Lamentations, where there is a turning point for the good.

h) COMPARISON WITH THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

Kallir's *Az Bimlot Seifek* skilfully reflects the Book of Lamentations. It could be termed a "mini-Book of Lamentations" as it is to a large extent a concise version of the earlier work. It contains references or allusions to the Book, as well as to Amos 5:1,2 and other Biblical books dealing with suffering such as in Job.²⁰

The most prominent point of contact between the Book of Lamentations and Kallir's *kinah* is that the prophet Jeremiah features in both, either as the traditional writer of the Book of Lamentations, or as an important character amongst the personae in Kallir's poem.

The word *Eichah* occurs in the Book of Lamentations in the title and three times in the book itself (1:1; 4:1; 2:1) and the word *Eich* occurs in Kallir (verse 6), but whereas the Book of Lamentations begins with the word *Eichah*, Kallir places *Eich* in the centre of the poem. In both poems, the main character is a woman (other than the *gever* in the Book of Lamentations), fallen in estate, and in both poems they represent Jerusalem, the lonely city, often used to describe the Israelite nation. In Kallir's poem the city (the nation) is "as beautiful as *Tirtzah*"; in the Book of Lamentations she is *tiferet Yisrael* (2:1), "the beauty of Israel", *k'lilat yofi*, "the perfection of beauty", *masos l'khol ha'arets* (2:15), "the joy of the whole earth". This connects with Kallir's poem, *yafe lakh b'eletz* (verse 5, line 3) *v'lismo'ach b'tovah*, "it is beautiful for you to live in joy and to rejoice in goodness."

In both poems the "woman" has sinned. In the Book of Lamentations "Her filthiness was in her skirts, / She was not mindful of her end; / Therefore is she come down wonderfully" (1:9). In Kallir "she" was "beautiful of form", *y'fat to'ar* and "ugly" and "disgraced", *m'nuvelet*.

²⁰ Job (20:22) from which the title of the poem is taken.

In the Book of Lamentations, the "woman" was "as a widow" (1:1). In addition to the loss of status and other disadvantages of widowhood, a widow would often be left penniless. Hence it is suggested that in the Book of Lamentations and also in Kallir's poem, the "widow" or "destitute one" had to fall on any profession by which she could be a bread-winner and therefore "her sin" was a necessity for survival.

Both the Kallir poem and the Book of Lamentations have certain themes from the standard lament: the "then and now" idea is demonstrated, the "then" of beauty, innocence and happiness and the "now" of ugliness and disgrace; the contrast between the past and the present. In both poems, G-d is sought, directly or indirectly, for help. In Kallir, an attempt is made to communicate with Him through Jeremiah and the "forefathers".

In both poems the "woman" is told to cry to G-d.

Pour out thy heart like water
Before the face of the Lord;
Lift up thy hands toward Him (Lam 2:19)

In the Book of Lamentations the whole community is called upon to pray.

In Kallir verse 8, there is an urging to "give voice in crying". Here there is an answer: "What can I do? This is a decree." In the Book of Lamentations G-d cannot be reached, although there is encouragement: it is said, "It is good that a man should quietly wait for the Lord" (3:25)

There are many similar ideas, metaphors and imagery in these two laments. In the Book of Lamentations (1:3) we read, "she findeth no rest". In Kallir in the third verse the woman says: "I was known for sitting restfully." (We notice this is in the past tense; in the present she has no rest). In Kallir, the woman says "How can she rejoice and lift her voice," when her people are in captivity, and in the Book of Lamentations (1:3) we are told, "she weeps sore in the night."

In Kallir, verse 6, line 2, we have *ol'lai nit'nu b'yad tzarim*; in the Book of Lamentations (1:5) *olaleha hal'chu sh'vi lifnei tzar*.

Both criticize the *prophets* who did not execute their duties of guiding the community; (this does not refer to the classical prophets); Kallir also regards these *prophets* as

defective, *laku n'vi'ai* (verse 6); however, in Kallir's poem Jeremiah the prophet is not defective. He is a central *persona* and a mediator.

Kallir (verse 6) writes *laku nvi'ai damam mugarim* "Our prophets are defective and their blood is poured down," - "as waters that are poured down a steep place" (Micah, 1:4); in the Book of Lamentations we are told (2:9), "Instruction is no more; / Yea, her prophets find no vision from the Lord" (and fail to seek the true message of G-d), and the question is asked of G-d, "Shall the priest and the prophet be slain / in the sanctuary of the Lord?" (2:20). Both poems speak of the prophets not doing their work sincerely, and being slain.

Both discuss the king's exile. In verse 6, line 4, of Kallir's poem, G-d is told, "My kings and officers are exiled, and my priests are in yokes or chains of iron on their necks."²¹ In the Book of Lamentations we read, "Her kings and princes are among the nations" (2:9), and "the breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, / Was taken in their pits" (4:20).

In both poems the young men have gone into exile. In Kallir, the Temple is desolate, *Shamem Mikdash mib'li ba'ei mo'eid* and all is a ruin, *b'avoni nadad* (in the fourth last line) and in the Book of Lamentations, the city is despoiled and solitary, *Mi'bli ba'ei mo'ed kol sh'areha sho'meimin* (1:4).

In both poems the usually bustling city has no inhabitants, no pilgrims, no festivals, the people have erred and stumbled.

However in the Book of Lamentations there is an anxiety: what will the enemy think? This does not occur in Kallir. In the Book of Lamentations the enemy is cursed (3:60-66), and hardly mentioned in Kallir.

Animal imagery occurs in both laments. Kallir makes Jeremiah roar like a lion: *sha'ag v'naham* at the Cave of *Makhpelah* as in *Amos*, 3.8, *aryeh sha'ag mi lo yira*. The Book of Lamentations also has animal imagery; G-d, not Jeremiah is compared to a lion as well as to a bear (3:10). Here again is a double meaning. *Aryeh sha'ag* is the eternal voice of G-d, as in *Amos* 1:2: "the L--d roareth from Zion and uttereth His voice from Jerusalem", and as again in *Amos*, 3:8, "The L--d hath roared, Who will not fear?" Jeremiah is the prophet who bears G-d's words and therefore roars. As opposed to

²¹Kolar "chain" is a Talmudical word *Sanhedrin* 7.

Jeremiah roaring like a lion in Kallir, in the Book of Lamentations the prophet-speaker is silent: words fail him (Lam 2:13); his eyes are full of tears (3:48-51) and “his eye has affected (his) soul” (3:5).

To summarize, there are certain structural similarities. Kallir's *Az Bimlot Seifek* is like a short version of the Book of Lamentations, thirteen four-line verses as compared to the five chapters of the Book of Lamentations. Both personify the city of Jerusalem as a despairing woman, and the atmosphere is grey in both, but there is no sobbing meter in Kallir's poem.

Kallir focuses more on rhyme and alliteration, and in this poem uses short simple sentences, whilst in the Book of Lamentations there is a predominance of the rich Biblical style of repetition and some parallelism.

Both Kallir's poem and the Book of Lamentations hinge on the centrepiece of the poem. As demonstrated earlier, important changes occur in the Book of Lamentations in the central verse of each of chapters 1,2,3 and 4, simultaneously with the central letter of the alphabet, the letter *kaf*. In the poem of Kallir as well on the letter *kaf*, in the words *ki-eich* - something important occurs²²; it appears as if these eight lines (verses 6 and 7) are a smaller version of the Book of *Eichah*.

The words of Kallir spoken by the woman in verses 6 and 7 reflect, concisely and relevantly, the essence of the Book of Lamentations. This is an important central focal point in the poem, starting on the letter *kaf* and continuing in an intensive way for eight lines, ending *Rabati am eichah yash'va vadad*.

Verse 7 of Kallir's poem ends with the first line of the Book of Lamentations chapter 1, but with a slightly inverted word order: instead of *Eichah yash'va vadad ha'ir rabati am*, Kallir says *Rabati am eichah yash'va vadad*. This is done for the sake of the rhyming effect and *ha'ir* has to be omitted. The changed version attracts attention; it is a climax, and the reversed word order accentuates the tragic paradoxical situation, that

²²In the Book of Lamentations there is an important transition, by way of a turning point, in the centre of chapters, 1,2 and 4 Kaufmann (1960:584, 586,589); also Gottwald, (1962:30). In chapter 3, which is the centre of the Book, and which is written in triple acrostic, at the letter *Kaf*, the middle letter of the alphabet, we find three verses each beginning with this middle letter *kaf* and these verses, found in this Book of gloom and darkness, give an indication of light, exactly and precisely in the centre of the Book. It seems that the centre of laments often forms an important highlight of the composition.

is, there were so many people, but now "the widow" is alone, yet it can conjure up a change for the better, a turning point as opposed to the original isolated situation.

Both Kallir and the Book of Lamentations conclude with a message of comfort to the reader.

Kallir's deliberate modelling of his laments on the Book of Lamentations can also be clearly seen in his *kinah*, *Suru Meni Shimoni Ovrai* in which the verses of the chapters of *Eichah* are linked into an alphabetic chain, and which is read on *Tishah B'Av*.²³

This message is still important today, in a century of conflict and disaster and has the power to alleviate despair.

i) ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE

Jeremiah, in Kallir, concludes in beautiful rhyme, "Restore them, support them and sustain them, have mercy, for the time has come". *T'shiveim k'mei'az, someikh v'so'eid, / T'rakheim Ziyon ki va mo'ed*. This is the same theme as the twice told ending of the Book of Lamentation, "Turn Thou us unto Thee O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old". *Hashiveinu Adon-ai elekha v'nashuva. Chadesh yameinu k'kedem* (5:21).

The message in this *piyyut* is that in spite of suffering in life, a covenant has been entered into, which involves discipline and responsibilities, and which in the end will bring joy.

It is beautiful for you to live in joy and to rejoice in goodness

j) FAITH AND PRAYER

In this poem the woman, *Tirtzah*, speaks to the prophet and asks him "Please speak to your G-d on behalf of the poor distressed woman, until G-d answers and says 'Enough'!

²³In other *kinot* which Kallir bases on the Book of Lamentations, some are arranged according to the verses of one or more chapters of *Eichah*, for example the *kinah* - *Z'khor Adon-ai, me haya lanu* by Kallir is based on chapter 5 of *Eichah*. Each verse corresponds with the consecutive verses in chapter 5. Every verse in the Kallir poem ends with *Oi, Oi, me haya lanu!* The last four verses in chapter 5 and the Kallir - *Z'khor Adon-ai* correspond identically: *Hashiveinu Adon-ai Eilekha v'nashuva chadesh yameinu k'kedem*. Kallir signs his name at the end. Another signed *piyyut* of Kallir's starts *Eichah* in each verse and has a complex alphabetical acrostic (Rosenfeld, 1986:1,19). The alphabet is repeated five times for odd-numbered letters (*aleph, gimme, hei...*) and six times for even-numbered letters (*bet, dalet, vav...*). This repetition alludes to the Five Books of the *Torah* and the Six Orders of the *Mishnah*.

and that He will save my children from the sword and exile". Jeremiah advises her to repent as she deserves to enjoy a good life and will no longer be called the bad woman. And Jeremiah prayed before his Master, "Merciful as a father would be merciful to his son.

Restore them as they used to be Support and sustain them. Have mercy on Zion".

T'shiveim k'mei'az, someikh v'so'eid

T'racheim Tziyon ki va mo'eid

Repeated expression is given in the *piyyutim* to the undying hope that G-d will finally put an end to the misfortunes and sufferings and replace it with joy and goodness.

k) **FAITH IN REDEMPTION THROUGH THE RETURN TO ZION**

The request for mercy for Zion indicates hope that G-d will relent and the children of Israel would be able to return to Israel.

l) **CONCLUSION**

"It is beautiful for you to live in joy and to rejoice in goodness".

This message is still important today in a century of conflict and disaster. Twelve hundred years later, Kallir's ability is still recognized. Urbach, president of the Israel Academy of Sciences, said that Kallir's poetry has the power to alleviate despair and compared him to Uri Zvi Greenberg, the masterful twentieth century lament writer (Lindenbaum, 1997:107). I have tried to demonstrate the method Kallir used in the poem to achieve this aim.

LAMENTS IN THE GOLDEN AGE OF SPAIN

INTRODUCTION

The *lingua franca* of the Jews in Spain was Arabic; Bachy Ibn Pakuda, Yehudah Halevi and Maimonides all composed their philosophical works in Arabic but their poetry although adapted to the Arabic style was written in Hebrew. As most of their poems were written for prayer, Hebrew the holy tongue, was the suitable medium.

This was a period when the *Karaite* sect was rejecting Rabbinical teachings and scrutinizing the Biblical texts, and the Jews of Spain in response, became enthusiastic about the Hebrew Scriptures and its language (Goldstein, 1965:14). The wish to revive Biblical Hebrew was dominant and most of the Hebrew poets excelled themselves in their uniqueness (Zedakah, 1988:14) and enlarged Hebrew vocabulary by extending the semantic range of Biblical words.

The Hebrew poet-philosophers living in Muslim Spain from the ninth to the twelfth century did not necessarily abide by a particular convention. They structured language and ideas and evoked the imagery of human emotions and the tensions of human existence.

Influenced by Arab poetry and philosophy, the Hebrew poetic mind made use of the standard of quantitative meter and rhyme, applying it to Hebrew Biblical, Midrashic and esoteric Jewish sources. Arabic verse, as regards composition, metric forms, rhyme patterns and themes (Spicehandler, 1993:594) had a powerful attraction. The Spanish-Arabic poetry was rhetorical and epistolary with ornate metaphors written in an exaggerated, flamboyant way; the rules of writing were strict, according to a clearly defined fixed crystallized tradition.

Hebrew poetry was thus the product of a symbiosis of Hebrew and Arabic culture (Carmi, 1981:25ff). The combination of stylistic aspects of Spanish-Hebrew poetry with the various aspects of the ancient Hebrew style results in rare achievements of perfection and beauty.

One of the most common genres was the Arabic ode, the *qasida*, which soon became the vehicle for occasional poems written to celebrate an important event or to praise a patron¹.

Heine regarded Gabirol, ibn Ezra and Halevi as the three stars in the firmament of Neo-Hebrew poetry in Spain, and Hanagid became identified as a fourth star of equal brilliancy (Brody & Solis-Cohen, 1945:xxiii).

The Jewish poets were great contributors to the Golden Age of Spain;² they gained a wide and appreciative public in Spain and abroad and their wide scope and variety of forms influenced Hebrew poetry for four hundred years (Finer-Mintz, 1966:xxix).

HISTORICAL SETTING

With the conquest by the African Moors of the south of Spain in 711, the Golden Age of Spanish Jewry began. The Jews enjoyed equal treatment in Arab lands under the enlightened rule of the Mohammedan caliphs and every encouragement was given them to develop their own religious communal life (Ausubel, 1956:105). It was a time marked by liberality of mind and the advancement of sciences and the arts. The Jewish intellectuals became enthusiastic co-workers of the learned Arabs in every branch of knowledge and cultural creativity.

During the Golden Age of Spain, which lasted from the ninth century to the end of the twelfth century, reading, writing and poetry was considered an essential element of education in an aristocratic society with an elevated standard of education. This was a period suited to a large range of all-encompassing Hebrew creativity (Waxman, 1938:216 vol. 1), including laments of wrath (Gabirol)³, pain and sorrow (Hanagid, Gabirol, Ibn Ezra) and constant painful yearning for the Holy Land (Halevi). Hanagid wrote many poems lamenting the death of his brother, one of them being *Hayam beini u'vei'ne'kha* in which the poet-speaker sits at his brother's graveside.

¹ The most common form of poetic line was divided into two cola (clauses or phrases). Both cola of the first line rhymed and that rhyme was repeated throughout the poem to link the end words of the second cola, i.e. - a - a / - b - a / - c - a / - d - a as in Hanagid's *Hayam Beini U'vei'ne'kha*. However, the poems studied here by Ibn Gabirol, Ibn Ezra and Halevi do not follow this pattern nor do they follow the formal constructions of the *payyetanim*.

² From Harizi's *Tachkemoni*, *Third Gate* cited in Nave & Levin (1955:223)

³ On leaving Saragossa, *Nichar Be'kor'i G'roni*

Times did not remain peaceful. Various Moslem kings in Spain fought for power and engaged in petty wars. Meanwhile, in the North of Spain, the Christian kings who still ruled their small kingdoms prepared to drive the Moslems out of Spain. The Jews suffered greatly during these stormy times - frequently intolerant Arab rulers would drive them from their homes, yet this was the time when the greatest Jewish poets and philosophers made their contributions to Arabic-Jewish life and created a Golden Age. Hanagid had to flee from Cordoba in the wake of the Berber conquest. Gabirol was orphaned young and suffered from poverty and alienation. Ibn Ezra was most unhappy in life (Brody & Solis-Cohen, 1945:xxiii); for forty years he was in exile, wandering through a hostile Christian Spain. Halevi, despite living in comfortable circumstances, viewed himself as living among hostile foreigners and yearned for stability in a Zionist homeland (Fleisher, 1994:37).

SHMUEL HANAGID

(993-1056)

a) ABOUT THE POET

Shmuel Ibn Nagrela was born in Cordoba in 993, and had to flee the city twenty years later when the Berbers destroyed it, and he became a spice dealer. He entered the service of Badis, the Berber ruler of Granada in 1038 who later appointed him vizier. He was a scholar, poet and patron of learning and the Jews of Spain conferred on him the title of Nagid (governor) to indicate their acceptance of him as their national leader.

He encouraged the development of Hebrew philology, grammar and lexicography.

He had many skills, scholarly and practical. Besides being a talented poet, he was also a statesman, rabbi, general, finance minister (Kalrich, 1994:41) and was acclaimed in each of these fields (Goldstein, 1965:45). The rise and political and military career of Hanagid marks a high achievement of a Jew in medieval Muslim Spain.

In order to educate his sons, Hanagid sent them his poems, instructing them to copy and arrange them⁴, for which work they were remunerated and praised.

He served in the Muslim army for eighteen years and sent his sons many poems from the battlefield. These constituted a poetic military diary which is significant, coming as it did from the stormy scene of military action (Carmi, 1981:98).

He endowed *Yeshivot* in Spain and scholarships for students and his philanthropic works included the supply of olive oil to the synagogues of Jerusalem. In spite of his success, he regarded Jewish life in exile as one of suffering and longed for the return of his people to Zion (Comay, 1994:185).

He died in 1056 at the age of sixty-three after many years of fighting, following a strenuous campaign in Granada. His triumphs were viewed by the Jews as national victories.

It was difficult to select a lament by Hanagid, because he wrote so many. When his brother died he wrote nineteen poems lamenting his death. I have chosen one of these because the pain and suffering he expresses, while ruminating at his brother's graveside, is as fresh today as it was then.

Hayam Beini U'veinekha

b) LITERARY ANALYSIS

Hanagid had a sure command of language, and although the Hebrew and Arabic poetry of that time was "precious" he seemed to write in a natural way. Goldstein (1965:45) comments that his poems are "noteworthy for the way in which he was able to inform the artificiality and occasional preciousness of construction with deep and obviously sincere content". This will be noticed in the poem selected, which is written in a natural conversational style.

He was a master of Hebrew and Arabic culture; his poetry excels in the fusion of epic and lyrical elements and in it he maintained a rich repertoire of forms and motifs. A literary artist of high order, his sure command of language is demonstrated by the great variety of subjects he chose for poetic expression.

He was particularly known for his military poetry and is credited as having been the one to introduce poetry of war and battle into Hebrew literature.

c) ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE

Theme : This poem is one of a number of dirges dedicated to Hanagid's deceased brother Yitzchak to whom he was greatly attached. Although he saw death in the raw, he could not adjust to his brother's death and at the height of his political and military power, he wrote a tractate of nineteen poems on the death of Yitzchak. This need to mourn through numerous poems will be observed in other poets in this thesis, in particular Uri Zvi Greenberg, who wrote 400 pages of laments on the Holocaust.

Above the poem is a short explanation, originally written in Arabic, by the poet's son, explaining that as the poet passed his brother's grave on a journey, he stopped to "speak" with his brother.

Rhetorical Device : The poem starts off by attracting the attention of the reader with a question; "Is there a sea between me and you...?" A question is a typical opening⁵ to a lament, intended to arouse the interest and sympathy of the listener or reader. The

⁴ They wrote captions to the poems in their own spoken language. The children started this at the ages of eight, and six respectively.

⁵ known as the *conquestio*, "conquest" in the beginning of a composition

question is asked, not to evoke an actual reply, but to achieve an emphasis stronger than a direct statement (Abrams, 1988:161).

Apostrophe : The poet then addresses his brother affectionately:

*B'khor avi u'ven imi, shlomim lach b'akhrut'kha,
V'ru'akh Ei-l t'hi nacha alei rukhakha v'nishmat'kha!*

The *khas* in these lines and at the end of each line have a part of *eichah* in their sound, a strong lamenting sound, with strong mourning associations. He goes on "I am returning to my own soil, for you have been locked under the soil." / "Sometimes I will sleep, and sometimes I will be awake, but you will sleep forever. Until the day of my passing, the fire of your departure will burn in my heart" (trans Carmi, 1981:293).

The poet speaks in the first person, and addresses his brother as "you", as if his brother were actually there, since the presence of the deceased brother still lives on in his heart.⁶ This is a form of denial.

d) USE OF LANGUAGE

Rhythm : The meter is *marnin*, long, short, short; long, short, short.

Rhyme : The rhyme is *mavri'ach* - each line ending with the unifying sound of *t'kha*. (Kalrich, 1994:44). This suits the context, in which the poet can only think of his brother, the "you" to whom he speaks, and his own involvement in the brother's constant "presence".

In the crucial line of the poem known as the *qasida*, line 10, *sh'ol beit'kha* and *u'vakever monat'cha* rhyme; this is *l'tiferet* - to enhance the beauty of the poem - usually *l'tiferet hap'tikha* (for the enhancing of the opening), *hadelet* or *l'tiferet hasiyum* (for the enhancing of the closing, *hasoger*), in the first and last lines. The *qasida* poems had one rhyme repeated at the end of each line as if forming a string of beads.

Word Structure : He changes grammatical rules to suit the sound and rhyme, for example *kiv'r'kha* becomes *kivrakh* in line 4, and *l'kha* becomes *lakh* in line 11. In these cases he changes the gender of the words. He is addressing his brother yet these two words are feminine in gender. This formation could be of Aramaic influence.

⁶ Cf Wordsworth's "Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour!" Sonnet; London, 1802

Punctuation : The poem is meticulously punctuated at the end of each line. This emphasizes the conclusiveness and finality of death.

Use of Language : Even though the language is simple with no descriptive embellishments, yet there is also occasional exaggeration (Zedakah, 1988:14) as in "Until my dying day the fire of your separation will burn in my heart."

Contrast : There are marked contrasts in the poem (Kalrich, 1994:44): the land of the dead, and the land of the living (line 13); the living brother speaks and the dead brother is silent; the poet says "I greet you" but "I don't hear your answer" (line 6) "I come to you" but "you don't come to meet me" (line 7); "I go to my land, but they close you in your land" (line 13); "I awake and sleep, but you sleep forever" (line 14). There is a tension between these contrasts.

Words of love and longing : The poet asks if there is such a huge immeasurable distance between him and his brother, such as the sea (2:13) that he, with troubled heart, cannot stop at his brother's graveside to commune with him. He feels that if he did not do this, he would be a traitor to the brotherly love that had existed between them. He sits at the grave, *l'umat'kha* "facing you", and the pain in his heart is just as great as on the day that his brother died. Here he is verbalizing the pain of loss felt by the bereaved.

Negative Words : He recalls the many joys they have shared, with frequent use of the negative word *lo* because these joys no longer apply. They cannot see each other or talk and joke with each other, or meet.

He explains that this is because *l'ma'an ki sh'ol beit'kha u'vakever m'onat'kha* - "for the pit is your home, the grave your dwelling place". It is clear that they had a close fraternal relationship, and that there is a void in the poet's life, but the fact that he talks to him, carries him within himself, keeps the brother in the land of the living, helps alleviate the pain of separation.

Allusion to other sources : In lines 10 to 15, we see much use made of Biblical sources as was common in the Spanish Hebrew poets. In this poem there are allusions to: *sh'ol beitakh* (Job, 17:13); *b'akharitakh* (Ps, 37:37); *v'na'cha alav ruach Adon-ai* in line 12 from Isaiah (Isa, 11:2); *v'ad bo yom chalifati* in the last line "until my change comes", meaning "until my last day" from Job (14:14); (Yarden, 1966:247).

e) COMPARISON WITH STANDARD LAMENTS

As a lament, this poem has traditional lament qualities, for instance, the "where are you" and the "then and now" features, as seen in the poem. There is praise of the deceased, a tribute, in *achva't'kha*, "brotherly love", *b'khor avi u'ven imi*, being a special son of the parents. We are told that the speaker's grief is as vast as the sea: *Hayam beini uveinekha...?* This recalls the Book of Lamentations : "For thy breach is great like the sea" (2:13).

A blessing for the deceased is invoked, "May the spirit of G-d rest upon your spirit and your soul!". The lament is based on a pattern, but is strongly individualistic and powerful, as was the style in "Spanish" laments.

f) EXPRESSING THE FEELINGS

Hanagid is one of the poets who comes closest to getting in touch with a mourner's true feelings, and by so doing helps the reader to find closure and lighten despair.

Hayam Beini Uveinekha is a personal poem filled with pain and it discusses feelings we can share. It is written simply with no adornments. He talks to his brother while visiting his grave, using the first person, as though his brother were actually there. This talking to his deceased brother as though he could hear is an impulse to which many readers can relate, an activity that makes the one left behind feel as though he/she is not quite alone, that there is still some sort of contact. This may represent the denial stage of grieving, one of the earlier stages of the healing process. The mourner feels that the deceased is not really dead, has not actually gone forever or far, is nearer than breathing and closer than hands and feet. This gives the poem a feeling of genuineness, not of poetic affectation.

Hanagid's pain over his brother seems fresh and raw. We can see what his brother and he used to do together, and how happy they always were to see each other.

It is heart-breaking, but even if the poet-mourner sheds bitter tears, it is healthy that he is able to express his grief and release it. The poet recalls the many joys he shared with his brother, but in the initial stages of grieving this kind of thought does not help; it makes the pain worse, for as C.S. Lewis has said under such circumstances, "The greater the happiness then, the greater the sadness now." The readers gain comfort in reading this lament because it is easy to identify with Hanagid's honest feelings.

g) **CONCLUSION**

Habermann (1971:817,818) said that Hanagid was never content; the canker of melancholy gnawed at him, and a note of pessimism sounded in his poetry. It was the depression that spurred him to write, seeking comfort in the act of verbalizing and the catharsis he gained through expressing his pain. Because of his depressive nature, Hanagid had an understanding of and a sensitivity to the feelings of mourners, and because he was able to “tune in” to their feelings, laments like this are still able to enable readers to empathize with him and share in his grief. Readers can identify with the poet’s pain and this helps them find catharsis.

University of Cape Town

SOLOMON IBN GABIROL

1021-1055

a) ABOUT THE POET

Little is known of Ibn Gabirol, although glimmers may be gathered from his poems. He may have been born in Malaga in Spain c.1020 and been taken to Saragossa when young. He was orphaned and left destitute at an early age, and suffered adverse health throughout the approximate thirty-four years of his life, *R'vivei Dim'akha* (Carmi, 1981:101).

Endowed with great gifts, *ish eshkolot* (Zedakah, 1988:248), Gabirol stands amongst the greatest of Hebrew poets of all time. He dedicated his life to poetry and philosophy; he lived by his writing, and was therefore dependent on the precarious support of benefactors. He was known for his insensitivity and self-esteem. He wrote about himself as "one who chose wisdom even as a youth", *U'vachar bat'vu'nah mi'n'u'rav* "*Ani Ha'ish*" and asserted that to him all the "doors of wisdom" were opened whilst they were closed to his fellow beings. One wonders if his self-opinion was not due in part to his genius and in part to a sense of inferiority caused by solitariness "To whom shall I speak and to whom shall I tell my sorrow?" as well as by his unattractive appearance and poor health (Levin & Levinger, 1955:218). It would seem, however that self-praise was in fact a part of the scheme of Arab poetry, and also Gabirol may have over-extended himself in his descriptions as imaginative exaggeration was the mode of the times. His talent and intelligence made it difficult for the poet to establish contact with those around him (Zedakah, 1988:12). He was also known for his lack of delicacy in writing. He insulted others, creating enemies amongst people of note as is described in the poem "On Leaving Saragossa" - *Nichar b'kori g'roni*, resulting in conflicts with influential people.

Gabirol insulted his patron, Hanagid, saying that his poetry "was as cold as Senir, as a glacier". Gabirol had one excellent, empathic friend in his youth, Yekutiel, who became his new patron and who protected him for three years before he was executed owing to court intrigue. Eventually Gabirol had to leave his home in Saragossa, because his life became unendurable due to unpopularity (Levin & Levinger, 1955:218).

He was steeped in "wisdom literature" and philosophy. His major philosophical works were "The Kingly Crown", *Keter Malchut* and the influential *M'kor Haim* "Fountain of Life", a prose work written in Arabic and translated and preserved in Latin as the work of a Muslim known as Avicebron. This was only attributed to Gabirol in 1846 when Munk recognized that Gabirol and Avicebron were the same person (Wise, 1901:8), so his unfortunate luck continued long after his death (Carmi, 1981:101).

Unfortunately his religious associates did not appreciate his knowledge, and his abilities did not make him socially acceptable. Gabirol's knowledge was vast and despite his short stormy life he wrote prolifically and reached the heights of Hebrew literature. He died in Valencia (Zedakah, 1988:248).

R'ei Shemesh

Ibn Gabirol wrote many laments including *Shomron* (Rosenfeld, 1986), which is one of the *kinot* frequently recited on *Tishah B'Av*. Although *Shomron* is similar in theme to that of the Book of Lamentations, namely the sinning of the people, and, like the Book of Lamentations which ends with "Renew our days as of old", it ends with "Renew our days as the days of my youth". I have selected *R'ei Shemesh*, a less traditional poem, to show the development of the lament genre in the intervening years. In *R'ei Shemesh* the theme of despair is handled in a more modern and symbolic manner, with the darkness of despair and the light of comfort being described metaphorically, using nature as a symbol. Day undeviatingly follows night; the setting and rising of the sun becomes a symbol of the despair and the hope in the future.

As Levin says, "the poem *R'ei Shemesh* is an example of an impressive unique fashioning of a general motif of the stamp of sorrow in the world, 'the sinking of the lights' " (Levin, 1973:114). The title of this poem and its content is reminiscent of the legend in which Isaac, after the *akedah*, returns and laments the death of his mother:

Woe is me, oh, my mother, *harachmaniyah*,
for you have left me suddenly!
I thought I would yet see your face which
was to me as the light of the sun at midday!

I thought I would yet hear your pleasant words
 that gladden the heart and revive the soul!
 And now, alas! my sun is darkened and my heart is broken.
 How can I be comforted when my comfort
 is gone from me?

(Levner, 1946:95)

b) ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE

Content : The poem *R'ei Shemesh*, one of two elegies written by Gabirol upon the death of Yekutiel, expresses through images and colours a traumatic emotional loss. It is a lyrical poem, in which the poet projects his feelings on to the entire universe. Mourners frequently project their despair on to the world about them.

Rhythm : The poem is written in a typical Arabic meter, *m'ruba*, one long and two short beats, one long and two shorts, and a long and a short.

Rhyme : The rhyme is taken from the Arabic, the *kharuz*, as in a string of beads, and is called *mavri'akh*, with every second line rhyming with each other with the sound *seh*, a unifying element through the poem, as a "bolt", *l'havri'akh* - "to bolt through". The rhyming words at the end of the lines are similar in meaning (Kalrich, 1994:61).

c) USE OF LANGUAGE

Metaphors and images : There are words with insinuated meanings, especially those from Biblical sources, which include vivid metaphors and images. The symbol of the personified "sun" represents Yekutiel; the "earth" signifies the poet-mourner and "darkness" and "night" and the "setting sun" imply death. The entire universe mourns.

Personification : There is personification in the "sun wearing red" and the "earth left naked" (Kalreich, 1994:62).

Motifs : In the poem, there are coverings and uncoverings, *Lav'shah*, *t'fasheit* and the words *mich-seh*, three times over, and *tola*, *argaman* and *sak*, together with *arumah*, provide a unifying theme or motif of nature dressing and undressing. These metaphors describing the setting of the sun in parallel, but progressive ways, crystalize the poem (Zedakah, 1988:13).

Keywords : Notice the "covering, protective" rhyming words in every second line:

l'mikhseh (2), *t'khaseh* (4), *v'techseh* (6), *m'khuseh* (8).

This is interesting. The word *mikhseh* is a key-word in the poem - there is much mention of "covering" and "protection"; yet the poet-speaker's "protection" is gone. With all this "covering" in nature, the protection which is needed no longer exists. The north and south are stripped and the earth is left naked. "Red" was the predominant colour just before darkness covers all.

Play on Words : In the short eight lines, there is a play on words, such as *mikhseh*, "covering", the verb *t'khaseh*, "covers", *tech'she*, "take shelter" and *m'khuseh*, "covered" (Kalrich, 1994:62).

Yekuti'el has died and the entire universe is swathed in a covering of darkness.

Adumah (1) rhymes with *arumah* (5). The *adumah* (bloodshed) causes the feeling of *arumah*, of exposure, of helplessness. *K'ilu* (2), typologically speaking, is diametrically opposed to *k'ilu* (7). This draws attention to the word: it is *as if* it cannot be believed that his beloved patron was dead, a form of denial.

Gapping : Basically, the poet is traumatized by this death; he sees the entire universe in terms of blood. An interesting factor is that the critical moment of death, the moment when the sun sets, is not mentioned. It is a moment that cannot be faced.

Contrasts and juxtaposition : There are opposite features: the dressing and the undressing, the little man as against the huge sun and the sky. The different contrasts of colour serve to emphasize the tremendous shock of the finality of the occurrence of death! Nevertheless, the fact is that the sun sets only to rise tomorrow.

There is also the polarity of the sky above and the earth beneath, and the silk garment *tola* as opposed to the "sack". There is also the red and the shadow, and the north and the south. Implicit in these contrasts, is the contrast between life and death.

Colour in Nature : This poem is based on nature images. It is a masterpiece of brevity and colour. The range of reds and scarlets, the evening of the day (and thus, the evening time of life), the darker purple of the west (symbolizing the congealing of blood) leading up gradually to the shadow of the night and ultimately the dark skies, the naked earth, all go to describe the death of the patron Yekuti'el. The colours relate to the ambience of death, and the relationship (which is not stated) of the mourner to the

deceased. Images of nature are evoked and, the last line tells us, "the skies darken, as if covered with sackcloth, mourning the death of Yekutiel" (Levin, 1973:113).

Colour in Praise of the Dead : In patterns of lament nature is often called upon to play a role. In this poem nature fills up the panorama in startling colours, a red and purple sun used to represent death and darkness.

In the convention of lament, the praise of the dead is often recalled; here it is recalled indirectly by the enormity and extensiveness of the sphere of mourning and hinted at in the use of the aristocratic colours red, *adumah*; scarlet, *tola*; (worn by princes and high officials)⁷ and royal kingly purple, *argaman*.⁸

Element of Surprise or Shock : *V'hashachak azai kadar, k'ilu / b'sak al mot Yekutiel m'khuseh*. We are unexpectedly told how the sky darkens (Zedakah, 1988:11); we might have thought this was a nature poem. Until now, we were not told that a human being was mourning a loss; these are the last three words of the poem. This *pointe* is a device for creating a marked effect in a restrained way.

Allusion to other sources : The word *shachak* (line 7) is frequently used in the Bible, for example: *Ki mi vashachak ya'arokh la'Adon-ai?*⁹ In addition to referring to the sky, *shachak* can also mean the heavens. Maybe this is the message of hope which should alleviate the pain. The depth of grief and sorrow is difficult to accept, but the sun unfailingly does rise on the morrow.

B'tzeil halailah sounds like *y'lalah*, which is an onomatopoeic word for lamenting or wailing, *t'fasheit* as in 1 Sam 31:8 to "stripping the slain", and although there is no mention of death until the last line, there are frequent allusions to it through Biblical words connotations.

The role played by nature as a mourner is within the convention of the lament. In this poem, almost the whole sky is wrapped in sorrow. The mourning covers a large universal area. *T'fasheit pa'a'tei tzafon v'yamin / v'ruach yam b'argaman t'chaseh*. The extensive grief could mean that the deceased is mourned by many, but in the restraint of the poem, it would appear that the poet mourner is suffering immeasurable grief, and is

⁷ Lam (4:5): *Ha'emunim alei tola*

⁸ See Ex (28:4,5) where purple and scarlet were among the colours specified for the garments of Aaron the High Priest. Purple and scarlet were also specified in the construction of the Holy Tabernacle, Ex (26:1).

⁹ Ps (89:7). Job (37:18); Prov (8:28); Job (37:21); Job (35:5); Deut (33:26); Ps (68:35); Ps (89:7,38)

specifically focusing on what is outside of himself, to try to avert the pain. This immediately invites comparison with David's lament over Saul and Jonathan. In 2 Sam (1:17), distractions such as weapons, garments, jewels, are sought to try to sublimate the pain; in Gabirol's poem the mourner turns to nature.

Often the poets were commissioned to write elegies commemorating the dead, to be read in public, but in this poem, although it has no first-person narrator, it becomes clear that the writer himself is the chief mourner, enveloped in grief.

See, *r'ei*, he says, intimating "See what I see!"; "The sun at evening time!" - with the reds and scarlets symbolizing the blood of the execution. This is the bloody end of his only friend, patron and protector. The north and south are stripped of colour, as though life has lost meaning, and then, at the end of the day, even in the west it has become really dark.

The earth, like the mourner, is left naked, vulnerable, exposed, and without protection, cover or warmth; and has to retreat into the shadow of the night, alone, to hide in misery and seek refuge in sleep - hoping for amnesic oblivion, the nearest one can get to nursing pain. The skies darken. It is not simply the shadow of the night, the sombre skies cover all - as if the entire sky is covered with sack-cloth, because of the death of Jekuthiel - *k'ilu / b'sak al mot Yekutiel m'khuseh*. That means the whole universe is wrapped up in mourning.¹⁰ But the reader knows that tomorrow the sun will rise emerge.

d) ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE

This short poem at first sight seems to be a nature poem, but it is not about nature. However, it is matchless in its use of nature to symbolize death without mentioning death by name through its rendering of images of grief, using nature symbols.

In the poem, it seems as though the sun has gone to bed forever, that this is the tragic end of all that is dear to life. Zedakah (1988:11) interprets this as indicating that unlike the sun which rises daily, man sets only once. I disagree with Zedakah's interpretation, who fails to understand that the sun, always a symbol of life, is much more potent a metaphor than insignificant ephemeral man.

Hope lies in the fact that no matter how dark it may seem to be at that moment, the sun will rise again. Things will improve.

The depth of grief and sorrow is difficult to accept but because the sun does rise on the morrow, maybe in this panorama of the sky is the message of hope which should alleviate the pain.

e) CONCLUSION

Gabirol had a virtuosity of style and language. He is said to have surpassed his contemporaries by the quality of his compositions as one who brought the art of Hebrew poetry to perfection (Zangwill-Davidson, 1923:xl) and also "penetrated the Arab treasures and drank deeply of their fountains" (Ungerfeld, 1977:27).

This lyrical lament is perhaps one of Gabirol's finest poems (Levin, 1973:114). It has power to alleviate despair through the underlying understanding of the cyclical nature of sunset and sunrise, and by association, death and life.

¹⁰Sackcloth was always a sign of mourning, eg *Chigru sakim, sifdu, v'heililu*, Jer. (4:8) especially on national occasions.

MOSES IBN EZRA

c. 1055-1135

a) ABOUT THE POET

Moses ben Jacob Ibn Ezra, who lived c. 1055-1135, was one of four distinguished brothers from Granada. We have no record of what became of him during the persecution of the Jews in Granada in 1066, but it may have been at this time that he went to Lucena, "the city of poetry" (Schirmann, 1951:218) to study under Isaac Ibn Gi'at. At all events, we find him in Granada again when the Jewish community was re-established and he gathered around him a circle of scholars and poets, both non-Jewish and Jewish, among whom was the young Yehudah Halevi.

Although his early poetic achievement in Granada received great acclaim and he was given an honorary degree, he lived an unsettled life. In 1090 the community of Jews in Granada was destroyed by the Berber Almoravids and Moses' family left Granada; some years later there was a family quarrel over his niece as a result of which his brother Joseph left him as did his children (Goldstein, 1965:103).

He was a skilled poet and prolific writer, and one of the treatises which he wrote in Arabic "The Book of Conversations and Memories" based on Arabic poetics, is a valuable source for the history of Andalusian Hebrew poetry. This book "is unique in medieval literature, which amongst other subjects dealt with rhetoric and ornamentation" (Schirmann, 1951:219).

Ibn Ezra's outlook on life was basically pessimistic. "People advance towards their deaths like passengers embarked on a voyage in a ship. Although the passengers are not conscious of it, they are constantly being carried forward" (Fleisher, 1994:39).

I have selected *Hekitzuni S'ipai* because in this lament Ibn Ezra is writing about the voyage, and discussing life after death in a positive way as a reunion of separated families.

Hekitzuni S'ipai

b) LITERARY ANALYSIS

For his ideas on "ornamentation", rhetorical forms and metaphorical language as a means to embellish the content of a poem, he drew abundantly from Biblical texts and as a linguist made scientific studies of the texts from the point of view of style and aesthetic writing (Schirmann, 1951:219). He was the first to write homonymic poems, which he had learnt from the tradition of Arabic poesy. In his liturgical poetry he adeptly combined Jewish religious and Arab secular features, and many of these poems are recited in the synagogues today.

c) ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE

Content : *Hekitzuni S'ipai* is a meditative, reflexive lament. The title of the poem tells us "My thoughts and heart-ache have awakened me". It is as if the poet dreamt he was sitting in the cemetery and conversing with his dead parents and friends, or he could have been in a state of dreaming wakefulness and feels heavy-hearted. His parents and friends are gone. He has no one to be at his side as a companion. It is reminiscent of Hanagid's poem on his visit to the grave of his brother *Hayam beini uveinekha*. Like Hanagid the poet-speaker has been thinking about those whom he loves and his thoughts have aroused him to "visit" them at the cemetery. There he communes with them. He asks them a question, but, as in Hanagid's poem, it is a rhetorical question, because his dear ones cannot hear or answer, neither can he expect an answer; he feels betrayed, because they have all left him, including his closest family, his mother and father.

Then comes a surrealistic picture; they, without language, call him to them and show him his place at their side. His thoughts have aroused him to see the truth as it is, with open mind and open eyes. As he gets older everyone leaves him. They either die or are ill or leave. His turn will come next. He feels alone for he has no one of his own.

Rhyme : The second line rhymes with the fourth and the sixth *sh'lomi, v'imi, m'komi*; the rhyme is in the first person singular, as this is a personal poem, expressing the dejected feelings of the speaker. In line 3, the word *makshiv* rhymes with the word

meishiv. This rhyme emphasizes that the closest family and friends are not alive, so that there is no one to hear or respond to the speaker.

Syllables : This poem is based on syllables and not on the usual Spanish quantitative meter. There is no regular meter; each sentence is built up of eleven syllables.

Word Structure : Some of the words used are abstruse. The forms are often chosen to provide the right number of syllables for each line. Verbs are used with verbal suffixes, such as *he'ki'tzu'ni*, *k'ra'u'ni*, and *her'u'ni*, *Sh'iltimo* (Weingreen, 1959:256) is an unusual and stilted archaic form of *sh'al'tim*, "I asked them" "my parents and friends"; here the verb *sha'alti* "I asked" has been combined with a verbal suffix denoting "them". The poet changes the form of the word for the sake of the number of syllables and sound to *sh'il'ti'mo* - *v'ein makshiv u'mei'shiv*.

Sound Effects : The letter *shin* occurs many times in the poem, especially in line 3, and gives a hushed feeling of the cemetery atmosphere with the dashes in the line adding to this atmosphere. Likewise the use of the assonance and the *ah* sounds in line 4, together with the question mark, convey a downcast feeling. The long syllables in this line, and in the poem generally, give a mourning sound.

Allusion : Use is made of Biblical and Midrashic texts. The word *s'ipim* means "thoughts", "meditations" and it is near to the Arabic, meaning "worry", "pain in the heart". It is also used¹¹ in Job, *Bis'ipim meichezyonot halaila...* In Job, a voice is heard, whereas in Ibn Ezra's poem it is the absence of voice and the Biblical verses which causes pain.¹² *Anshei shlomi* (line 2 in the poem) is used in Jer 38:22 as "friends", and the prophet goes on to say "thy feet are sunk in the mire and they are turned away back". This is also homonymic, as the feet, like the feet of all the dead, including the feet of the poet-speaker's dead ones in Ibn Ezra's lament, are presumably under the ground and can never emerge. Also "they are turned away back" and can never turn round again, and face one.

¹¹See *s'ipim* Gesenius (1885:DCCXCII)

¹²Job (4,13ff). In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men / Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up: It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before my eyes, there was silence, and I heard a voice..."

The words and expressions from the Biblical texts are the essence or key to something deeper and more complex, which give a high-powered explanation of the connotation of grief.

Malon (line 2) is used as a "lodging-place" in Josh 4:3, and in Jer 9:1. In *Midrash Mishlei* there is to be found: *Ashrekha, Rabbi Akiba, she'nimtza l'kha malon tov bish'at mitat'kha*.

"Happy are you, O' Rabbi Akiba, for whom a good lodging-place has been found at the hour of your death."

d) FAITH AND PRAYER

There is a hidden source of hope in *Hekitzuni S'ipai*, a seemingly dismal poem reflecting on the parents' graves. Death is seen not as finality, but as a crossing over in a journey of transition. All those who loved him are waiting for him, beckoning him to the afterworld. There is a torch of hope for the future although the past is a nightmare.

The poet speaker sees his family at the end of a dark tunnel and there is an indication of a rejoining with his loved ones. There is a strong resonance of peace in the word *shlomi*. There are other synonyms for relatives, but the poet has chosen the expression, *anshei shlomi*, which conjures peace.

At the resting place, his parents and friends cannot speak to him, but they beckon to him. Physically, the *anshei shlomi*, are waiting for him at *M'lon horai*, their overnight lodging place, whilst they are *en passage*, progressing towards their destined home. They are going over to a better world. Notwithstanding the difference in modern use of language, and the language of the Golden Age of Spain, the poet does not speak of a "grave", a "hole", "earth", "blackness", but of *m'lon horai*, the night hotel of my parents.

The poet is a man of words, but his family cannot speak to him with words. They are silent. He is troubled by their inability to communicate with him. This creates a barrier between them. But it is as if they are waving to him, and they assure him they are keeping a place for him with the people who love him. However, the fact that he can see them when they beckon shows clearly that there is light where they are, and this gives him a feeling of reassurance. What appears frightening at first sight may be an

indication that they will be going to meet. Although one does not wish to leave this world, Moses Ibn Ezra indicates that it can mean being reunited with loved ones.

One's natural fear of death dictates one's feelings on first reading this poem, and these feelings make the poem, to the modern reader, overwhelmingly surrealistic.

The acknowledgement in this poem that death is only a stage in the whole process of life, alleviates these natural fears and this recognition helps to bring light to the bereaved; those who loved them are waiting for them at the *M'lon horai*.

For the religious believer, there is a belief in the *Olam Haba*, and a future life after death, and these beliefs give comfort. Religious people find spiritual comfort and consolation in the knowledge that they will rejoin their loved ones in the *Olam Haba*. In *Hekitzuni S'ipai*, Ibn Ezra accepting these beliefs, comforts mourners by being able to greet and anticipate joining his family.

e) CONCLUSION

This is a typical individual-universal lament, and although short and written simply and with restraint, it is poignant with sadness, but there is a hint of the future, a journey somewhere.

Introspection and meditation are focal points in Moses Ibn Ezra's poetry. The Spanish Hebrew poets were versatile; even when Ibn Ezra was bitter and dejected, his mood neither impeded his great poetic sense nor undermined his poetry (Schirrmann, 1951:218).

This lament has power to alleviate despair through its belief that the bereaved will see their loved ones again in the world to come.

YEHUDAH HALEVI

c. 1075-1141

a) HISTORICAL SETTING

Yehudah Halevi was born at a time when the Jewish population was caught between two warring enemies, Christian and Muslim Spain. This and the invasion of Granada by the fanatic Almoravids influenced his life and his world view. Once religious warfare got on the way, particularly after Christianity's reconquest of Spain, the position of the Jews deteriorated. Halevi recognized the complete hopelessness of the situation of the Jews and portrayed it in his poems.

b) ABOUT THE POET

Yehudah Halevi is one of the few poets in this section about whom we possess biographical details, not only from his written work but also from letters found in the Cairo Genizah and from information from Moses Ibn Ezra, and Abraham Ibn Ezra.

He lived c.1075-1141. He was probably born into a wealthy and learned family in Muslim Tudela¹³ on the borders of Christian Spain. He received a thorough Hebrew and Arabic education and like the other Jewish poets, was strongly influenced by Arabic culture, elements of which he ingeniously assimilated.

He studied in various Jewish colleges in Andalusia where he met his life-long friend Moses ibn Ezra in Granada, and attended the Academy of Isaac al-Fasi (known as the Rif) in Lucena. After completing his studies there he settled in Toledo, the capital of Castile under Alfonso VI, where he successfully practised medicine and was consulted by the court of Alfonso.

When Halevi's benefactor Solomon ibn Ferrizuel, a Jewish nobleman in Alfonso's court, was killed by Christian soldiers in 1108, Halevi had to set aside the elaborate poem of celebration he was preparing for Ferrizuel's expected return from an important mission, and compose in its place a long official elegy.

When the Jews in Toledo were attacked the following year, he moved to Cordova (Carmi, 1981:106) in Mohammedan Spain.

¹³ not the better-known Toledo, where he later settled

Halevi was a philosopher and poet and wrote about 800 poems on the subjects traditionally dealt with in Spain which included nature, love, wine, significant events, commissioned and uncommissioned laments. His poems describe his travels in Spain and different countries, his status in the community, the people he met, and his spiritual development.

He was particularly known for his "Zionist" poems of passionate longing for Zion, "for the celebration of Jerusalem in song". These poems are known as "Zionides". He longed for the redemption of his people through *Aliyah*, not as an escape from suffering but as a goal which would bring the time of the coming of the Messiah closer, the return of the *Shekhinah* and also the exiles, and thence the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the land. Redemption to Halevi is an important solution to the Jewish national problem. To Halevi, the life of the nation can never be complete in exile. This belief is one of the most characteristic themes (Goldstein, 1965:117) in his poems in the *Diwan* and in his philosophical dialogue, the *Kuzari*.¹⁴

At that time there was a movement called Mourners of Zion, *Aveilei Zion*, who encouraged their followers to go to Israel where they could mourn the destruction of Jerusalem and the loss of a Jewish state.

They would lament at the Wailing Wall (the Western Wall), the last remnant of what remained of the Holy Temple, and what is referred to in German as the *Klage Mauer*, the "Wall of Mourning".

The *Aveilei Zion*, Mourners of Zion, became an important component of Jewish mourning practices. They are referred to upon the entry of mourners into the synagogue and at the end of a visit to the house of mourning in the following prayer "May the Almighty comfort you among the other mourners for Zion and Jerusalem". This prayer of comfort is also said at the conclusion of a Jewish funeral service, and on *Tishah'B'Av* in the *Shmoneh Esreh* prayer, a special petition is inserted which opens with these words: "Comfort, L--d our G-d, the mourners for Zion and the mourners for Jerusalem."

¹⁴ About 700 years later, in the 19th century, Heinrich Heine was inspired by Halevi's works and wrote an unforgettable reconstruction of his life, "The epitome of the woeful and heroic history of Israel" in "Hebrew Melodies" (1851), (Ewen, 1948:44).

Birnbaum wrote that these “Mourners for Zion” having emerged from darkness into light, out of mourning into festivity, are an inseparable segment of the *Yishuv*, the Jewish settlement in Israel (1979:549).

A contemporary of Halevi, Sahl ben Mazliah, wrote that “Jerusalem at this time was a haven for all who fled, a comfort for all mourners...wherein resided dirge singers and eulogizers in Hebrew, Persian and Arabic” (Beinart, 1992:33). Such a dirge singer and eulogizer was Yehudah Halevi.

He was seized with a burning passion for Palestine and travelled there via Egypt and composed many sea-songs while aboard ship. He became ill in Egypt and never reached the Holy Land. Legend, however, tells that he was killed at the Wailing Wall by a hostile Muslim on arrival while he was reciting “Ode to Zion”.

Halevi’s Zionides form part of the *Ashkenazi Tishah B'Av* services. I have selected *Libi V'Mizrach* from the Zionides as it is possibly the best known.

Libi V'Mizrach

c) ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE

This poem is a short lyric, monorhymed (aa,ba,ca) of *qasida* form with two symmetrical hemistiches (half-lines of the verses). It is monothematic (the theme of longing for Zion). An example is

Libi V'mizrach, v'a'no'khi b'sof ma'a'rav.

The title of the poem *Libi V'mizrach* tells the reader the content. It is to be understood that he is in the west and yearning to be in the east, for that is where his heart is.

d) THEME

This poem *Libi V'mizrach* focuses on Zion; to reach Jerusalem in the east, is the poet-speaker's sole heart's desire. He laments that he cannot get there, and may never get there, and he laments over the destruction of Zion, at the same time craving passionately to see the adored holy ruins: *Y'kar b'einai r'ot afrot d'vir necherav*. He has mixed feelings: intense love for Jerusalem and grief at her destruction. He can enjoy nothing in life; nothing has a taste: what he eats has no taste; how can anything be sweet

when he is so far from glorious Jerusalem? And not only that, but Zion is *b'chevel Edom* in the hands of the enemy, (the Crusaders, as a result of their victory in 1099) while he is *b'khevel Arav*, (in the iron chains of Islam, Arabic Spain.) The poet speaks of leaving behind "all the good things of Spain."

Motifs : There are recurrent motifs like the "heart longing theme, "east and west"¹⁵; the conquest by enemies; the love of the Israeli stones and dust and the desolate ruins of the shrines.

Contrast : There is a tension between love and pain, between the reality and the dream, and the hiatus between east and west - not only the geographical location of east and west, and the religious connotation of Jerusalem in the east, but the place of sunrise and joy, compared to the place of sunset and dark and the evening of life. There is a strong intellectual argument, overcome by personal feeling and sorrow. Spain is an enticement, a country of home and culture, but not so strong as the desire to see "the dust of the ruined shrines", *afrot d'vir necherav*.

Alliteration : The alliteration in the last line with the letter *resh* helps to unify the poem, as that letter is carried through in the rhyming at the end of four lines of the poem, *ma'a'rav, ye'erav, arav, necherav*.

Enjambement : At the end of lines 3 and 6, with the words *b'od* and *k'mo*, the enjambement emphasizes the lines that follow, namely the east and west situation, and the desire to see the dust(s) of the ruined shrines, *afrot d'vir necherav*.

Rhetorical Devices : In lines 2 and 3, the words "How shall I taste...?" and "How shall I enjoy it?" are rhetorical questions. As noted in *Hayam Beini Uveinekha* by Hanagid, questions are typical openings to laments and are designed to arouse the reader's sympathy.

Lament words : The onomatopoeic words *Eich* and *Eichah* occur frequently in lament poetry as in the Book of Lamentations. In line 2 *eich* is repeated, and in the word *okhal* the *okh* is close in sound to *eich*. Line 3 says *Eichah ashaleim n'darai ve'esarai...?*

Metaphors : Zion and Spain respectively are described in terms of something else, namely *B'chevel Edom* and *B'khevel Arav*. The poet-speaker is unhappy because he is

¹⁵Also in *Zion, halo tish'ali*

tied down "by the chains of Muslim country", and Zion, where he wants to be, is "in a strip of enemy country".

Paronomasia : There is a play on the words *chevel* and *khevel*, words of the same sound with different meanings.

Hyperbole : In Arabic poetry hyperbole, extravagance and exaggeration are regarded as praiseworthy poetic elements but in this case, the style suits the context. One is aware of desire and languishing for Zion throughout the poem. The poet cannot enjoy life:

Libi V'mizrach, v'anokhi b'sof ma'arav -

Eich et'ama et asher okhal v'eich ye'e'rav?

His heart is in the east and he is at the very end of the west. It appears as an exaggeration or hyperbole but that is how he feels; he feels the rift. He is most unhappy and grieves because of his inability to be in Zion.

e) **ALLUSION TO OTHER SOURCES**

Vows : *Eichah ashaleim n'darai ve'esarai...?* "How shall I fulfill my vows...?" The poet-speaker had made a vow to leave Spain and go to Jerusalem. This was a solemn matter (Num,- 30:2ff) "How can I taste what I eat and how will it be pleasant to me?" *Eikh et'ama eit asher okhal v'eikh ye'e'rav?* in line 2, connects with line 3, concerning verbal vows, i.e. vows made with the lips. In other words the poet-speaker is implying that he cannot concentrate on oral pleasures while his vow is unfulfilled. This also alludes to Job 34:3 *V'cheich yit'am le'ekhol* (also Job 12:11), the "mouth (or palate) tastes what it eats."

Cheich is similar in sound to the lamenting word *eich*. The *ye'erav*, "to be sweet", in line 2, could also mean "to be responsible for", hence referring to the "vows" which have been made, namely to go to Zion.

Biblical phrases : Biblical allusions are important elements in Spanish poetry as are Koranic allusions in Arabic poetry (Fleisher, 1994:42). In this poem Biblical phrases are used to enhance the meaning of the poem, and there are layers within layers.

f) **EXPRESSING THE FEELINGS**

As was common in this period, Yehudah Halevi combined an intellectual structuring of the poem with an expression of genuine emotion. The poem, describing symptoms of depression, is technically evolved and polished and springs from the heart. The poet can enjoy nothing in life, not even eating. Lack of appetite and the inability to get pleasure out of life are recognized symptoms of depressive illness.

The Canadian poet A.M. Klein (1951:92-94), who translated Bialik's *Be'ir Hahareigah*, described how he joined "the venerable elders of Jerusalem as they went forth on the eve of *Tishah B'Av* to weep on mount Zion. In mournful broken singsong they read from the archaic *Zionides* of Rabbi Yehudah Halevi and from the Lamentations, and their voices were almost female with pathos" This is a description of how the poem tuned into the feelings of the mournful elders.

g) **FAITH IN REDEMPTION THROUGH THE RETURN TO ZION**

This is a short lament expressing not only the unfulfilled desire of the poet, but also the poignant anguish of the nation over the fallen city, as in the Sumerian lament over the destruction of the fallen city of Ur. To the Jews lamenting for the destroyed city is not limited to a single day, and much of Jewish life is marked by a continual mourning. The destroyed Temple is even remembered on a wedding day. As the Psalmist said "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its cunning" (Ps 137:5).

To Yehudah Halevi redemption through *Aliyah* was an important solution to the Jewish national problem and Zion was the central part of his life. In *Libi V'mizrach* he dreams of Zion. To Halevi the life of the nation could never be complete in exile (Waxman, 1938:230,231).

In this poem Halevi expresses the feelings many Jews had of longing for a Jewish homeland in Israel. This longing, kept alive for centuries by countless oppressed Jews, fed the fires of Zionism and culminated in the creation of a state of Israel in 1948. He uses his poetic abilities to express feelings shared by many Jews. Recognizing where the heart is sets one on the voyage to fulfilment, as Yehudah Halevi himself did.

h) CONCLUSION

The beauty of this lament has been compared by the Israeli poet Sadan (1970) to the Book of Lamentations... and the laments *Rehovot Hanahar* by Greenberg on the Holocaust (Lindenbaum, 1997:110). I feel that Sadan's praise is a little extreme in his comparison. It is not practical to compare the short poem of Halevi with five chapters of the Book of Lamentations and almost four hundred pages of *Rehovot Hanahar*.

However this lament with its strong message of a hope for redemption through the return to Zion has had strong reverberations through the centuries because its message alleviated despair. It impressed the nineteenth century English writer George Eliot who in *Daniel Deronda* made her hero Mordechai quote "My Heart is in the East" from *Libi V'mizrach* in an impassioned speech (1964:359).

It has become part of the *Tishah B'Av* service because of the comfort it provides after having read the Book of Lamentations which has described the destruction of Zion and gives a positive message of redemption and return.

LAMENTS IN THE BEGINNING OF THE MODERN WORLD

FROM THE GOLDEN AGE OF SPAIN TO BIALIK

Hebrew poetry has been divided into the Biblical and medieval periods which we have been discussing and the modern period during which the laments about to be discussed were created.

The medieval period includes the *Mishnaic* and *Talmudic* period (100 BCE - 500 CE), the Byzantine period (500-800 CE), Moslem Spain (10th - 12th centuries), Christian Spain (1200 -1492 C E) and the period of Italian poetry (Spicehandler, 1993:501). The poetry of pre-modern *Ashkenazi* Jewry was almost totally religious, but the assaults and massacres of Jews by the Crusaders en route to the Holy Land resulted in the composition of many dirges, in which the theme of the *akedah* - the sacrifice of Isaac - frequently occurred and was used as a symbol of martyrdom. The *akedah* became a particular genre of martyrological poetry and is exemplified by Ephraim of Bonn's *Akedah*, (12th century) (Spicehandler, 1993:506) and the *Netaneh Tokef* attributed to Amnon of Mainz (10th century).

Pre-modern intellectual Jewish life in Central and Eastern Europe was focused on Biblical or Talmudical study and little original work apart from religious commentary was tolerated by the community until the rise of the *Haskalah* movement in the 1770's. The *Haskalah* was an offshoot of the ideas of the Enlightenment which was sweeping through Europe. The *Maskilim*, the promoters of the *Haskalah* movement, placed greater emphasis on modernization of Jewish life, assimilation into the wider world and exposure to its culture, its literature and its education. Secular books were translated into Hebrew and Yiddish, "Hebrew became a vehicle for secular and professional scientific expression" (Slutzky, 1971:1440) and Hebrew poetry was composed "to prove that poetry of distinction could be written in Hebrew" (Spicehandler, 1993:507). By the end of the nineteenth century Hebrew poetry of distinction and significance had been developed.

HISTORICAL SETTING

In 19th century Tsarist Russia, life for the Jews was one of "implacable hostility" and they were treated as "unacceptable aliens" (Johnson, 1987:358). Under Alexander II (1855-1881) there had been an attempt to modernize Russia and schools and universities were opened to Jews who flocked to them, immersing themselves in Russian language and literature which flourished under their pens. However, "the achievements of the Jew in Russian literature ... are poor indeed compared with his success in the domain of Hebrew" (Raisin, 1949:145). In this atmosphere of promise and enlightenment there was an outpouring of work in Hebrew by the enlightened Jews, the *Maskilim*; poetry, novels, scientific and historical works, as well as Hebrew newspapers *Hatzfirah*, *Hatzofeh* and *Haz'man* were published (Slutsky, 1971:455).

Unfortunately the modernization of Russia led to unacceptable demands by the populace and a growth in the revolutionary movements, which resulted in a tightening up by the State in which the Jews received the blame. After the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, the doors to liberalization shut tight and the plight of the Jew became intolerable with numerous legal restrictions of a discriminatory and antisemitic nature, leading to massive Jewish impoverishment. Under Alexander's successor, Nicholas I, pogroms became State policy, which in the words of the Tsar's tutor Pobyedonostseff, was calculated to "force one third (of the Jews) to emigrate, another third to embrace Christianity and the remainder to die of starvation" (Raisin, 1949:164). Pogroms against the Jews provided convenient safety valves to distract popular dissatisfaction against the status quo and divert it on to the Jews.

One such pogrom took place in Kishinev, the provincial capital of Bessarabia in 1903, in which 49 Jews were killed, 500 injured and 2000 families left homeless.

This was precipitated by the discovery of the body of a Christian child, and the death by suicide of a Christian woman in a Jewish hospital.

These events were adequate "reasons" to blame the Jews. Agents of the Ministry of the Interior and high Russian officials of the Bessarabian administration planned the attack. Russians, Rumanians and students from theological seminaries and colleges participated.

The garrison of 5000 soldiers stationed in the city took no action in holding back the mob. It was later established that the Jews were innocent of the charges against them. (Lavi, 1972:1064,1065). The silence of their erstwhile Russian intellectual associates, and their acquiescence in the pogroms and harsh laws, led to enormous disillusionment among the *Maskilim* who now turned to Hebrew as synonymous of nationalism "and every Hebrew writer became *ipso facto* regarded as an advocate and upholder of the ideal of national regeneration" (Raisin, 1949:172).

By the end of the century Russia was in the throes of a struggle for liberation and constitutionalism and many Jews sympathized with the fighters for reformist democracy. The failing Czarist system and its supporters identified the revolutionaries with the Jews, and did their best to distract the attention of the people away from the prevailing abuses and to screen their own activities by stirring up anti-Jewish feeling and blaming the Jews for the country's troubles including the attempted Revolution in 1903. Many were arrested and shot and others were sent for long prison terms to the wastelands of Siberia. Many others emigrated to America, Palestine or wherever they could find refuge.

Those who went to Palestine formed five distinctive groups. The First *Aliyah* (1882-1903) consisted of small groups who established the early *moshav* settlements. The Second *Aliyah* (1904-1914) was the *Aliyah* that was responsible for starting the new Hebrew Press and Hebrew literature. They were pioneers and worked as hired labourers and their motto came from a popular song "We have come to *Eretz Yisrael* to build and be rebuilt", *livnot ul'hivanot* (Schweid, 1976:100).

The post-War Third *Aliyah* (1919-1923) had many young pioneers who worked on road building. The Fourth *Aliyah* (1924-1928) were mainly middle class Poles who settled in the cities. The Fifth *Aliyah* (1929-1939) arrived as Nazism was tightening its grip and included many from Germany. The writers were born in Eastern Europe; when they moved to Palestine, they wrote poetry in Hebrew instead of in Yiddish, their mother tongue.

CHAIM NACHMAN BIALIK

1873-1934

a) ABOUT THE POET

Bialik was born in 1873 in Radi, in the province of Volhynia, where his scholarly father oversaw leased lands and woods.

As the eighth and youngest child in a poor family, Chaim Nachman was left to his dreams and devices and an exploration of the world of nature. When he was five years old, his family moved to a suburb in Zhitomir, which had a large Jewish community, where his father became a tavern keeper. When Bialik was 7, his father died and the young boy was sent to live with his strict and pious grandfather. By the age of eleven he was reading medieval works of philosophy and mysticism as well as stories and novels (Efros, 1948:2).

At sixteen, he attended the famous *yeshiva* of Volozhin. After two years he went to Odessa where in 1892 he published his first poem, *El Hatzipor*. After his marriage in 1893, he worked as a forest merchant in Korostishov and then as a Hebrew teacher in Sosnovitz, while continuing to publish passionate and stylistically modelled Hebrew poems and stories, eg *Aryeh Ba'al Guf*, *Mei'achorei Hagadeir* and *Hachatzotz'rah Shenit'ba'y'shah*, the autobiographical prose poem *Safi'ach* and the prose poem *Megillat Ha'eish*.

The publication of his first long poem *Hamatmid* "the Eternal Student" in the periodical *Hashiloach* established him as the outstanding Hebrew poet of his time.

Bialik returned to Odessa in 1900. Together with his friends Ravnitzky, Ben-Zion and Lewinsky he established the publishing house *Moriah* for the publication of school-books, and edited poetry and fiction for the important monthly *Hashilo'ach*.

When the news of the Kishinev tragedy became known, Bialik was commissioned to investigate by the Union of Hebrew writers, consisting of Ahad Ha-am, Simon Dubnow, Ben-Ami and Ravnitzky (Roskies, 1988:156-159).

Bialik's task was to bring back a detailed report of what he found, so that plans could be made to prevent such catastrophes in future. In the Bialik archives there is a letter to Bialik from Dubnow, the chairperson of the Historical Commission, written on 24th July 1903, giving him instructions. These included having to attend the court cases during the inquiry, record lists of names of the dead, consult nurses and doctors, sound out the wounded, record with photographs, consider the damage perpetrated in synagogues and communal places, record rapes, gather evidence concerning the complicity of the authorities, compile statistics and see what defence measures had been taken by the Jews. Lachower found records which showed that the long report which Bialik wrote was never published. (1944:425). The night before he left for Kishinev, Bialik wrote his poem, *Al Ha'shechitah*.

After 1905 and his Kishinev exposure he became more active in public affairs, devoting his abundant vigour, vision, and charm to the preservation and advancement of Jewish culture. He participated in Zionist Congresses (1907, 1913, 1921 and 1931) and the Congress for Hebrew Language and Culture (1913).

In 1921, he moved to Berlin¹, and in 1924 to Palestine, where he continued his cultural missions promoting Jewish culture and working for the Hebrew University as President of the Hebrew Writers' Union and of the Hebrew Language Council (Spicehandler, 1971:801).

Bialik's works have appeared in numerous editions. His letters have been published in five volumes and his recorded speeches in two volumes. He translated Don Quixote, Wilhelm Tell, Shakespeare and the Yiddish play *Der Dybbuk* into Hebrew, edited the poems of Gabirol and Moses Ibn Ezra and began a commentary on the *Mishnah*. This constituted a re-linking of Hebrew literature to its sources and a safe-guarding of the literary treasures for the generations to come. He was known as the national poet and the voice of the people.

¹ He was one of a group of writers who were permitted to leave the Soviet Union, thanks to the intervention of Maxim Gorky, the pro-Lenin Russian writer and champion of the oppressed Jewish people in Russia.

Without doubt Bialik laid bare the collective experience of eastern European Jewry in the early twentieth century. That collective experience increasingly became the basis of Jewish existence in most countries of the Diaspora.

In later years, he was the uncrowned leader of all whose Jewish consciousness was a factor in their lives. His judgment and opinion were accepted as authoritative, and he was seen both as a poet of renascence as well as a poet of destruction (Shaked, 1985:20,29).

He expressed the inner struggles of a generation concerned about its attitude to Jewish tradition. His name became a symbol for Hebrew culture, and he was considered its representative (Waxman, 1947:221,226 iv). His dominant theme is the crisis of faith which confronted his generation as it broke with the sheltered and confined Jewish religious culture yet desperately sought to hold onto a Jewish way of life and thought in the new secularized world. His poetry can be read on three levels; the individual, the Jewish and the universal.

Bialik died in Vienna in 1934, where he had gone for medical treatment (Carmi, 1981:133). Seldom did a poet attain such eminence in Jewry, or as much wide-spread influence in his own lifetime as he did.

Three poems of Bialik are discussed in this thesis. These are *Al Ha'shechitah*, *Im Shamesh* and *Be'ir Hahareigah*. These constitute a cycle, all three having been written as a response to the Kishinev pogrom, a dark moment in Jewish history.

I have chosen to include these poems because they demonstrate a watershed in the writing of laments. Traditional expressions of grief and conventional belief in theodicy and the vindication of G-d's justice are no longer adequate. The poet is not trying to appease the mourners, but is expressing anger at the mourners for allowing the tragedy to happen. This is the first time since David that the poet has not been prepared to accept the Jew's passivity and martyrdom, but like David urges the people "to learn the bow", to fight back.

That the act of writing in itself alleviates distress and that the poet would have gained comfort by pouring out his feelings of the festering sore of rage can be clearly seen

through these poems. By the end of the Kishinev cycle, it is obvious that Bialik is feeling calmer and is seeing some light.

University of Cape Town

“*Al Ha’shechitah*”

b) INTRODUCTION

Although these are not typical poems in the lament genre, I believe that they are definitely laments and that they draw particular strength from their subversive style. We find the “Kubler-Ross” stages of coming to terms with loss in them: in *Be’ir Hahareigah* feelings of denial are expressed, feelings of rage, feelings of impotence, feelings of depression and conflict as in the lines:

Rise, to the desert flee!
The cup of affliction thither bear with thee!
Take thou thy soul, rend it in many a shred!
With impotent rage, thy heart deform!
Thy tear upon the barren boulders shed!
And send thy bitter cry into the storm!

In *Al Ha’shechitah* there is a clear denial of G-d’s existence. G-d is not to be found in the heavens. It is clear that these poems are not laments in the traditional sense. In speaking of *Al Ha’shechitah*, Daiches (1974:18) says, “the tone goes far beyond mourning into agony and violence”. I agree with him. The same applies to *Be’ir Hahareigah*, and this anger is stronger than mourning, turning the poem into what could be termed a translament,² which, together with the stages mentioned above and that of acceptance in *Im Shamesh*, has intense power.

There can be little doubt that translaments have validity as a form of coming to terms with a national catastrophe. This is recognized in the most recent book of Holocaust poetry which is called “Beyond Laments : Poets of the World bearing Witness to the Holocaust” (Striar, 1998).

Bialik represents the lamentation tradition in transition. He is no longer strictly bound to the religious authorities or the past formulas and his laments are more complex than the traditional laments that came before him. It is clear that Bialik writes in quite a new

² Mintz speaks of “transironic” in the sense of beyond irony (1984:142)

way from his predecessors. Previous generations of lamenters wrote that they had sinned and were therefore punished, or considered that it was a privilege granted to them by G-d that they should suffer. Bialik's attitude was different; he saw the sinning as inadequate resistance and lack of self defence. Bialik's Kishinev poems, reaffirms Ezrahi, (1982: 102) are far more complex than the traditional *kinot* not only in their theodicy but also in their exploration of the responses of the victims. Bialik indeed found it unacceptable that his people should have accepted their fate when they should have retaliated and fought back. He registered his protest not by a retreat from but by subtle inversions of the traditional responses to catastrophe. By retaining the familiar symbols and constructs yet altering their form and significance, Bialik succeeded in conveying the ambiguities and complexities of a new spiritual reality while satisfying the community's need for the event to be memorialized in poetic form because in the words of Striar (1998:xxii) "Poetry is not only necessary, but can be subversive in the way it poses a challenge to the status quo of ideas".

Sarcasm and satire can be necessary to shock people into action. The situation at Kishinev was a mammoth death situation, and it is difficult to find words to express such shock and therefore the only thing to do was to subvert. Bialik's lamenting was inherent in the very act of writing, and in this writing there was thought for the future, to console and comfort the people that there could be a better future, and thus to alleviate the pain and despair of the present.

These poems were written as a result of his mission to report on the Kishinev massacre. *Al Ha'shechitah* was written the night before he left for the disaster area. When Bialik wrote *Im Shamesh* a month later, at Kishinev, he had calmed down considerably and said, "Let G-d live". The latter poem was regarded by Adi Zemach as a sequel to *Al Ha'shechitah*. *Be'ir Hahareigah* was written over a period of three months after the catastrophe.

c) LITERARY ANALYSIS

Theme : The theme is the slaughter of the innocents at Kishinev. This is a spontaneous poem with short lines containing combinations of cries and shouts and expressions of flaming, angry, lyrical pathos.

d) ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE

Mood : The poet speaks with an enraged prophetic voice. He is angry. He indicts G-d and the people. He does not ask for G-d's help. He ends with a curse. The poem is on the brink of blasphemy.

Play on Words : The title is a manipulation of the blessing said on the slaughter of animals. Here it concerns the murder of the people in the city and at the same time is a grotesque play on words:

The speaker-prophet seeks G-d, but G-d cannot be found. He tries the heavens, in case G-d is to be found there, but since he cannot find him, he asks the heavens to pray for him and to seek mercy for him. He cannot pray, for his heart is dead; he cannot even mouth the words. He has no strength and no hope and proclaims:- *Ad-matai? ad-ana, ad-matai?*

Rhyme : *La'netzach, la'netzach* (line 14) rhymes with *retzach* in line 12 (murder, for ever).

Bialik is effective in his rhyming. In all four verses, the first and fourth lines rhyme, the second and third, and the fifth and seventh; in verse 1 - abbaaca; in verse 2 - deedfgf; in verse 3 - ghhgiji; in verse 4 - kllkmnm.

e) USE OF LANGUAGE

Image and sound : There are strong words and powerful images: *Orfeini kakelev, l'kha z'ro'a im kardom, v'khol ha'aretz li gardom, hach kodkod, vi'zaneik dam retzach*.

These are fierce onomatopoeic sounds: the *k*'s in *kum, kakelev, kardom* and the '*g*' in *gardom*. The term *hakh kodkod* is quick and incisive and it reflects the sarcastic cutting tone of the poem.³ Used here the poem is highly subversive.

³ See Sanhedrin 8: *Tol makeil v'hakh al-kodkodam*.

In the poem we have, "The blood of nurslings and old men, will spurt onto your clothes, and will never, never be wiped off." The word *yi'mach* is used. This word is used in connection with *Amalek*, the prototype arch enemy, who had to be exterminated (Ex 17:14) and connotes a curse.

The questions in *Ad-matai? ad-ana, ad-matai* bring to mind the mourning sounds which reinforce the association with the lament.

Words of Hate : After the terrible things that have happened, the poet cannot pray, and he asks the heavens to pray for him, if there be a G-d in heaven.

There is no answer from Heaven, so he calls to the killers: *Hatalyan! Hei tzavar - kum sh'chat! / Arfeini kakelev, l'kha z'ro'a im kardom v'khol ha'aretz li gardom- / Va'anachnu - anachnu ha'm'at!*

"Executioner! Here is my neck - kill! / break my neck like a dog's, you have the power and the axe.⁴ / For the whole earth is an executioner's block to me, / And we, we are the few."

Dami mutar - hakh kodkod, vizaneik dam retzach, / Dam yoneik vasav al ku'tont'kha / V'lo yimach lanetzach, lanetzach. "Shedding my blood is permitted. Strike the crown of the head and let the blood gush forth in murder, / Blood of babe and old man on your shirt, / And it will never be wiped out, never, ever".⁵

Words of Scepticism : Not only are there words of hate, but also words of scepticism. In the third verse, the speaker says, "If there is justice, let it show itself at once!" "But if there is justice" is akin to "if there is a G-d in you..." "But if justice shows itself after I have been destroyed from beneath the skies - let its throne be hurled down forever!" The word *hishmadi* ties up with *yi'mach* "Let the blood not be blotted out forever" - and let heaven rot, *shamayim yimaku*, with eternal evil of the world. "Heaven rotting" is a confirmation of the overall destruction.

Words of Contempt : "Let justice's throne be hurled down forever!" Justice's throne can only be G-d's throne, - the speaker cannot find G-d and his heart is dead. There is no G-d and there is no justice or heaven or mercy in the world. The word "forever", *la'ad*,

⁴ "You have the power and the axe" is a far cry from the Biblical counterpart Ps (89:14) *L'kha zro'a im-g'vura*, "You have the power and the strength".

⁵ Translation by Daiches in "The Valley of Tears and Dover Beach".

is similar to the repeated *lanetzach, lanetzach*. There will be no world, there will be nothing - only extermination and extinction. The hypothetical "*Im yeish...Ei-l...*" (line 2) and *V'im yeish tzedek - yofi'a miyad* (line 15) ("If there is a G-d and if there is justice, let them appear immediately") is effective rhetorically in conveying the derisive answer, "There is none!"

Words of Power

The poem is replete with invectives, imperatives and expletives. The exclamation marks in the poem stand out. They are an understatement of the malediction. There is damnation.

All are damned, the heavens, G-d, Justice; also "a person who says 'avenge' is cursed," *V'arur ha'omeir: N'kom!* The evil-doers are cursed in their violence and cruelty: *U'v'dimkhem chayu v'hinaku*. It is possible the speaker first thought the murderers should be destroyed, but he then changed his mind, realizing that revenge was no return payment for the deaths of helpless babes and the aged.

"Live and be cleansed" or "thrive" as Roskies says, or "be destroyed"; whatever the translation, ultimately all would perish, the blood would consume the abyss and the rotting foundations of the earth. The astute speaker says even Satan could not devise a suitable revenge that would measure up to the crime. In *V'arur ha'o'meir: n'kom!* and in the last two verses of the poem, the alliteration and assonance bring about an onomatopoeia sounding of curse and doom.

N'kom relates sonally with *kardom* and *gardom* and *t'hom*. These three metaphors for the unkind world, the "chopper", the "executioner's block" and the "deep abyss", rhyme with each other and strengthen each other in their association with cruelty and death.

Allusion to other Sources

The world will be far worse than *tohu vavohu v'choshekh al pnei t'hom* as we read in Genesis 1:2; its rotting foundations will be filtrated with blood. The poem states *Yikov hadam et hat'hom!* and repeats *yikov hadam ad t'homot machashakim*. This takes us back to *Yevamot* 92a, *Yikov hadin et hahar* (the law must be strictly adhered to, without any preferential treatment). In other words it is implied that the whole accursed lot should perish.

Even Justice's throne has no escape. *Y'mugar na kis'o la'ad!*⁶ His throne is destroyed forever. The situation is fraught with terror, *m'gura*⁷ and more so with anger. The last lines of Bialik's poem have a dreadful image of the blood of the slain ones devouring the rotting foundations of the earth.

The words in the exclamation *Ad-matai, ad-anah, ad-matai?* (line 7) is reminiscent of certain Psalms. For instance in Ps13:3 there is *ad-ana* and again *ad ana*, "How long shall I take counsel in my soul, / having sorrow in my heart by day? / How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?" Variants of the sound of *ana* occur in the forms of *aneini* and *einai* in verse Psalm 13:4. All these sounds reinforce the *ad-ana*'s in these Biblical verses. All of these sounds also reinforce the *ad-ana* and *ad-matai* in Bialik's poem and emphasize the "sorrow in the heart" in addition the exaltation of the enemies over the Jews throughout history.

f) EXPRESSING FEELINGS

One of Kubler Ross's stages of coming to terms with loss is anger. This is an angry poem. The poet is angry with G-d, and is angry with the people. He uses strong words and powerful images to give vent to his feelings. He expresses feelings of denial, denial of G-d's existence. He expresses feelings of bitterness, of depression and of impotence.

g) FAITH AND PRAYER

Even though the poet is so angry, he still approaches G-d. Although he has difficulty praying, he asks the heavens to pray for him if there be a G-d in heaven. He cannot find G-d and his heart is dead, and he doubts that there is a G-d or justice in the world. Many bereaved people respond to their loss by turning away from G-d because they feel if there were a G-d, their tragedy would not have occurred. This response has been

⁶ Ps (89:45) *V'khiso la'aretz migarta* See also: Kallir, *Piyyutim* (699). Moses Ibn Ezra, *Ma'afeil layil mugar adei ad* implying destruction. Also the word, *t'mugeir* is found in the thirteenth *b'rachah* of the daily *Shemoneh Esrei*, *V'lamalshinim*

⁷ Jer (46:5). *Magor misaviv*, an expression also frequently used by Greenberg in his anthology *Rechovot Hanahar*

noted in many Holocaust survivors. But it is a valid response and by acknowledging these feelings Bialik tunes into the feelings of many readers, thus providing a catharsis.

h) CONCLUSION

Bialik's verbal onslaught had an influence on the Jewish youth and inspired them to action. This influence is strongly shown in the autobiography of the Zionist leader, Shmarya Levin, who mentions that: "in a poem of rage and misery ... Bialik poured forth the anger of the Jewish people against the pogrom hooligans, against itself, and against its own God. It is one of the most remarkable utterances in all literature. For, with the impartiality of utter despair, it spares neither the Jews nor their God; for the former it has the name of beggars, and G-d is referred to as "a pauper G-d".

These angry poems had results - "like a flash, Bialik's poem travelled from end to end of Jewish Russia and everywhere the Jews learned it by heart" (Levin, 1932:253).

In spite of many scholars claiming that *Al Ha'Shechitah* is a negative, desperate poem, in my opinion this is a superficial reading, because the mere fact that he is motivated to put pen to paper, to vent his anger for posterity, is in itself an act of lamenting and preserving those feelings in writing. In spite of the words, the act of writing indicates the positive belief, as slight as it is, in the future.

This poem does not alleviate despair, but by expressing strong anger it does help to ventilate feelings many Jews have and the act of seeing one's feelings mirrored in a poem has power to help.

“*Im Shamesh*”

I have chosen *Im Shamesh* without including an analysis simply to show the positive view of Bialik in the face of disaster.

Bialik wrote *Im Shamesh*, an optimistic poem, on the Kishinev massacre, (24th Sivan 1903) a month after he wrote *Al Ha'shechitah* (Iyar 1903). As discussed in my thesis, the act of writing is therapeutic for people in shock and grieving and helps them to come to terms with the loss. This can be clearly seen in *Im Shamesh*. When he first confronted the tragedy, Bialik in *Al Ha'shechitah* poured out his anger against G-d for allowing the pogrom to happen. *Im Shamesh*, unlike other laments, is bathed in light. It is clearly a section of the Kishinev poems, as we see from the inscription of place and date. His pain has been alleviated and he is finding light and comfort and *Im Shamesh* is the light in the cycle.

The three Kishinev poems are closely related; they are as one poem with three distinct sections:

- *Al Ha'shechitah* is a poem of curses and apocalyptic rage; the title is based on a blessing which is inverted, and the heavens are blasphemed.
- *Im Shamesh* carries a positive message; Bialik is now trying to bring comfort, hope and inner strength to his readers. “There is place for hope - hope!” This is his message.
- The poem *Be'ir Hahareigah* is a double matter of adjustment: a) the people must learn how to act, and b) the poet-prophet must learn how to cope with his own mounting crisis.

The three sections, when considered as a unit, point to a message of encouragement on the part of the poet, that when all seems lost there is still hope. Clearly he is lamenting the disaster of Kishinev, wanting to help his people to be relieved of their distress, while at the same time instructing them to take up a positive attitude for the future.

The last lines of *Al Ha'shechitah* are :

*Yikov hadam ad t'homot meichashakim,
v'a'khal bachoshekh v'chatar sham*

Kol mosdot ha'aretz ha'n'makim.

"Let the blood seep down to the depths of darkness,
and eat away there, in the dark, and breach all
the rotting foundations of the earth"

The last lines of verse 1 of *Im Shamesh* are

Ho, n'makei hachoshekh u'r'keivei ha'amesh,

Hitpa'llu la-shemesh, la-shamesh!

Ho, the rot of the darkness

-n'makei hachoshekh

and repeats again, for the sake of accentuation and acceleration, the words "and the rotting darkness" - *u'r'keivei ha'amesh*. Therefore both poems speak of the "rotten darkness", using similar words and other reinforcing words with the same meaning and motif.

Addressing the darkness, *Im Shamesh* (Verse 1, line 13,14) continues *n'ma'kei hachoshekh* and *r'keivei ha'emes*h, "you must go and seek the good healing gold," and, "if your eye does not see the light," (third verse), "you must create the light of the sun out of nothing" (verse 3).

It is interesting that this poem, a Kishinev poem, begins and ends (as does the title) with the light of the sun, according to Bialik mythopoeia, the *or haganuz*, the "light of the seven days of creation" (Zemach, 1988:309).

In his poems *Al Ha'shechitah* and *Be'ir Hahareigah*, Bialik is trying to motivate the Jews to be proactive and to take active steps to defend themselves. His message is loud, clear and angry. Do not peddle the bones of one's depression. Do not be a passive victim. Take action and prevent such horrors from happening again. Like David's lament, in which the poet tells his people that they must learn to shoot, Bialik is trying to motivate his people to learn self defence. Bialik tries to do this by shocking his readers by relating what he observed in Kishinev when he visited after the pogrom. In *Be'ir Hahareigah*, he fiercely brands the people's weak response to the pogrom at Kishinev. It is interesting that Mintz also finds similarities with the *payyetanim*.

In the hyperbolic mode of the Rabbis and the *payyetanim*, Bialik sought to make iconographic use of Kishinev by draining the event of its particularity and informing it with symbolic power. Bialik wished to make Kishinev stand for something massive and millennial (Mintz, 1984:131).

Bialik succeeded and forty years later in the ghettos of Warsaw, Vilna and Lodz, Bialik's poem would be constantly cited to measure the distance from pogrom to final solution.

In the Warsaw ghetto diarist Abraham Levin would link Kishinev to Warsaw with the line "The sun is shining, the acacia is blooming and the slaughterer is slaughtering".

Al Ha'shechitah is largely a monologue addressed by G-d to the prophet, who is forbidden to show pity for the people and is forbidden to weep. This poet feels a huge conflict at his helplessness in this crisis of slaughter of his people. The stark brilliance of this poem influenced the Jews to defend themselves more rigorously. In the next pogrom, they organized themselves more strongly and fewer Jews died. Roskies (1998:17) recognized that Bialik's poem *Be'ir Hahareigah* transformed the way modern Jews perceived catastrophe. No longer would passivity be accepted.

In *Im Shamesh*, Bialik tries to show his readers that there is some hope, there is light. In this poem in speaking of the rotten darkness, *n'ma'kei hachoshekh* and *r'keivei ha'emes*, the poet says to the people

you must go and seek the good healing gold,

and

if your eye does not see the light," (third verse),

you must create the light of the sun out of nothing.

In other words, if you cannot find hope, you must take steps to create hope yourself.

This poem, begins and ends (as does the title) with "the light of the sun".

Light is a symbol for hope that brings comfort and I maintain that the continual occurrence of this symbol in laments even in these angry poems of Bialik is to lift the lament, providing a measure of hope for a better future.

In *Im Shamesh* the poet is also trying to give a message that a light will renew strength, and this poem has an end (as does the title) with "the light of the sun".

These poems had results and gave inspiration to Zionist youth to take a more active role in their fate and encouraged them to go on *Aliyah* or get involved in anti-Tsarist activities.

After Bialik, the nature of lament poetry changed. They no longer only lamented their helplessness, but they also reaffirmed their right to action.

i) EXPRESSING FEELINGS

These poems by Bialik are different from the other laments in this thesis but like the other works, they too have the power to alleviate despair, though in a totally new and different manner. In *Al Ha'shechitah* and *Be'ir Hahareigah*, Bialik is not concentrating on grief, but on anger, a step prior to grief in the stages of coming to terms with loss. Such anger is an emotion that will certainly resonate in many readers who feel strongly that prejudice-driven attacks on innocent people should never be allowed. They are unjustifiable, unforgivable, inexcusable and outrageous. Bialik is angry with the Russian attackers. Bialik is angry with the Jews for not defending themselves, Bialik is angry with G-d.

In *Im Shamesh*, Bialik seems to have come to terms with the disaster and the anger that he shows so blisteringly in *Al Ha'shechitah*; he has given way to acceptance, the last stage in Kubler-Ross's coming to terms with a loss.

j) FAITH AND PRAYER

Bialik recognises that solace can also be found in prayer which gives the worshipper hope.

Bialik says:

Kum achi, hitpaleil - yeish makom li't'fila

Yeish makom l'tikva - ho'chila!

Arise, my brother, pray - there is place for prayer

There is place for hope - hope!

k) CONCLUSION

According to Kohn, Sokolov did not regard *Be'ir Hahareigah* as a great literary work. I find it impossible to agree with Sokolov because I believe the work to be a profound lament which is penetrating and influential, based on tradition but written in a new vogue. Kohn believes that the historic value of the writings establishes and secures its lasting fame so that it will remain a great historic epic story of our people (1979:184). This statement is borne out by the fact that two recent books, Lindemann's "The Jew Accused" (1991), and Dworkin's "Scapegoat, the Jews, Israel and Women's Liberation" (2000), both quote this poem by Bialik. For example, in Lindemann, "Jews must fight back; Jews must learn to rely on their own resources, Jews must stop being cowards", was the message, and in the immediate aftermath of the Kishinev pogrom "in everybody and before all else, there emerged the thirst for revenge" (1991:163).

(This thirst for revenge was also to be found in the laments of the *payyotanim* where impassioned petitions to G-d for vengeance and numerous instances of desperate and defiant indictments of divine silence or indifference can be found).

In answering the silent cry of a people needing articulation in a new era, Bialik gained permanent recognition (Spicehandler, 1971:803).

The power of these laments by Bialik helped transform the passive attitude of the Jews so that they were able in future to overcome passivity and start to fight back.

It is important to read the three Kishinev poems as one cycle. Bialik grieved over the luckless fate of his people, chronicling in verse its disasters, frustrations and warpings through the long night of its ghetto martyrdom (Ausubel, 1975:206).

As Bialik works through the cycle he comes to terms with his plight and there is light. The pain is alleviated and there is a looking forward to a better future.

"Be'ir Hahareigah"

l) INTRODUCTION

This poem and *Al Ha'shechitah* have been selected for their importance and revolutionary nature.

Although this poem does not fit the traditional pattern of lament poetry, it has been included in some prayer books "as a contemporary addition to the martyrology of the

Yom Kippur liturgy" (Mintz, 1984:154,275). This is a strange combination, since Bialik was adamant in his dislike of the martyrology belief and practice. The poem is an example of the lamentation tradition in transition. It is a lament in epic form crying out on behalf of a people whom the writer loves and for whom, in the poem, he has contempt. He has a conflict because he wants to help although he feels helpless. This is a lament because it is an expression of the distressing state of death and destruction in which the people find themselves and on which Bialik writes with the purpose of arousing them and alleviating their despair. He wants to shock the people into action in order to help them.

Be'ir Hahareigah was written over a period of three to four months (Tammuz - Tishrei 1903) after Bialik visited Kishinev. He completed the writing of this poem whilst staying with his father-in-law in the forest of Goroovtshina.

He had originally intended to publish his report in book form in aid of the wounded. He subsequently decided that a poem would better serve the purpose of arousing his "audience" of readers and of convincing them of the need to change their way of thinking and acting, - to act in time, to fight and obtain results for social improvement and physical safety.

This act is recognized by totalitarian governments which have always feared open poetic expression, often reacting with suppression, censorship and persecution (Striar, 1998:xxii,xxiii).

To avoid the State censorship, the poem is written to be read symbolically. As a result, instead of naming the poem after Kishinev, Bialik called it *Masa Nemirov*, after a pogrom during the Chmielnicki persecutions of 1648. Shaked (1985:23) feels that the original title is just as appropriate because both events are simply the twin tips of the iceberg of an historical paradigm which had a long past, and which was also to have a long future. Bialik wrote it in rhetorical mode and in discreet code.

Be'ir Hahareigah has been described as "a tragic and elegiac ... poem in memoriam for those innocents who had been massacred ... following the pattern set by the Hebrew dirges that were composed ... for the ... martyrs during the Crusades and the Black Death" (Ausubel, 1975:207). In this poem Bialik registers his protest by retaining

familiar symbols and constructs but changing their context and significance, showing a new spiritual reality while satisfying the community's need for an elegist (Ezrahi, 1978:138).

m) LITERARY ANALYSIS

Theme : Bialik faced a difficult task. To his way of thinking, the people accepted their torture as a decree, and did not summon up sufficient strength to fight for their rights. He had to persuade a community that they were wrong in thinking that if they stopped "sinning", they could leave it to G-d to protect them. They had to protect themselves. At the beginning of the poem the people and the pogrom are the main focus. Later the increasing crisis of the poet becomes the foremost topic (Mintz, 1984:144). The poet does not lament. He rages. The raging anger, and rebuke, together with pain, constitute the core of lament. The poem "rings not with an accusation against heaven...., not against the dehumanized mob, but with a burning shame and indignation at his own people, the victims of the pogrom" (Spiegel, 1930:303). The speaker displays neither pure piety nor unmitigated compassion; he is repelled as much by the cowardice of the victims, the men cowering in the corners, as by the brutality of the victimizers. In this poem, it is human behaviour as well as divine providence, which is being tested (Ezrahi, 1982:234 fn25).

The poet feels not only anger and pain, but love for his people. He chastises them as he sees an urgent necessity for them to change their ways and manner of thinking. They must either strengthen themselves and be able to defend themselves or leave. *Be'ir Hahareigah* is not about tragic defeat but about failure to initiate (Mintz, 1984:147).

The poet does not want to admit that some people did try unsuccessfully to defend themselves, as noted in his unpublished report, lest they be demoralized, nor could he encourage the Jews to leave, as they played an important role in the economy, and discretion was essential. For example, in 1898, 29 of the 38 factories in Kishinev were owned by Jews. When many Jews left between 1903 and 1905 as a result of the pogrom, the economic development of the town was brought to a standstill. Had he

stated facts openly he and the Jewish people would have been considered fifth columnists.

He used deliberate psychological mechanisms to achieve his aims. He overstated events - for instance the "cowardly husband" scene, and the vending of human wares by the so-called *schnorrers*. He withheld facts, like the acts of self-defence. He aimed to arouse people at all costs through the use of his pen.

Be'ir Hahareigah, "In the City of Slaughter", is an historiosophical poem which attempts to interpret the ambiguous situation of the victims, the murderers, the way of the world "The sun shone, the acacia bloomed, and the slaughterer slaughtered". The acceptance of the victim's situation as a divine decree is worse than the murder itself. In other words, the victims could be more contemptible than the murderers. (Shaked, 1985:24).

n) ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE

Style : This, like *Al Ha'shechitah*, is a poem of crushing anger and fierce indignation, but directed inwards at the poet's own people. It is the same ambivalence between love and hate that is found in the ethical values of Biblical prophecy and Rabbinic morality. Using the format of the Hebrew dirges recording medieval persecutions composed by the *payyotanim* "Bialik cried out to the heavens for retribution on behalf of the slain. 'Remember the martyrs, Lord; Remember the cloven infants, Lord'" (Ausubel, 1975:207).

This is a long poem (which Bialik calls a *poema*) designed to set the emotional tone and dwell on the subject while the details provide a notion of reality. It is episodic in sequence and there is interaction between G-d and the poet-prophet.

"The employment of verse allows for the dramatic description of G-d's appearance" (Gitay, 1991:3). By placing the words into G-d's mouth, the prophet-poet casts inordinate indictment onto his pauper Lord.

The poem, imaginative and indirect, expresses an admixture of Biblical prophetic-visionary style and includes the personal inner dynamism and imagination of the poet. Poetry is the language of creativity, a medium which allows the poets to portray the

world in their own colours. The style is polished and processed, written in long verses and extended Homeric sentences, with well crafted scenic structures. Bialik had his own heartening and endearing ways of rhetorical persuasion. There is no introduction, such as "the hand of G-d was upon me", or something similar (Lachower, 1944:431). The narrative starts in epic style, in the "middle of things", *in medias res*, at a critical point in the action.

Although not actually an epic poem, it manifests the epic spirit in the scale, scope, and profound human importance of its subject, taking stock of its historical, cultural and religious heritage. Newman (1993:362) proposes that this type of poem can change the course of the nation to a considerable extent as a result of its influence. I agree with Newman - even in modern Israel the influence of *Be'ir Hahareigah* has been considerable. Controversy arose as to whether *Be'ir Hahareigah* should be taught at schools in case it influenced the youth to become anti-*Golah* or anti-religious.

Satire : The poem has scenes of scathing satire. From the attic, they go into the cellars, and recreate the horrendous rape scenes "before the slaughter, during the slaughter and after the slaughter", *lifnei shechitah, u'vish'at shechitah, u'l'achar shechitah*; the behaviour of the killers, plunderers and rapists is barbarous, but we are even more repulsed by the behaviour of the cowardly menfolk in the cellar hiding places. *V'ata, leikh v'heiveitikha el kol hamachavo'im: batei machara'ot, mikhla'ot chazirim ush'ar m'komot tzo'im, v'ra'ita b'einekha eifo hayu mitchab'im / achekha b'nei amekha u'vnei v'neihem shel-hamakabim, / ninei ha'a'rayot she b'Av Harachamim v'zera ha'K'doshim*. His assessment of the survivors is more negative than that of the murderers.

To the graveyards, beggars! Dig up your father's bones
And the bones of your holy brethren, and fill your packs
And shoulder them. On your way now, you shall
Peddle them at every fair

This repulsive image compels the reader, used to identifying with the victims and survivors, to repress the very thought of them so they will not have to come to terms with the dreadful image of the world which Bialik is forcing on them.

(Shaked, 1985,24).

In the prayer *Av Harachamim* the martyrs died for the sanctification of the Holy Name. In this poem, *Be'ir Hahareigah*, the rhetorical question is asked, "Is this the way the children of the courageous Maccabees sanctify my name?" Not only is G-d's name not sanctified, but the lives and deaths of the people are meaningless.

The tone of the passage changes from satire to pathos to contempt: *Ribono shel olam, asei neis - v'eilai hara'a lo tavo...Rabbi! Ishti ma hi? muteret o asura?* And everything is fine (or so it is said) and forgotten again, *V'hakol yashuv l'minhago, v'hakol yachazor l'shura.*

Surrealism : There are scenes of surrealism. Tears are forbidden; pain and anger is unbearable. Only G-d can bear the silence. We have a nightmarish picture. Inanimate things take to life:

The tumbril wheels lie spread--
 Their open spokes, like fingers stretched for murder,
 Like vampire-mouths their hubs still clotted red.
 Enter not now, but when the sun descends
 Wrapt in bleeding clouds and girt with flame,
 Then open the gate and stealthily do set
 Thy foot within the ambient of horror.
 There is terror everywhere!
 Terror floating near the rafters, terror
 Against the walls in darkness, hiding
 Terror through the silence sliding.
 Didst thou not hear beneath the heap of wheels
 A stirring of crushed limbs? (Trans Klein)

Movement : The poem is cinematographic with extended speech. The poet-prophet is commanded as was Abraham, then called Abram, *Leikh l'kha* ... "Get thee out ... unto a land that I will show thee" (Cf Gen, 12:1). In the poem, the prophet-speaker is told "Go," and, "see with your own eyes." and instead of being shown how G-d would make them a great nation, he is taken from scene to scene, to the horrifying spectacles and displays.

He is spoken to as "son of man". *V'lama teivkh, ben-adam; v'ata gam ata, ben adam; emor ata ben-adam, v'gam ata, ben-adam; v'ata, ma l'kha po, ben-adam.* (Ezekiel in the Biblical text is also commanded: "Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel," *ben-adam leikh-bo el-beit Yisrael*.⁸ The poet-prophet therefore dons the mantle of Ezekiel; he is the prophet of wrath, harsher than Jeremiah. As he goes from one section to another of a living hell, as in Dante's "Inferno", his anger and fury increase as he is commanded to harden his heart. He must restrain all tears, "a serpent in its nest", and let them accumulate and collect into a river of curses and a fountain of poison, which would pour out at a later date, to no avail, without words.

"I will make hard thy heart, yea I will not permit a sigh." "Never shed a tear..." "I will not let thee weep...I'll stifle it within thy throat." Ultimately-

Thy tear upon the barren boulders shed

And send thy bitter cry into the storm (Trans Klein)

It is reasonable to assume that Bialik, who studied at a *yeshivah* and was well versed in the Bible, alludes to G-d's call upon Ezekiel, and said, "Son of man... Whether they hear or whether they forbear...they shall know that there hath been a prophet among them." In Ezek 37:14 G-d says to Ezekiel, "And I shall put my spirit in you and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land".

As they go from section to section in the city they see ghastly sights. The poet-speaker is forbidden many times to cry even if his heart bursts, - and it is again as though nothing has happened, everything is back to normal - "the earth is as it was, the sun still shines; it is a day like any other day" (Trans Klein). Only the spiders are left alive to tell the tale.

o) USE OF LANGUAGE

Motifs

- Terror motif. *Magor, magor misaviv*... "Terror" is a word frequently associated with violence; such as in Ps (31:14). *Magor misaviv*; Jer (6:25) *Magor misaviv*;

⁸ Ezek (3:4, 3:10). See also Ezek, (2:1,3,8); (3:1,3,4,10); (4:16; 8:5,6,8).

(20:3,10) *Magor misaviv*; Lam (2:22) *M'gurai misaviv*. Greenberg frequently uses this word in his poems. It is a formula⁹ which connotes terror.

- Living Dead Motif. Another motif that Bialik used is that of the "living dead" - an idea that later became "the epitomy of the Holocaust" and which represent a symbol of posthumous victory over the perpetrators (Ben Yosef, 1988:1564). The style is polished and processed, written in long verses and extended Homeric sentences, with well crafted scenic structures. *Be'ir Hahareigah* opens with a horrifying description of the destruction and of the survivors, who are also "dead", for they are more like living dead than truly living people, and he, as "prophet" comes not to the dead but to the living dead. This living dead theme is found in line 195 when G-d talks to them: "My heart is sad for you ... and neither I nor you know why you died." *V'tzar li aleikhem, banai, v'libi libi aleikhem: ... v'gam-ani v'gam-atem lo-yadanu lama mat'tem v'al-mi v'al-ma mat'tem*. Similarly in line 300, "old and young yawn, The mark of death is on their brows and their spirit is dead." *Eileh shom'im u'm'fahakim ... Tav hamavet al-mitzcham, meit rucham, nas leicham*.

Shaked feels that the image of the living dead is probably the most dominant symbol in all of Bialik's poetry. I agree with Shaked (1985:28) because I think that this image stands out in high relief. In these poems the poet talks to the dead who think and yawn while the living are passive and unmotivated, more dead than alive. They have no fighting spirit - they might as well be dead. Ben Yosef's interpretation of the living dead is more positive than the image portrayed by Bialik, as Ben Yosef sees this image as being a symbol of triumph over the Nazis. I have noted that this image recurs in some of the Holocaust laments I have examined.

Bialik's poem ends with an angry compulsion by the narrator to bear witness to what he saw, the living and the dead, a need which Shaked (1985:28) described as "the antithesis to the living dead ... the voice of the poetic *persona* whose cry is the only

⁹A formula is part of the traditional poetic idiom used by generations of poets, an idiom that combines the practical and immediate value of ready-made phraseology with the aesthetic advantage of enormous connotative force.

living voice to be heard". Bialik roars into the vacuum of space, but doubts if anyone will pay attention to his message:

Shed your great tear there on top of boulders

Release your bitter roar - and be lost in the storm

Comparison and Contrast : Like the idea of living dead, Bialik makes dramatic use of other contrasts. His pain, anger and shame are merged and the question is asked, "which is the greater, the pain or the shame?"

V'gadol hak'eiv m'od ug'dola m'od hak'li-ma--

uma mi'sh'neihem gadol? --Emor ata, ben-adam!

There is a strong contrast between beautiful nature, with whom G-d is one, and the ugly world.

Ki kara Adonai la'aviv v'latevach gam yachad

Hashemesh zarcha, hashita parcha v'hashocheit shachat,

as in Klein's translation, "The slayer slew, the blossom burst and it was sunny weather!" Seh-Lavan (no date:41) disputes the interpretation generally given that Nature is indifferent to the atrocities, as is G-d. He says this is a reference to the beastly ways of those who defy G-d's beautiful world by their actions. I accept Seh-Lavan's interpretation because I believe that the poet was using it as an effective contrast.

The first person imperative restrictive structure of G-d commanding throughout the poem "allows" the poet-prophet to see and listen only, and not be heard.

In the poem there is tension and inhibition. The poet-prophet may not express sorrow and he may not sympathize with the people, in fact, there is no communication between him and them. It is difficult for the poet to express his pain.

Hyperbole : An overwhelming description in the poem is that of the *schnorrers* selling the relics of the deceased from the graves! Bialik is determined to outrage his people into a wakeful commonsense of pride, dignity and shame.

Rhetorical Devices : The poet uses many rhetorical devices and is affectively persuasive. (*Comparison* and *contrast* have already been discussed). Others are *contempt* and *pathos*, to arouse emotion in his listeners and spur them to activity, *repetition* and *metaphor*. He arouses pain and anger in his readers, and it would seem

that although the pain is great, the shame and the anger for the prophet are greater, which leads him to scorn the non-action of the people he loves. Not only the people but also G-d falls under the rapier of his derision. After having seen with his own eyes the hatred and cruelty of humankind, he bursts forth furiously against all faith. Nothing is certain. G-d himself is helpless. Kohn also remarks on the sarcasm with which Bialik regarded this divine weakness (Kohn, 1979:117).

There is no reward on this earth nor in the world to come.

Forgive, ye shamed of the earth, yours is a pauper Lord!

And ... see, I am fallen from my high estate.

I grieve for you, my children.

My heart is sad for you

Silchu li, aluvei olam, eloheikhem ani khmotkhem,

Ani hu v'chayeikhem v'kal vachomer b'motkhem,

Ki tavo'u machar al-skharkhem u'dfaktem al d'latai--

Eft'cha lakhem, bo'u u'r'u: yarad'ti min'khasai!

V'tzar li aleikhem, banai, v'libi libi aleikhem.

And G-d goes on to say:

Your dead were vainly dead; and neither I nor you

Know why you died or wherefore, for whom, nor by what laws;

Your deaths are without reason; your lives are without cause.¹⁰

Repetition : Repetition is dramatically effective. The poet tells us more than once that everything is fine and returns to what it was. This emphasizes the opposite:

For G-d called up the slaughter and the spring together.

The slayer slew, the blossom burst, and it was sunny weather!

The earth is as it was, the sun still shines.

It is a day like any other day.

Or the poet will repeat many times that he is forbidden to cry.

The poet-prophet uses repetition to hammer in his points and to arouse the reader's emotions. This is a most effective rhetorical device.

¹⁰Trans Klein in Mintz, (1984:132ff)

Metaphors and Gapping : The poem has graphic descriptions and images like: "The perfumes will be wafted from the acacia bud / And half its blossoms will be feathers, / Whose smell is the smell of blood!"; also "trampled leaves and parchments, torn holy books and scrolls of the Torah". These examples rely for their effectiveness on the shock provided by the gapping technique, a technique also used in the Book of Lamentations. Bialik describes the trampled leaves and torn parchments, and leaves to the imagination of the reader how the leaves were trampled and how the parchments were torn. Bialik describes just "a glimpse of the abyss" (Ezrahi, 1992:99).

Allusion to other sources : One of the strengths of the poem is the frequent use Bialik makes of allusions whereby he attaches the idea to past tradition and subverts it to suit the present moment. An example of this is the "son of man" motif, as referred to in respect of the prophet Ezekiel.

Allusions are in abundance; an example of this is the reference to the Day of Atonement service as the tour is continued and a synagogue is visited. Instead of the *chazan* praying (as on the Day of Atonement), *Asei imanu tzedaka v'chesed, v'hoshi'einu*, praying for righteousness and lovingkindness and G-d's saving grace, he prays-

Asei l'ma'an ha'tvukhim!

Asei l'ma'an tinokot!

Asei l'ma'an o'l'lei tipuchim!

Another example is the portrayal of the *Shekhinah*, the traditional term of endearment for the Divine Presence.

p) **COMPARISON WITH THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS**

The poetry of the Book of Lamentations and *Be'ir Hahareigah*, written 2000 years apart, have left a deep mark on the collective memory of the nation, the former lamenting the massacre of the Jews in Jerusalem in 586 BCE, and the latter a long epic narrative lamenting the massacre of the Jews in Kishinev in 1903. These monumental works are affecting, persuasive and as stirring today as when they were written. The cruelty of the shameless enemy and the reactions and sufferings of the people are beyond description both in the old lament and in the later poem.

There are many points of contact in the two poems. The Book of Lamentations is accredited to the prophet Jeremiah, "the prophet of wrath" (Jer 15:17), although scholarly research rejects this authorship. *Be'ir Hahareigah* is written by Bialik who dons the mantle of the prophet Ezekiel. The "poet-prophet" in the poem is addressed as *Ben-adam*, which is the name G-d calls Ezekiel¹¹. In both poems, the speakers feel intense pain because of the situations in which they find themselves, or to which they (and the nation) have to relate and adjust.

In *Be'ir Hahareigah*, the prophet-poet finds words to describe the cruelty of the enemy and the sufferings of the people, but they fall on deaf ears: he feels he has failed and flees to the desert to shed his tears on to the granite rock and sends out a bitter roar¹² (not a simple cry), to be lost in the storm of his soul. Although there are sections of lament the prophet-poet wants to cry, but cannot; he may not.

In the Book of Lamentations, too, the writer breaks down¹³; the tears pour forth, in contrast to the modern *Be'ir Hahareigah* where tears are forbidden and repressed.

These poems are filled with pathos. The writers express distress and unmitigated sorrow at the plight of their people. They do not tone down their words. Children and babies die (the Book of Lamentations); G-d himself is in a pitiable state, *Be'ir Hahareigah*.

The image of G-d in these two long poems can also be compared. In the Book of Lamentations G-d is no help. He is there, but seems to be on the side of the enemy, a marksman, *darakh kashto k'oyeiv* (2:4), fighting against His own nation, and His "right hand", his strength, the symbol of G-d's help in Israel's history, has become Israel's greatest enemy (2:4,5). There seems to be an eclipse of the goodness of G-d. In Bialik's poem, G-d is there, but hopeless and helpless.

What says the *Shekhinah*?

In the clouds it hides

In shame, in agony abides:

¹¹who chastizes the people on behalf of G-d, (Ezek, 2) and is given a scroll, and there is "written therein the Book of Lamentations, and mourning and woe", *kinim, vahege vahi*. Ezek (2:1,3); (3:1,3,4,10); (4:16); (8:5,6,8)

¹²*sha'aga*. Cf Ps, (38:9); (22:2); (32:3); Job (3:24); also ben Kallir in *Az Bimlot Seifek*.

¹³Lam (1:16); (2:11,12,13); (3:48-51)

G-d is hiding - He is not helping.

In *Be'ir Hahareigah* G-d is "pathetic". His people do not help themselves and so he "cannot help them." The prophet-poet calls upon the people to rebel against G-d.

Bialik makes a helpless G-d reply:

Wherefore their cries imploring, their supplicating din?

Speak to them, bid them rage!

Let them against me raise the outraged hand,-

Let them demand!

Demand the retribution for the shamed

Of all the centuries and every age!

Let fists be flung like stone

Against the heavens and the heavenly Throne!

This reflects Bialik's anger and his dismay at G-d's ineptitude and defeat.

Klausner, feeling the power of this poem describes it as *Megillat Eichah*, stronger, bolder, more forceful than [the original] *Megillat Eichah*. It is a lament, like the Book of Lamentations, but a lament with a difference, a stronger, bolder and more forceful lament, something beyond lament (Klausner in Seh-Lavan,40).

If one looks at the words of the Yiddish poet Frug:

How weak our hand is to do battle,

How great and heavy is our woe--¹⁴

one sees that unlike *Be'ir Hahareigah* or *Al Ha'shechitah* of Bialik, Frug's poem shows a passive impotence compared to Bialik's active anger. His poem *Be'ir Hahareigah* is known as *shirat haza'am*. In the Book of Lamentations it is G-d, not man, who is angry:

How hath the L--d covered with a cloud

The daughter of Zion in His anger!?

And hath not remembered His footstool

In the day of His anger (2:1).

¹⁴"Have Pity"; trans Roskies (1988:150)

Be'ir Hahareigah is an epic story, a cinematographic presentation of varied scenes with a common denominator of cruelty. G-d plays a triple part. His is the voice that speaks: he is the protagonist taking the prophet from scene to scene, and he as a pathetic divinity plays a part in the drama.

In the Book of Lamentations, there are also clearly-described scenes of a city besieged. G-d is portrayed as cruel (3:43), or inaccessible (3:44). The nation feels cut off, estranged and afraid and the survivors¹⁵ are hungry, helpless and dying. In Bialik's poem the survivors are described as a bunch of disabled tramps peddling the remains of the dead.

In the Book of Lamentations women and children are victimized:

We are become orphans and fatherless
our mothers are as widows (5:30).

Everything is hopeless. There is prostitution, the only livelihood available to bereft women:

her filthiness was in her skirts
she hath no comforter (1:9).

In *Be'ir Hahareigah* the women are raped. The only comment by the *Cohanim* is: "Rabbi, is she permitted?"

The question of guilt is an important motif in the lament genre, and is felt in both poems.

As long ago as 586 B C E, and as recently as 1903, the creators of these works used literary techniques and methods of persuasion to involve the reader, since "eloquence is written to be heard" (Sloane, 1993:1046) with the fervent hope of arousing the listeners. These poetic works can be visualized as pictorial displays in which there is a sense of a pervasive presence behind the scenes.

In their impassioned prolific use of literary devices - metaphor, personification, repetition, alliteration, assonance, many figures of speech - they demand the heart and attention of the reader. These are found in both works.

¹⁵ Lams (2:10,11,12; 4:4; 5:10)

An effective figure of speech not frequently mentioned is parataxis, the joining up of propositions without connecting words, ("and" is not counted). In the Book of Lamentations we read, "Thou hast slain them in the day of thine anger; thou hast killed, [and] not pitied"¹⁶:

Haragta b'yom a'pekha tavachta lo chamalta

This has the effect of piling up, of swiftness, and compression. This verse is a relentless, frightening, yet almost objective account of G-d's onslaught, the focus being mainly on the paradox of G-d's violation of his own holy place (Landy, 1987:331). In *Be'ir Hahareigah* the same technique is used: "The sun shone, the acacia bloomed, and the slaughterer slaughtered" - *Hashemesh zarcha, hashitah par'cha v'hashocheit shachat* or another example,

Dig up your fathers' bones

And the bones of your holy brethren, and fill your packs

And shoulder them.

... *Vachafartem atzmot avoteichem*

v'atzmot acheichem ha'k'doshim u'mileitem tarmileikhem

These represent unqualified abhorrence at what the poet sees around him.

Many of the images are shared by both, for example in the Book of Lamentations, the widow weeps, "weeping she weeps" into the night and her tears are on her cheeks: among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her. Her tear is on her cheek. It is as if it is there for ever. If she had died in the destruction, her suffering would have been over. The poet and the poem should comfort her, and G-d should comfort her. The question is, do they (Landy, 1987:330)? In *Be'ir Hahareigah* the prophet is forbidden to shed a tear; he is forbidden to feel sorry for the victims. G-d will harden his heart and his tear will become like a poisonous serpent within him. Eventually he casts it on to a rock in the desert.

Both poems use familiar images, and the effectiveness of the image derives in part from its familiarity. Tears are distinctly human. In the Book of Lamentations G-d is a spiritual warrior. In *Be'ir Hahareigah* people peddle human bones.

¹⁶Lams (2:21). In the Hebrew there is no "and"

There is animal life in both poems. In the Book of Lamentations, the lion and the bear are strong, lying in wait. This is a description of G-d (3:10). In *Be'ir Hahareigah*, man (dead), dog (dead) and pig (live) wallow together, their blood dripping down the drain. Only the spider knows everything. In both the poems nature plays a part; the sun shines while the slaughterer slaughters and the trees blossom bloody feathers in the spring, *Be'ir Hahareigah*. Both poems end in desolate places, and in the Book of Lamentations foxes walk on Mount Zion.¹⁷ Nonetheless, even in such a desperate image there is hope, as we see in the *Talmud*: in this regard Rabbi Akiva's optimism is worthy of mention: "where the foxes walked there the Temple will be rebuilt. 'There shall yet old men and old women sit in the broad places of Jerusalem' " Zech (8:4) said Akiba. "Akiba, you have comforted us!" said Rabban Gamliel, R. Eleazar b. Azariah and R Joshua.

Milennia apart, both poems are outspoken, formal and also intimate, angry, serious and often ironic (Abrams, 1988:136). Their ends are persuasion, which is audience directed, and eloquence, which is often form and style directed (Sloane, 1993:1046). They are written with vivid immediacy.

Both poems express a need for consolation and help, from humankind and from G-d. This is unrequited longing. Both express something basic and respond to a certain central expectation within the soul of the reader.

The dominant pattern is a focusing, heightening, or specification of ideas, images, actions and themes from one verse to the next. There is a dynamic movement of intensification of images, concepts and themes and a compact narrative moving, in the telling, toward some culmination (Alter, 1987:615,620), in the Book of Lamentations, a hope for reunion with G-d, and in Bialik, the need not to surrender to suicidal despair.

The Book of Lamentations concludes:

Turn thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned:

Renew our days as of old.

In *Be'ir Hahareigah*, the despair of the poet-prophet remains unresolved; he has to live with the tumult within his soul, until such time of national renewal.

¹⁷Makkoth (1935:24b). Trans Lazarus (1935:175)

The Book of Lamentations is read each year at the *Tishah B'Av* service providing a model for future generations to copy during times of despair. These poems by Bialik became part of the collective sub-conscious mind within the historic processing of the nation, part of the cycle of laments created by Hebrew poets who regarded the writing of laments as a natural endeavour to help the nation to cope in a catastrophe.

q) **EXPRESSING FEELINGS**

This poem like *Al Ha'shechitah*, is a poem that expresses *anger, denial, impotence and depression*, but this time Bialik's anger is at his own people.

The poet through his verse, is able to refer to and describe objects which otherwise could not be dealt with. The poem enables the poet to be emotional (in the case of *Be'ir Hahareigah*, the emotion of rage), to stir the imagination, and to dwell vividly on specific details through figurative language.

In his anger, he wants to punish the people by not allowing them to weep. Weeping helps to relieve tension. The poet-prophet says "Never shed a tear....I will not let thee weep."

Grief is another feeling associated with loss which is found in this poem.

It is the strength of the Book of Lamentations and *Be'ir Hahareigah* that in both these laments, "the writer has to cope with a crisis situation, from which a new reality may be born" (Shaked, 1985:21). It is for the reader to participate and to try to resolve the answer. The reader, therefore, takes part in the creativity of the poem.

r) **FAITH AND PRAYER**

Despite the poet's anger and disillusionment, he still refers to a religious world view of belief in the *Shekhinah* and in G-d but he does not address G-d with the respect and subservience of earlier generations.

V'hakol yashuv l'minhago, v'hakol yachazor l'shura. Although everything is fine and has returned to normality, the dark *Shekhinah*, in mourning, hides its shame in the clouds and abides in agony; it "Runs to each nook and cannot find its rest; / Wishes to

weep, but weeping does not come; / Would roar, is dumb. / Its head beneath its wing"
(Trans Klein).

The *Shekhinah* occupies a part of the prophet's own soul. The prophet is told to close the gate and fill up his heart with sorrow, and to speak about it one day, "But thy lips shall not find its utterance." In the Biblical prophets, there is a spiritual relationship between G-d and His people. There is a contract. G-d is the effector. In Bialik's poem G-d's power is ineffective. There is a loneliness of the nation; the world is indifferent; nature is indifferent, G-d is not indifferent, but seems to need help himself. Nobody cares.

The satire is unsparing. "Is that how you sanctify my Name? By hiding away?" and through an allusion to the prayer *Av Harachamim*, G-d who is implied to be a G-d of mercy, is asked the rhetorical question, "Shall the nations say 'where is their G-d'?"

This is a public response to a major catastrophe, a vocal outpouring of Jewish grief at the inability of their G-d to alter events tragic to his people. More than the history of Kishinev, or the history of its people, this poem concerns the crisis within the soul of the poet-prophet. He may not cry. He may not feel sorry for his people, he may not feel sorry for himself. And he cannot depend on G-d.

s) **FAITH IN REDEMPTION THROUGH THE RETURN TO ZION**

Bialik in his criticism of the Jews in *Be'ir Hahareigah* implies that they should leave their homes and go to Israel, which he later did.

t) **CONCLUSION**

The poems, with their horrendous beauty have a positive message and they have survived and have continued relevance. The theme relates to profound issues for the contemporary reader, issues of coping with crises from which a new reality may be born. The conflict between passivity or active involvement when attacked, is still a relevant theme. Bialik, who died in 1934 before the Nazis had gained supremacy, was aware of the inner workings of Jewish life in Europe. He experienced these realities in his poetry.

His inclusion in the literary canon was not long in coming because that generation knew in the depths of its soul that the poet expressed something which they felt. What at that time had only a vague and potential existence, was given the breath of actuality by the poet; only to be given even more dreadful actuality by later history (Shaked, 1985:22,30).

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SAUL TCHERNICHOWSKY

(1875-1943)

a) ABOUT THE POET

Saul Tchernichowsky, a contemporary of Bialik, was born in the Crimea in Russia in 1875. He had a happy childhood and started learning Hebrew at the age of 7. At 15 he was sent to Odessa, a centre of Hebrew culture, where he received a general education. He was especially interested in languages, and studied German, French, English, Greek and Latin. He read Pushkin, Lermontov, Goethe, Heine, Shakespeare, Byron, Burns, Longfellow and the Greek classics as well as contemporary Hebrew writers, all in the original language. He was drawn to Zionist circles, as well as the younger Hebrew literary circles. The study of Hebrew testifies to his national identity, and although he had grown up in a secular home with Russian as his mother tongue, Tchernichowsky acquired a devotion to the Hebrew language. At the age of 19 he published his first two poems in Hebrew. Joseph Klausner encouraged him in his poetic productivity and made him vow never to write poems in any other language but Hebrew. His first book *Chezyonot U'Manginot* appeared in 1898 (Waxman, 1941:261). This full length work, reflected the poet's deep involvement with the poetry of different nations and the influence it had on both the form and the content of his own poetry (Scheid, 1971:877). He greatly admired the classic writers, ancient Greek art and literature. As he alludes to Greek mythology in some of his poems, in traditional circles he was considered a "pagan poet" by various critics. However, he was strongly imbued with the Jewish spirit, and was rooted soundly in his own culture as well as in other cultures, making him the versatile poet that he is (Birman, 1968:59-62).

Initially he thought himself an emancipated citizen of the world and his poems celebrated the joys of existence, but he was shattered by the atrocities of the Kishinev pogrom in 1903, and by the collapse of the Russian Revolution in 1905, and he associated himself more closely with the persecuted people (Ausubel, 1957:208).

Like Bialik, Tchernichowsky responded to the Kishinev massacre with poetic anguish, and composed the poem "Baruch of Mayence", ostensibly about an attack upon the Jews of Mayence during the first Crusade. Like Bialik with Nemirov he was forced to disguise the real topic to avoid State censorship. Like Bialik, deep rage seizes the poet against the bestial enemies, against G-d as well as against his own brethren for their cowardly submission and he unburdens his anger in a narrative of the distant past (Spiegel, 1930:424,425).

In 1907 Tchernichowsky qualified at Heidelberg in Germany as a medical practitioner. He was imprisoned in Russia for 6 weeks as a "political agitator" (Carmi, 1981:133). He devoted much of his creative energy to translating ancient and modern poetry into Hebrew, including the Sumerian epic "Gilgamesh", the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey", parts of Shakespeare, Longfellow's "Hiawatha", and poems by Horace, Goethe, Shelley, Heine, Pushkin, De Musset and Francis Thompson.

While Bialik devoted endless energy and erudition to the in-gathering (*kinus*) and editing of scattered Hebrew sources, Tchernichowsky was engaged in a parallel venture, namely the in-gathering into the Hebrew language of European classics from antiquity to his times, from which Hebrew poetry had been severed in the ghetto-centuries. I agree with Carmi (1981:42) and Penueli (1966:55) who stated that Tchernichowsky was acutely aware of the need to revitalize Hebrew poetry not only by the infusion of new themes, but also by refocusing attention on formal and aesthetic problems and by cultivating European poetic forms and genres such as the ballad, the sonnet and the narrative idyll (Carmi, 1981:42). Birman states that Tchernichowsky's poetry was widely translated into English and other languages (1968:59-62). I disagree with this as for a poet of such high calibre, very little is known and been published in English to date. He moved to Germany in 1922, and settled in Palestine in 1931. He died in Jerusalem in 1943.

Following the news from Europe during the Holocaust he wrote martyr poems, *Harugei Timunya*, "gloomy with foreboding on account of the Nazi menace ... composed in the spirit of the medieval martyr elegies, the *kinot*" (Ausubel, 1975:208).

Among his published works are "Visions and Melodies" (1898) , "Sheaf of Sonnets" (1922) , "Book of Idylls" (1922), "New Poems" (1924), "The Flute" (for children) (1923), "Behold O Earth" (1940) and the posthumous "Stars in Distant Skies".

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“Al Harei Gilboa”

b) INTRODUCTION

I have chosen *Al Harei Gilboa* for selection for two reasons. Firstly, because it is a modern re-telling of David's lament at the death of Saul and Jonathan on the Mountain of Gilboa (2 Sam, 1:17-27) and secondly because Tchernichowsky has changed, transferred and fashioned the original lament in such a way as to show that out of tragedies, strength can be evolved.

He does not bemoan the tragedy. He does not say, "Alas" or, "Woe is me," although he does say, "the enemy is too much for us!"

Here we have an example of a transformation of a Biblical *kinah* into a modern proclamation. This poem is a lament that has been converted into a song of conquest, using a Biblical theme in secular language with a change of message. Tchernichowsky was disturbed by the "defeatist" attitude of his people who accepted their victimization, so he took a poem of lament from the Bible and transformed it from a song of tragedy into an acceptance of challenge.

It must be admitted that there could be a controversy whether or not this could be regarded as a lament. However, as I have indicated in my analysis of David's lament, the lament actually starts in 2 Samuel (1:17) with the message that his men must fight and learn the art of the bow; here too Tchernichowsky's message is that they should not give up, but overcome the obstacles. This is a very positive example of the strengths that laments can provide and the different forms they can take.

Al Harei Gilboa was written in Fichtengrund in 1929, a year of Arab riots in Palestine.

Tchernichowsky wrote to Klausner: "Life itself, as it is very often revealed to us in reality, is ugly, but the content and essence of life is glorious, veritable poetry ... it is the song of conquest of order over chaos ... of life over death".

"I am a poet of conquest" he said, "but as a Jew I am destined to be a poet of defeat. And against this fate I struggle, and even as a Jew I am the bearer of the song of conquest."¹⁸ He believed that victory must be fashioned out of defeat.

Tchernichowsky takes this concept to an extreme, not only in the themes and content of his poem, but also in the choice of character. This poem deals with King Saul who throughout history was looked upon as a weak and tragic figure and not a good choice of king. Tchernichowsky whose first name is Saul consistently portrays him as a national hero.

c) LITERARY ANALYSIS

Theme : The poem *Al Harei Gilboa* is a statement of Jewish historical tenacity and heroism in the face of catastrophe. It is based on the title and the "final" and "conclusive" Biblical quotation from 1 Sam 31:6 :

So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armour bearer, and
all his men, that same day together

*Vayamot Sha'ul ushloshet banav v'nos'ei kheilav gam kol
anashav bayom hahu yachdav*

This caption at the top of the poem is a device of the poet, creating an understanding between himself and the reader, in which he makes a statement to the reader as a preview of what is to come. He adopts the quotation as his own, since the context is the core and basic structure of his dialogue.

d) ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE

Style : The poem is written in the form of a ballad with an epic narrative basis, in which is described the fall of nobility; the incident is briefly described and the mind of the reader is drawn to the main theme (David, 1987:77). David's lament describes the tragedy after it has taken place. In this poem the reader is taken to the scene of action.

¹⁸ And he adds, "But when I feel really defeated, I am silent, for the conquered have no songs but dirges." Waxman (1941:264). The writer of this thesis would like to add that the Jews, with their faith and spirit such as that which Tchernichowsky depicted are never conquered; and therefore all the laments or

We are not told what happens, but we do see the enactments before our eyes, as the dialogue progresses, the events, characters and emotions being reflected in the sparse, tense and dramatic conversations. The atmosphere is dark and tragic.

Rhyme : There are three couplets in each stanza, aa bb cc. The six stanzas of rhymed couplets of the poem provide terse and tense dialogues between the king and his armour bearer, between the king and the *maggidim* who relate the news of the fall of the sons, and between the king and the *tokei'a*; and there is the important, powerful and dominant dialogue between the sound of the drums and the sound of the *shofar*. This dialogue fleshes out the drama.

The short human dialogues portray character, outlook, events and feelings: the parallel dialogue between "drums" and *shofar* show up history and the everlasting strength of the *t'ki'a g'dola* of the *shofar* as against the *tupim amumim*.

e) USE OF LANGUAGE

Contrast : The contrast in the poem creates a dramatic tension, the many on the Israelite side who abstained from the battle as against the hordes of participating Philistines. Saul's brave determination to fight to the bitter end is contrasted with the urging of his armour bearer for him to rest. Also the spiritual and physical bravery of the king is set against the fall of the demoralized army during the battle. There is also juxtaposition between what is described here in this poem and the description of the weak Saul in battle in First Samuel in the Bible.

The expression *el hakeilim* in

T'ka! V'yeichaltzu hayoshvim al hakeilim!

takes us back to Saul, when he was in his youth, *nechba al hakeilim* (1 Samuel, 10:22).

This takes the reader from the weak and aged Saul to the magnificent, strong young man that he once was, implying the lament style of the comparison of the glorious past with the unfortunate present, and the transience of young manhood.

dirges, however sad and tragic, are ultimately songs of encouragement never to give up and may therefore be seen as songs of conquest, as epitomized in Tchernichowsky's poem *Al Harei Gilboa*.

"He was higher than any of the people from his shoulders upward" (1 Sam, 10:23) and he was the one "whom the Lord had chosen, none like him among all the people. And all the people shouted 'Long live the king.' "

In this poem the opposite is the case; the king is going to die at any moment on the mountains of Gilboa.

Message : Each verse has a message of universal validity for the Jewish people at all times:-

- "Blow the *shofar*! Strengthen yourselves!" *T'ka, chizku v'imtzu!* (Ps, 27:14)
- "Blow! Gird yourselves!" [to those who remain in the background]
- "Let them come!" [to the tribes who separated themselves]
- "A disgrace!" [to the slanderers and backward ones]
- "Is everyone going to be allowed to be slaughtered like sheep?!"¹⁹
- His last will and command for the present and future is: "Go up! Take the place of the dead and fallen!"

These commands given in each stanza unify the poem organically, and contrast the difference between the weak action of the king in the Biblical story of his death, and the strength of spirit of the king in this poem. Through these recurring commands Tchernichowsky has swung the tone of the poem over completely. In the same way that David commanded the army to shoot, so does Tchernichowsky's king use the opportunity to inspire his followers to fight. This is a message to Tchernichowsky's generation telling them never to be discouraged, never to go like sheep to the slaughter. This same phrase was found in Kallir's poem.

The ballad rhythm and repeating refrain change from verse to verse to suit the message. With each verse there is a new wave of enemy attack; however bad, the king never gives in.

Sound Patterns : A poet creates unity in many ways, and the creation of sound patterns is one of the oldest ways. The rhythm and rhyme together create sound effects which suit the poem. There are tensions which suit the mood changes.

¹⁹See *tzon tivcha* in Ps (44:22)

The caption at the top of the poem contains a quote directly from 1 Sam 31:6 as follows:

*Va'ya'mot Sha'ul u'shloshet banav v'no'sei kheilav
gam kol-anashav yachdav*

The words *bayom hahu yachdav* are heavy spondaic stresses, which give the atmosphere of finality and match the tone of the poem. In these terse words the Biblical writer indicates the finality of war with its needless destruction of soldiers. In this way the tone of Tchernichowsky's poem is set but with changes in the sound patterns: the introduction is sorrowful because of the heaviness of the subject, but the battle is fast and the sound patterns keep up the pace.

Acrostic : The first three stanzas are written acrostically, *aleph, bet, gimme*, giving a hint of the acrostic lament style.

Motif : The motif of blowing of the *shofar*²⁰, *t'ki'ah* in the Hebrew, is central to the poem. Traditionally the blowing of the *shofar* is connected to the ram's horn, representing the sacrifice of Isaac. In this modern poem, three sons are sacrificed, *N'si'khim m'nadvim nidvatam pi sh'losa*.

The *shofar*, too, proclaimed a time for rest (Shabbat 35b). In this poem the *shofar* connotation implies the opposite of "rest". "You are tired," says the bearer twice to the king²¹ and the king retorts, "This is no time for rest." *Lo eit l'hinafeish*.

In the poem, the *shofar* is blown loudly and clearly in answer to the dull call of the vibrating drums of the enemy, to spur on Saul's soldiers. The nobility and courage of Saul is symbolically implied through the *shofar*, which represents strength and power.

David frequently uses the prohibition *al* in his lament over Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam, 1:19) to prevent the enemy from gloating over David's nation's defeat (1:20,21). "Do not tell it in Gath / Publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon...let there be not rain and dew."

Tchernichowsky in the modern poem, however, uses it to encourage the fighters.

Al nasog mimakom bo na'amoda, al nu'a. "Don't retreat from the place where we stand, don't move." (Stanza 4 line 19); and the homophone *Al har'bkha tipol* (*Al* with the

²⁰The blowing of the *shofar* was a clarion call to war and in addition was sounded to announce a death. *Moed Katan* (27b:179)

²¹Stanza 1 line 3 and stanza 2 line 8

letter *ayin*, played upon for its sound), *v'al ti'pol b'yadav* (Stanza 5 line 25) in the sense of "rather fall on your swords, on no account fall into their hands!" as emphasized by the punctuation mark. This might imply an injunction to the Jews to stand their ground wherever they meet persecution and fight back.

Anaphora : The anaphora in the poem is not a classic anaphora but rather an escalating anaphora, i.e. *t'ka* (line 6,12,18,31,33) in its different forms *bitko'a*, line 1; *t'ki'ah*, line 31; *hatokei'a*, line 9; and *tako'a nitko'a*, line 31) acts as an escalating motif of refrain and is cumulative in effect, the device of "incremental repetition" and this shows up what transpires within Saul's life. Outwardly he is strong: *N'sichim m'nadvim nidvatam pi shlosa*, and as the situation worsens, so he summons up more strength, but not in verses 4 and 5, where there is no *t'ka*, where Saul feels helpless and is unable to conduct the battle. On the other hand, in the last verse it appears five times: *t'ka*, *t'ki'ah*, *tako'a*, *v'tako'a* and *t'ka*. This signifies strength, a renewal of battle, not to be a victim, but to die the death of heroes.

Repetitions and Refrains : The poem, written as a ballad, through conjoined blending of structure and content, makes an intellectual and emotional impact on the reader. One of the devices is the use of certain set phrases, like the different forms of *T'ka*, to invoke courage.

Hageid ma b'fikha? (line 14); *Ma tagid, hamagid?* (lines 20 and 26) indicates anxiety; and the word *od*, "yet", "still"²² expresses the increasing strain of culminating desperation in the war.

This repetition is acceptable to the ear, and lends emphasis and unity to the poem with progression and intensification of thought. The restatement becomes energized and its significance increases as it moves along with the poem (Heese & Lawton, 1983:47).

The refrains in the poem are emphasized and with each repetition the development of the theme and atmosphere is amplified.

Throughout Tchernichowsky's poem the refrain serves as an acute awareness of the overwhelming numbers and unlimited hordes of enemy pouring in. I agree with Shapiro (1993:1036) who, in discussing repetitions, states that the constant refrain is a

²²Lines 4, 10, twice, 15, 21, twice, 22

semantic reinforcement leading to a progression and intensification in each repetition, and an accumulation of recontextualization and significance. This applies particularly to the *areilim*.

In each stanza the king declaims, "the enemy are too much for us today," *Rabim mimenu hayom ha'areilim*. Up till now he and the army could cope with the hordes, but no longer. Saul exclaims, "Are we all going to be killed like a bunch of sheep", *Hakeves Yisrael, im nishacheit ki'r'cheilim?!*

In the poem, the king fights for the future. This is no time to rest, he says. Blow the *shofar*! Let those of our people in the background gird their loins. Let them arm themselves! He shows masterly control.

The king says, *T'ka: chizku v'imtzu ...!* *Chizku v'imtzu* is a meaningful, traditional phrase, based on Biblical texts. This figure of speech is analogous to the words used by G-d to the children of Israel, immediately after the death of their leader Moses when they were forcefully told four times (Joshua, 1:6,7,9,18) to be courageous and strong, for G-d would be with them and they would inherit the land. They should not be afraid or dismayed (Joshua, 1:9). These words may allude to the changing of leadership; Moses had to hand down to Joshua, Saul to David (a new dynasty), and didactically now Israel should change from a dispersed nation to a people in their homeland. Tchernichowsky himself followed his own thought and went to live in Israel in 1931 to start a new life. In alluding to the Biblical story and reverting to archetypal metaphors, Tchernichowsky became a spontaneous participant in the creation of our cultural history.

Pauses and Gapping : Between stanzas 1 and 2, there is a gapping. We are not told in this poem that Saul is afraid of the archers. We have to find that out from 1 Sam 31:3, *V'yachel m'od meihamorim*. In *Al Harei Gilboa* the bearer attempts to comfort Saul; he says (stanza 2 line 7) "they are shooting with many arrows, but they won't come near here." This pity for the king with the well meaning deception is not what the king needs: on the contrary, he needs positive encouragement to strengthen himself. This gap between wishful thinking and reality creates a tension and increases the anxiety and fear.

There is the tense dramatic moment when the king questions the messenger concerning what happened to Jonathan. "Tell us what is on your lips?" he says, *Hageid ma b'fikha?* This is an urgent question. Grammatically and syntactically the phrase is an interesting one. It is put as a question, with a question mark, and yet it is an instruction - *Hageid?* "Tell?" Here we understand a hesitancy and a confusion in telling on the part of the bearer, and a hesitancy and a fear in asking on the part of the king. The king seemed to know what was on the bearer's lips; the answer "-because Jonathan fell. / -..." is a *non-sequitur*. Why does the bearer answer in the form of a conjunctival clause? There is no main clause: *-Ki nafal Y'honatan. / -...* There is a dash before the "because Jonathan fell" and a full stop and a dash after it; it is only a part of a sentence, and we do not know fully what was said by either of the speakers; only these three words are said and the subject is changed. This refers to the death of the beloved Jonathan and no more is said about it.

He talks about the other sons. There are still two to go. *-Od shnayim li vanim po va'ma'a'ra'kha.* However, in each dash, before and after those words, "-because Jonathan fell. / -....." there is a pause, the pause of immobilization in the numbness of the moment of trauma.

Discontinuity in the poems such as pauses occurring at the end of a clause or unit of syntax, and punctuation with "dashes" discriminate between the different speakers. Also the enjambement at the end of line 1, after *bitko'a*, gives an implied cessation, analogous to the momentary stoppages that occur between incidents of battle.

Ambiguity : The text *Ayafta, hamelekh, sov acharei hatzinah / Od kochi v'motnai, alekha agina* (lines 3,4) and *Ayafta, hamelech, alai hisha'eina* is different from the Biblical context. In 1 Samuel and in 2 Samuel the question of tiredness does not occur and the bearer does not give support. In this poem the bearer does try to encourage the embattled king. *Sov acharei hatzina* ("turn behind the shield") is ambiguous; *Tzinah* is a "shield", but its meaning could be "cold", and this could mean "death", a sinister connotation; on another level, in another form, *tzina* as *tzo'ne* (Ps, 8:8) could tie up with the *keves* and *r'kheilim* of line 30 which in turn tie up with the ram's horn, *shofar* and the *akedah*, and a father's sacrifice of his son.

The words *Alai hisha'eina*, "lean on me" conjure up Saul's leaning on the spear in 2 Sam 1:6, wounded or in a state of collapse, or deliberately throwing himself on to his spear (1 Sam, 31:4) when he and his bearer die.

In line 4, *Od kochi v'motnai*²³ also rings the change from 2 Sam 1:9, where Saul says *umo't'teini*, "and slay me". These words sound similar but do not have the same meaning. There are deathly undercurrents.

f) COMPARISON WITH THE STANDARD LAMENT

This poem of Tchernichowsky, whilst based on the Biblical text, differs from it greatly although they are both based on the episode on Mount Gilboa.

Tchernichowsky like most of the Hebrew poets makes use of traditional Bible conventions. The caption and Biblical theme are archetypal metaphors. This device of using archetypal metaphors is used throughout by Tchernichowsky and interlinks past and future.

David's lament in Second Samuel (1:17 ff) is for Saul and Jonathan; they are the centrepiece of the drama. However, in both poems the actual deaths are only mentioned briefly, and by the poet's avoiding focusing on these deaths one becomes more aware of the subject.

In David's lament, the battle is over. In the modern poem, there is a step by step commentary (understood from the short dialogues) on the episodes taking place during the time of the battle. David's lament concerns a *fait accompli*. Tchernichowsky's poem deals with a preview of the *fait accompli*. It is never finalized in the poem. The individuals of the nation must always go up and take the place of the fallen and dead and continue with life. What stands out is Saul's steadfast determination never to give in, whatever the suffering and outcome. This would seem to be a message to the Jewish people not to accept their fate passively but to stand up for their rights. This is Saul's call to courage.

²³"I still have strength in my loins"; said by the bearer.

Both laments look to the future, David in instructing his men to learn the art of the bow. This poem by devices discussed above, emphasizes the ushering in of a new era for the Jewish people, which will be brought forth by heroism and determination. No more will Jews go like sheep to the slaughter, as in the pogroms. (This is ironic having been written before the Holocaust, when this phrase was used frequently).

g) CONCLUDING VERSES

In the last verse there is a huge blowing of the *shofar*:

T'ka t'kia g'dola tako'a v'tako'a

reminiscent of the *t'kia g'dola* blown on the High Festivals. There is a strong identification with the whole nation for all time.

The Hebrews will hear it south, north, east and west, *negbah, tzafonah, keidmah v'yamah* (line 33); as in Gen 13:14-16 where there is a different picture: G-d says to Abraham after he has separated from Lot, "Look north, south, east and west: / For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever." And what is more, Abram's seed would be numbered as the dust of the earth (Gen, 13:16). This evocation emphasizes the tragedy of Israel, the large numbers, the hordes, are not of Israel (as G-d promised) but of the enemy. The following line *Tirgaz ha'aretz v'tir'ad adamah* (line 34) conjures up what is said in the Bible and not in the poem, namely, *Vatirgaz ha'aretz va't'hi l'cherdat Elokim* "it grew into a terror from G-d", (1 Samuel 14:15) and the Philistines, in these verses, were in a state of panic. Notwithstanding these varied and opposing references, *T'ka t'ki'ah g'dola tako'a nitko'a* takes over. Despite all fear, against all odds, this line is fraught with evocation unto all generations to take courage - *Tako'a nitko'a!*

Propelled by his own inner strength and conviction, the king shouts *Alu!* (line 36) as an answer and an echo to his own refrain. This is a command!

This *Alu!* is mandatory as it is the last will and testament, the voice of the king, who would be one of the *noflim u'kh'sheilim* *Alu! Tifsu m'komam shel noflim u'kh'sheilim'* "Go up! Seize the places of the dead and fallen!" The king requires a positive response to each line of the refrain.

This is a vast progression from the refrain in the Biblical lament "How have the mighty fallen!" which is followed by, "And the weapons of war perished!" Now the tone has changed. There is a change of heart. This is a different Saul from the one who was afraid he might be the victim of mockery (1 Sam, 31:4).

In Tchernichowsky's *Al Harei Gilboa* the king is noble and proud. In their death he has consecrated three sons:

N'sichim m'nadvim nidvatam pi sh'losa

This is three times what Abraham had done in the Biblical text of the *Akedah*. This in turn ties up with the ram's horn (the main motif of the poem) and the ram (Gen, 22:13), (*v'hinei ayil*).

In the Tchernichowsky poem, the king will not give in. He wishes to retaliate. "Are we going to be slaughtered like sheep?!" he exclaims, implying certainly not.

h) ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE

In *Al Harei Gilboa* Tchernichowsky finds light where most people would find darkness and it is uplifting.

Tchernichowsky's description of the battle is a message for the future. *Al Harei Gilboa* is written about the same national disaster as that dealt with by David in Second Samuel that we analyzed earlier.

It is interesting to see how Tchernichowsky's Saul deals with the disaster. In Tchernichowsky's poem, we are drawn into the scene of battle. The content is tragic. The situation becomes increasingly severe on both a national and personal level and never improves. Despite the pessimistic situation, Tchernichowsky manages to find encouragement and hope and a positive message of the power of positive thinking even in times of acute danger. Tchernichowsky sees courage, bravery and hope where others see tragedy and defeat. The poet looks to the future of the nation.

Tchernichowsky uses this poem to alleviate despair in a number of ways.

His King Saul is fighting the battle that David had described in Second Samuel. He is not a tragic figure, he is a hero and does not bemoan the tragedy. He does not use

words such as “How are ... (the soldiers) fallen” *Eich nafloo...*, or “Woe is me!” He says

V'loo ta'amod ha-even ha-roshah

“As long as the key-stone of the arch stands”, he implies “all is still well”; the arch being the entrance and the strongest binding force of the infrastructure, there remains the possibility of restoration.

The fact that Saul is about to die is a negative factor in the poem, but the poet wrote it in a positive way for posterity. This is a picture of a man who, broken-hearted, represses his feelings for the common good. Kurtzweil (1975:260:1) claims that it is “as if this mighty, dark, central figure no longer belongs to our world which is passing and slipping by: every private fatherly feeling is swallowed, silenced, in the presence of his last task. He appears super universal”.

Although there is a lament content, Tchernichowsky does not wish to emphasize the tragic; he wants to emphasize the forward-looking aspect. Tchernichowsky's description of the battle is a message for the future. In Tchernichowsky's poem, we are drawn into the scene of battle, and find encouragement and hope and a positive policy of non despair in times of acute danger.

i) FAITH AND PRAYER

The line *V'loo ta'amod ha-even ha-roshah* in the poem is vital to Tchernichowsky's positive poem. It alludes to Psalm 118 in the Hallel prayer chanted after the *Amidah* of the morning service on Pesach, Shavuoth, Sukkot, Hanukkah and Rosh Chodesh.

I thank thee because thou hast answered me

And hast been my salvation.

The stone which the builders rejected

Has become the chief cornerstone.

This is the L--d's doing;

It is marvelous in our eyes.

This is interpreted to mean that Israel, rejected by the nations, is destined to be the foundation-stone of, and attain to, the most honourable place in the kingdom of G-d.

Israel has been appointed by G-d to have an essential function to discharge in the construction of His kingdom upon earth. The prayer continues:

The L--D is G-d, who has given us light.

The darkness of national anxiety and tribulation has given place to the light of freedom (Cohen, 1945:393).

By his allusion to *ha-even ha-roshah* Tchernichowsky is tuning in to a message of hope, restoration and light.

According to religious Jews, at the end of days the Messiah will come and we will hear *t'ki'at ha'mashi'ach*, the blowing of the *shofar*, to welcome him. The *shofar* inspires hope for the final restoration of the people of Israel (Birnbaum, 1979:592). The *t'ki'ah g'dolah* has a continuous triumphant note.

Tchernichowsky's message in 1929 in *Al Harei Gilboa* is that like Saul who maintains his bravery throughout disaster, the Jews must not give up hope despite persecution.

The Children of Israel must continue with strength and inner resources until independence and freedom have been gained. Two years later he himself moved to Palestine.

j) CONCLUSION

This poem is an inspiration for the time to come; the king never surrenders. The strength of his inner spiritual resources grow. Saul rises above the disaster. and stands as a classic example of Israel's bravery.

Tchernichowsky has absorbed his contemporary, Bialik's message. Jews cannot rely only on G-d. They must take positive steps to help themselves. The light is the encouragement to keep on fighting and never give up as "sheep to the slaughter". This poem is a didactic poem as is the poem of Bialik, who rages against a lack of motivation for self-defence.

It is interesting, as Spiegel (1930:433) has remarked, that Tchernichowsky, "this freest of Hebrew poets, who in no way went through the usual development of Hebrew writers and who represents a new type of Jew, is held fast by an inescapable invisible thrall in this old language. Despite his secular education and *Haskalah* influence it was to the

Bible that he turned for inspiration. However, unlike David's lament in the Bible, he developed the theme into a modern exhortation to positive action and the overcoming of obstacles, through human resources and not Divine deliverance". This is how his lament alleviates despair.

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HOLOCAUST LAMENTS

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Holocaust, also known as the *Shoah*, constitutes the darkest period of Jewish history and of modern mankind. Eleven million people were killed by the Nazis between 1939 and 1945 of whom six million were Jews, one third of the Jewish people. This period began on 30th January 1933 when Adolph Hitler came to power in Germany. Antisemitic beliefs formed part of his political platform and these culminated in the "Final Solution" to the "Jewish problem" - the total destruction of the Jewish people as well as every trace of Jewish culture. Hitler's theory, presented in his notorious book *Mein Kampf* (1925), overflows with hatred and contempt for the Jews. He started with the elimination of the Jews in Germany from citizenship, public office, the professions, and the intellectual and artistic life of the country.

Later synagogues were burnt, as were Jewish literature, music, art and religious books. Germany and German-controlled countries had to be *Judenrein* (Free of Jews).

The victims were discriminated against, herded together and sent to ghettos and ultimately to forced labour, concentration and extermination camps. The single-minded brutality which was used to exterminate the Jewish people was horrific and affected most of European Jewry. The world for the most part turned a deaf ear, with very few exceptions. Kohn (1979:95) speaks of the *Shoah* tragedy as being a result of humanity's moral and ethical collapse, shown by its collective indifference and cruel silence; "Jews could have been rescued, but such plans were rejected, and persistently refused, for reasons devoid of moral sensitivity and human responsibility" (1979:214). This was "murder conducted like some mass production industry".¹

This mass persecution left its mark both on the survivors and on world Jewry who were left with a strong resolution never to forget and never to let it happen again.

LITERATURE AND HOLOCAUST

In the introduction I have already dealt with the statement by Adorno that to write poetry after the Holocaust is "a barbaric thing" and I have discussed responses of

scholars to the idea as well as my own opinion. I shall not be re-stating this. I consider the laments of the Holocaust to be part of a literary tradition which are both responses to a unique event as well as a part of a chain. It may be what Salo Baron called a “lachrymose view of Jewish history”, but unfortunately the Holocaust forms what is the most lachrymose and tragic part of this history. Abramson (1982:126) regarded Holocaust laments as being responses to a unique and unprecedented historical event. Mintz in *Hurban* has discussed scholars who argue for its uniqueness (162, 269).

Through my study of the role of laments I have realized that Holocaust laments form part of a continuous pattern of laments written to alleviate suffering. The Holocaust may be unique because of the intensity of its iniquitous purpose and large scale fulfilment, but not for its literature. I maintain that any death could produce such poetry, were it the death of a father or friend, or the annihilation of a third of the people. After each catastrophe the community of sufferers had to find a way to renegotiate the terms of its succession within the history of the people of Israel and in relationship to the G-d of Israel (Rosenfeld, 1987:126) and this I see as the purpose served by laments especially those which lament the *Shoah*, although doubt is often cast on G-d’s role or existence.

Roskies in his examination of normative or standardized poetry of destruction, considered it to be varied, complex and multifaceted, to suit the times and environment. I see the laments as a chain of links in time and space, similar, yet diversified. This provides an anchor and binds us with one common voice, the same voice that said at Sinai, *Na'a'se V'nish'ma*, “We will obey and we will hear” that speaks in terms of a collective memory which considers not a cyclical recurrence but a future redemption. Rosenfeld (1987:126) is correct when he maintains that Mintz’s *Hurban* and Roskies *Against the Apocalypse* significantly advance our understanding of how a history of calamitous suffering has not overcome the Jewish will to creative survival. In the following analyses I shall be looking at their powers of alleviating pain rather than at a full literary analysis.

¹ Sir Hartley Shawcross, Nuremberg Trials, quoted in Robinson (1971:831)

YITZCHAK KATZENELSON

1886-1944

a) ABOUT THE POET

Yitzchak Katzenelson was born in White Russia in 1886. He was a poet and dramatist in Hebrew and Yiddish, and received his early education from his father, the Hebrew writer Jacob Benjamin Katzenelson. He spent most of his days doing educational work and established his own Hebrew secular school in Lodz, where he was principal until the outbreak of World War II (Ya-oz Kest, 1980:7). He identified himself in his work with the world of Jewish children. His literary career began in 1904 in Yiddish for the *Yidishe Folkstsaytung* and *Yidishe Bibliotek* and in Hebrew for Frishman's *Ha'Dor*. Many of his poems were set to music and became favourite children's songs and Israeli folk songs. He was "a wonder child, an infant prodigy dancing into our literature" (Zeitlin, 1969:425). He visited Palestine a number of times and his Hebrew works were published in Palestine in three volumes in 1938.

When the Nazis conquered Lodz, he fled to Warsaw where he joined the Jewish partisan movement, *Dror*. During the early days of the war he was in the Warsaw ghetto. In 1943 as an "Honduran citizen", he was moved to the Vittel concentration camp in France, where he diarized what he observed, recording what was happening, and wrote prolifically in Hebrew and Yiddish. The trapped Jews knew that the outside world was unaware of the enormity of the horrors of their existence and made every effort to keep an historical record of what was happening. Even the value of a poetic record was recognized. Kaplan in his Warsaw diary wrote, "A poet who clothes adversity in poetic form immortalizes it in an everlasting monument" (Ezrahi, 1978:139). Such a poet was Katzenelson who, aware of the importance of documenting the Holocaust, arranged for his writings created in the concentration camps to be sealed in three bottles and buried.² These were later resurrected. Among his writings was the Yiddish poem "The Song of the Slaughtered Jewish People" which he began in October 1943 and finished at Vittel in 1944. It is one of the greatest literary expressions of the tragedy of the Holocaust.

² It is of interest that Emanuel Ringelblum, a Yiddish scholar and historian who was killed by the Nazis, was a leader of a project in the Warsaw Ghetto to collect diaries and writings in order to document the Nazi genocide for the future. The "Ringelblum Archives" were dug up after the war (Harap, 1956:223)

"Honduran citizenship" did not help save his life and in April 1944 he was deported to Auschwitz. Katzenelson, his father, his wife Hannele and his sons Benzikl and Yomele were all killed.

In 1947 his *Ketavim Acharonim*, "Final Works" was published posthumously. A number of his plays have been produced. In 1950 an institute which bears his name was established at *Kibbutz Lochamei haGetta'ot* in Israel for research on the Holocaust.

Ironically, Katzenelson's previous reputation was as a poet who wrote about youth and the joys of life, although he had also written sad, ironic and sentimental songs about tragic aspects of life. Roskies (1988:543,544) described him as "a graceful, musical poet" but the Holocaust experience changed him and his poetic content and style. Sadan (1970:52) says of him "His early poems were written with feathers on a curtain and his later poems had become red fire on white fire".

The Nazi persecution altered his world view completely. In the same way that Viktor Frankel recognized "suffering" as a core element which gives meaning to life, I view Katzenelson's change of outlook as being an adaptation to his existential experience and his documentations of the persecution as being an expression of searching for meaning in the collective Jewish Holocaust experience. To Kohn (1979:36) Katzenelson was the tragic eulogizer of Warsaw Jewry and his authentic account of the pervading despair immortalized the total mood of dominated ghetto life. He was as an eye-witness to the Holocaust and its martyred victim (Kohn, 1979:106).

I agree with Kohn (1979:207) that Katzenelson's poetry remains one of the greatest monuments to the millions who died. Although he was killed, his works have survived to represent the victims to the survivors. His grandeur rests in his historical actuality and authenticity as witness and victim.

This poem has been included for its uniqueness in format, structure and vocabulary. Although dealing with the Holocaust, it is different from the fifteen-canto "The Song of the Slaughtered People"³, in which Katzenelson described the *Churban* in Europe. *Chalom Chalamti* is a short poignant poem, staccato and sparing in style, in which he weeps for his people who "are not" and questions G-d, "Why?"

“*Chalom Chalamti*”

b) LITERARY ANALYSIS

Theme : In the short Hebrew poem *Chalom Chalamti*, "I dreamt a dream" the narrator describes his terrible dream, that his people "are not" alluding to Jeremiah 31:15).

c) ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE

Style : By terminology, laments have a tragic theme, - yet each has its own distinct character and its inherent power to alleviate pain and suffering and despair. At the outset, the lay-out of *Chalom chalamti* is eye-catching. There are twenty four lines, each line containing only between two and three words, short and monosyllabic. The typography has the appearance of a long elongated ruler, and by contrast, the shorter the horizontal line, the more effective, the more the focus on the sadness.

Rhetorical Devices : He employs the image of a dream as nightmarish as it was. Many poets use the dream as a rhetorical symbol of the Holocaust, for instance Alterman, Gilboa and Greenberg, who are selected for this thesis. Katzenelson through his use of short, simple words and lines shocks his readers.

The poet-speaker wakes to find that the nightmare that he had is true! And he asks why and wherefore and how can it be? and he laments:

I have no people, my people no longer exist,
they are no more,

and he repeats his tragic words

They are not.

For Katzenelson it might have represented a hope that he would wake up and it would just be a bad dream. Unfortunately this was not to be.

Aha, aha!

Asher chalamti

ba li, ba!

The dominant factor in Holocaust poetry written by the actual victims is the subjective “I”, “which reflects from within the entire tragedy including poverty, deprivation, hunger, orphanhood, despair, dehumanization, slavery, torture, flickering hope,

³ I am not referring to Bialik's “In the City of Slaughter.

wounded faith, confrontation and ultimate death" (as in Katzenelson's own case). Kohn (1976:36,106) points out that in this poetry, written as an eye-witness account capturing the horror in all its inhuman barbarity, the "personal subjectivity" becomes an intrinsic part of the poet's voice, as is clearly demonstrated in the above quotation.

There are repetitions and refrains. The repetitions are mournful:

Ha, Ei-I b'Rama!-

Ekra r'teit:

Al ma v'lama

Ami meit?

Al ma v'lama

meit la'shav?

Lo va'milchama,

lo va'k'rav ...

Young, old, women and children already do not exist; "they are not, they are not."

Notice the skilful wording in the last two lines, which fit in with the context:

Al ma, riboni,

V'lama, Ei-I?

He keeps on questioning *Al ma* and *lama?* the word, *Al*, close to the word *Ei-I*, emphasizes that the speaker is addressing G-d; there is also a repetition of an invocation to G-d, *Riboni*, my G-d, a personal G-d and *Ei-I*, G-d of Power. The poet's words "Why? For what reason?" go with *einenu*: "For what reason are they not?" There is a question but no answer. These short expressions strike a quick blow. One can never forget.

He does not thunder against G-d in this poem. He only addresses G-d three times and yet this is a distress call to G-d. "For what O G-d, and why?" seems to be questioning justice! "O G-d in *Ramah*", "O G-d on high, mighty God". *Ramah* could be an allusion to the place where Samuel (1 Sam,19,20) was born and lived, and whence justice was dispensed (15–17). G-d in *Ramah* could be a reference to Rachel weeping for her children in *Ramah*.⁴

The idea here is much like the raving of denial to G-d, of the existence of "justice" in Bialik's *Al Hashechitah*, but in Katzenelson's poem, there is rather the insinuation, a

⁴ She refused to be comforted, *ki einenu*, (Jer. 31:15)

more indirect reference of irony concerning justice where there is no justice, as it is a reflection of a world that has lost its centre, a world from which G-d has receded. I agree with Ezrahi (1978:139,140) that it is not only in the atrocities that the terror in Katzenelson's poetry is reflected: echoes of phrases from lamentation literature are all the more terrible because the divine source of meaning and consolation that underpinned the previous interpretation of catastrophe is no longer there.

d) USE OF LANGUAGE

This poem *Chalom chalamti* has few words and each word is important in the repeated *ein* and *einenu* and *einam* and again *einam*. The repetition of these words as a motif constitute the core of the lament. The words are short: the speaker is grief-stricken and does not say much, but what he says is pervasive.⁵

Sound Effects : The syllable *cha-* in *chalom* sounds like *eichah*. The poet-speaker says "I Dreamt a Dream", in the title and the first line. *Chalom chalamti* is onomatopoeic: it sounds like a guttural, groaning, mourning or a moaning, with its drawn-out *-lom* and *-lam* - *chalom chalamti*. The mourning *m* sound is continued in the third line, *ein ami, ami*, and then in the *n*'s in the next line, *einenu od*.

Rhythm : Although mournful, it is written in a lilting metre. This is characteristic of Katzenelson, for his nature was to have a song in his heart, and a sense of good cheer.⁶ Zeitlin carries it to an extreme when he says that even when he wrote serious poems, he wrote in swinging rhymes: "While the poet wept his rhyme frolicked" (1969:425). I believe that the lilting meter in which the poem is written is characteristic of, as well as influenced by, the poetic convention of the 1930's.

Ambiguity : In laments there is often a reference to the enemy. He inserts a single phrase which could be words of anger against them: *Sifku kaf!* "Smite the enemy" as in (Num, 24:10) but can be read "clap hands in sorrow" since it is followed by *Ko eivch bi'y'goni* - "So I will cry in my sorrow."⁷

⁵ Katzenelson also ends "The Song of the Slaughtered Jewish People": Woe is unto me, nobody is left. There was a people and it is no more. There was a people and it is ... Gone ...!

⁶ Hence his rapport and amiability with children.

⁷ *Ko eivch bi'y'goni gam yom, gam leil* - "So I will cry in my sorrow day and night."

Words of lament : According to my definition of the lament, (see above) a lament can be vocal or unvocalized; it can be expressed as *n'hi*, *ni*, *hi*, *ni*⁸; a lament can be an expression hardly spoken, as *aha*, *aha* (line 6), or *ha* (line 9), a grunt or a groan or an explosion of breath. It could be the repetition of *hoi* (anaphora) (Gitay, 1991:111), etc. In *Chalom Chalamti* the words are close to *nehi*, *ni* and *hi*, by reason of their short explosive monosyllabic words. That is to say there are thirty virtually monosyllabic words in a total of fifty-nine words.

Punctuation : Katzenelson's poem has commas, colons, exclamation marks, question marks, semi-colons. These are striking features in the poem. This system of non-alphabetic signs that express meaning through implied pauses, pitch shifts and other intonational features express emotion. Although small signs, they play a vital part in compactedly expressing feelings

In an essay on the *Shoah* and the rhetoric of catastrophe, Michael Bernstein writes about the problem of trying "to find any descriptive or conceptual terms that are not so palpably disproportionate to the enormity of the collective injury as to seem to be almost an indecency. It is as though language itself were being interrogated and repeatedly found wanting for failing to provide a rhetoric somehow commensurate with the magnitude of the event".⁹ This feeling comes across strongly in this poem, because Katzenelson seems to find language inadequate to express his pain and has to revert to monosyllables, sighs and punctuation marks.

The "old and young" theme occurs in many laments. Katzenelson in *Chalom Chalamti* says: "Not in war, and not in battle" did they die. "Youngsters, old men, women and children." Whole families are wiped out, *tapam*, *n'sheihem u'v'neiher*, as repeatedly appears in the Book of Lamentations. This poem, short as it is, has become a part of the Jewish collective psyche. The children, the youngsters are the future.

Zeitlin (1969:425) writes that in this poem, in these few words of death, Katzenelson has bequeathed his monument of life. He has risen from the ashes to demand a reckoning.

The Jews in the death-camps looked for a writer who would bear witness and for an elegist; historically it has always been the elegist, the lamenter, who bears witness to

⁸ Jer. 9:17, 18, 19, 9; Jer. 31:14, 15; Mic. 2:4; Ezek. 27:32

⁹ Times Literary supplement March 6 1999

catastrophe. Even the historian Haim Kaplan felt that the historical record was not enough; I believe that history cannot express reality in its entirety as can the poet. Such a poet was Katzenelson, who when writing poetry about the trauma, expressed feelings such as history could never do.

The moving laments, despite (and because of) their sadness, impart a certain immortality to those who died and to us as a nation. Imaginatively, the slain martyrs arise from the valley of dry bones (Ezek. 37) and bequeath to us the moral strength to carry on.

Katzenelson ranks amongst the greatest of Hebrew and Yiddish lament writers. Although a man of cheerful countenance, his poems are suffused with affective pain and sorrow. He accompanies his poems with actions which happened before his eyes.

Katzenelson's poems are frequently read at the Annual Memorial Ceremony on *Yom Hashoah*, being regarded as a fitting public response to the catastrophe, in the same way as laments were recited at public ceremonies in earlier times.

His poems are riveting. He has become a poetic symbol for greatness, glory and Jewish tragedy.

e) **EXPRESSING FEELINGS**

As discussed in the chapter, "The Lament as a Way of Healing", psychologists show that the act of expressing one's feelings on paper is therapeutic. It does not help to eliminate the pain, but by enabling the grief-stricken individuals to take an active step in expressing their pain, it prevents the feelings of passivity and introspection and is cathartic. The grief process works if you can find words to speak about it and have it recognized by others. For people directly affected by the tragedy as was Katzenelson, it helps to know that it is not an individual experience. This is why laments that purely express the absolute pain of the writer are also significant to some extent in alleviating distress and producing comfort.

The deaths in the Holocaust are intolerable. The poet seeks light. His people died in vain! For what purpose? Why? They did not die in battle. They did not die in war. He is a thinking man, and he must know the reason. He desperately seeks enlightenment. He is not alleviating despair. The facts are irrefutable; however he is expressing the thoughts of many unable to express them.

Chalom Chalamti begins with denial – it starts as a dream, a bad dream that all his people were dead. When the poet works through the denial and accepts reality – he awakens with a scream :

Aha! Aha!

Asher Chalamti

Ba li, ba!

and discovers that it is true and he starts to question.

Denial, anger, questioning – these are all stages in working through trauma and are all understandable human emotions, emotions that transcend time and space and give the poem a validity that is meaningful to the reader. For someone feeling depressed it can be cathartic to read :

I cry in my sorrow day and night!

There is comfort to be gained in shared expression of sorrow, to recognize that others have also cried in their sorrow. The readers are not alone in their grief.

f) **FAITH AND PRAYER**

Even in his despair the poet still has faith in G-d and like Bialik, challenges Him. Katzenelson questions G-d. What is this all about? He is searching for meaning.

He cries:

For what reason, Oh G-d!

Like Job, he beseeches G-d!

g) **CONCLUSION**

In this poem there is no light, no positive meaning. However, the comfort it provides is that of therapeutic catharsis and enables the poet to express despair and his faith in G-d and the readers to identify their pain in his words.

URI ZVI GREENBERG

1894-1980

Much of Greenberg's work reflects the tragedy of the six million Jews who were slaughtered in Europe, their families having been torn asunder. Kurtzweil said no poetry in our generation can be compared to the poetry of Uri Zvi Greenberg from the point of view of its exhaustive and educative expression of the lot of our people, as was evoked in his lamentations. It was as if he penetrated the collective soul of the nation, which chose this poet to be the *shofar* to its pent up sorrow and holy indignation (Barzel, 1990:284).

It was therefore essential that Greenberg be included in this thesis. However, because he wrote so many laments, it was difficult to select just one.

I shall be examining *Kinat Habein B'vorcho Mibeit Avi'v V'imo* which is a good representative poem out of the almost four hundred pages of *Rehovot Hanahar*.

The reason why I selected this poem for inclusion was because I felt that his references to family, child, love and loss would well describe the purpose of the lament. The readers can readily relate to the feelings of humanity and family love expressed in this lament and find themselves sharing the emotion it arouses. I could just as well have selected many others from his magnum opus.

a) ABOUT THE POET

Uri Zvi Greenberg was born in 1894 in Bialykamien in Eastern Galicia to a family descended from Hassidic leaders. When he was young his family moved to Lvov, where he received a traditional Hassidic education. His earliest poems, both in Hebrew and in Yiddish, were published in 1912 in leading periodicals.

In World War I he was enlisted in the Austrian army fighting on the Serbian front. His poetry and manifestoes later recorded the electrifying horror of his experience there. He deserted in 1917 and returned to Lvov, where he and his family were threatened by the Ukranian pogroms in 1918.

In 1919 he wrote a lament on the Lvov pogroms. After the war he published poems in Yiddish and Hebrew, and published an Expressionist literary journal "Albatross". It

was the revolutionary expressionistic aesthetics of German literature of this period that definitively stamped Greenberg's verse (Mintz, 1984:166).

Sensitized by his experience, Greenberg as early as 1922 was predicting a European Holocaust "In the Kingdom of the Cross". His poetry from then on is obsessed with this vision of horror and he mourned the fact that his terrible message of the imminent massacres was being ignored. Determined to leave antisemitic Poland, he moved to Berlin in 1923 and the following year went to Palestine where he switched his poetic language from Yiddish to Hebrew and devoted himself entirely to Hebrew. His first book of Hebrew poetry was "Anacreon at the Pole of Melancholy" (1928). He contributed to the local Labour press editing the journal *Sadan*. He believed the function of Hebrew poetry to be not merely aesthetic but also to stir the nation to battle for its liberty. His poetic style is marked with "zealous intensity", its clarion call to militancy and what Ausubel calls "wild lamentation" (1975:211).

During the 1929 Arab riots he left the Labour movement and joined the nationalist Zionist Revisionist Party. During the 1936 Arab riots he published the "Book of Denunciation and of Faith", calling for revenge. He opposed the British government and also the Zionist leadership for betraying the Zionist dream and was sent to Warsaw to edit the Revisionist weekly paper *Die Welt*. Two weeks after the Nazis entered Warsaw, he escaped to Palestine. His parents and siblings remained behind and perished. Greenberg was permanently scarred by survivor guilt.

During the final struggle against Britain for national independence, he identified with the *Irgun Zeva'i Le'umi* and with the establishment of the State of Israel was elected to Israel's *Knesset*, as a member for the *Herut* Party, serving from 1949 to 1951. He published five collections of Yiddish poems and nearly twenty of Hebrew poems. (Although he published his later poems in newspapers he did not permit collections of these later poems to be published.)

His best-known and major work *Rechovot Hanahar - Sefer Ha'ilyot V'Hako'ach* (1951), what Lindenbaum (1997:110) calls "the most harrowing and moving threnodies lamenting the destruction of the exiles" is a book of interconnected poems dealing with the Holocaust which Mintz (1984:165) called "the single most important work on the Holocaust in Hebrew literature". *Rechovot Hanahar* was the only major poetic work of

the period that tried to grapple with the issues of the Holocaust through themes of loss, destruction and a vision of restoration.

Barzel (1974:195) considers Greenberg to be one of the greatest lament writers. His "synoptic eye" unites the times, e.g. the furnace of fire (the Holocaust) with the fire at which Abraham was tried in Chaldean times. The *Rechovot Hanahar*, "Streets of the River", are drawn from the rivers of Babylon to the Jordan, the river of revival and resurrection (1990:277).

Greenberg was awarded the Israel Prize for Hebrew Literature in 1957. He died in 1980.

His personal poetry is woven into his national poetry, and his views are often deeply rooted in the Jewish sub-conscious; he is taken up with the idea of Divine election.

He experienced great suffering, and wept for himself and his people. He often described that which is difficult to express in terms of ideas. His poetry is one of engagement, his rhetoric powerful. His scope and uncompromising content and style earned him the following remarks from critics: Kohn (1979:89) called him an "outspoken poet with no patience for euphemisms". Mintz (1984:164/5,193) wrote: "He foresaw, preached, grieved, broke down"¹⁰, lamented, memorialized". Ausubel (1975:211) spoke of his "characteristic verbal ferocity".

b) GREENBERG'S LAMENTS

Uri Zvi Greenberg is a giant in the writing of Hebrew laments with a marked aptitude for writing elevated expressionistic poetry with a passion in which he combines the mythical and the realistic, thus creating a powerful picture.

Expression, Mintz believed, is the essence of Greenberg's poetry (Mintz, 1984:171). "Everywhere there is passionate apprehension, passionate expression and equally the passion for form without which these other passions are spendthrift. [But] the form is inherent in the passion. ...it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing" (Read, 1948:57).

¹⁰The rod of my wrath was broken when my people were broken", he complains. Since the subject and stuff of his song have perished, how can he sing? He has been left by their loss like a tree whose branches have been cut off. Greenberg (1951:207).

He was a prolific lamenter and at the end of his four hundred page anthology, *Rechovot Hanahar*, he wrote "This book ... has not been completed"

TAM V'LO NISHLAM

SEIFER HA'ILYOT V'HAKO'ACH

*RECHOVOT HANAHAR*¹¹

Even when he varied the topics,¹² Greenberg remained true to the lamentation tradition using, according to Ezrahi, the same kinds of echoes and inversions of the conventional formulas and concepts that were characteristic of the ancient and modern *kinah* and of the Midrash, while maintaining his personal voice (Rosenfeld & Greenberg, 1978:42). As an example of this I shall be referring later to his frequent use of allusions and Biblical sources.

His use of the lament genre aroused some criticism. Alter (1973:57-63) regards Greenberg as a maverick for using the lament genre because Alter identifies laments as being outmoded. Alter believes that modern Hebrew poetry is private and personal being an affirmation of selfhood and not peoplehood, whereas in its historical precedents in the Book of Lamentations the writers had sought a higher meaning and spoke for the people as a whole.

I disagree with Alter because as I will show in this thesis, the lament genre is not outmoded, but is a natural form of poetry that is relevant to and is produced in all periods. I shall demonstrate in the thesis that laments are constantly being written and still express feelings in times of grief and distress and have healing powers. An additional indication that they are not outmoded, is that Rabin's death was commemorated by a book of laments written by Israeli writers, and a book of Holocaust

¹¹Birnbaum (1979:672). Normally at the end of Jewish works on traditional subjects, it was customary to express thanks to the Author of the universe for enabling the author of the book to complete it satisfactorily. The author's permanent gratitude for Divine aid is thus expressed in one word, *tushlaba*, which is composed of the initials of the following six words: *Tam v'nishlam, shevach la'Ei-l, borei olam*. As we see, Greenberg wrote the exact opposite: "This work [of 400 pages of laments] has not been completed".

¹²For instance, Greenberg's ballad, "Ivan ben Stefan of Guspador" is a lament in reverse. It is set in the mouth of a rejoicing drunken Polish peasant who has taken over the home of his master; now he can sleep with his peasant wife in the bed of his master, whom he had kicked in the buttocks and killed; now he can enjoy the silver candlesticks, forbidden ritual wine and juicy pig. Now the synagogue would be made into a church with a Cross. And Ivan ben Stevan blows the *Shofar*, *tututu tututu!* This dramatic onomatopoeic blast also represents symbolic spitting guarding against the "evil eye", as if the poet-speaker is saying "G-d forbid that such a thing should ever happen!"

laments published in 1998 by Striar contained 280 poems selected out of more than 1000.

Greenberg's personal poetry often sings of his agony as the suffering prophet-priest of the mythos of the Jewish catastrophe and redemption. Greenberg believed in Messianic redemption, and felt he had been called by G-d to spread His word. According to Alter, Greenberg saw himself as a prophet and castigator much as did the writer of the Book of Lamentations (Alter, 1973:57-63), and as did Bialik (*Be'ir Hahareigah*). Greenberg associates his national poetry with his personal history which also turns into mythos. The Jewish home in Poland, its Eden-like security of faith, his mother and father, assume archetypal and primordial dimensions: Adam and Eve, primeval forests, the sea, the moon, lakes and rivers, snow fields, form a mythical vista.

Alter (1973:57-63) criticizes Greenberg for mythologizing the Holocaust, which he sees as being a violation of the essential truth of history. Alter believes that Greenberg views all Jewish history from Abraham to Auschwitz as a single repeated tale of persecution, and as a result simplifies and flattens the facts of Jewish history. This creates what Alter calls a "skewed framework of myth", which by imposing a large symbolic scheme upon the Holocaust in a large series of poems falsifies our perception of the Holocaust.

I would say that through his mythologizing Greenberg graphically projects the perception of the Holocaust into an effective, vivid and unforgettable landscape. His characters are often described as young birds chirping in the home environment, or lame birds.

The strength of literature is frequently derived from the mythological and not from the historical appeal and it is this aspect which is universal. I agree with Kurtzweil and Lindenbaum when they say that no other Hebrew poet, "has reached such a degree of identification with the religious myth as did Greenberg" (Lindenbaum, 1997:113).

Alter has called Greenberg a "maverick", which may not sound a complimentary epithet. Yet the word could be interpreted as meaning an intellectual who refuses to conform and takes an unorthodox stand, and this would be true of Greenberg. He wrote in a style totally his own. With this interpretation the word could apply to Greenberg.

Even Alter, however, has to admit that *Rechovot Hanahar* is the most substantial of the poetic responses to the destruction of European Jewry, what Mintz has described as a

monumental achievement in which Greenberg "confronts the Holocaust head on" (1984:268).

For the writer of this thesis "Streets of the River" is the saga of a family and a people in distress and in the jaws of death and with a strong hope of resurrection. Greenberg created a huge, sustained and coherent body of work, and through it a lost world.

In *Shir Asir Tzav* (1951:130) Greenberg says, "Behold, I, in my generation, am committed by commandment". He speaks on his own behalf, and for love of the people, and despite Greenberg's anger with G-d, Kohn believes that Greenberg had a deep-seated faith that enabled him to be sarcastic and argumentative towards G-d, unlike Tchernichowsky, *par exemple* "who despairs of G-d altogether" (1979:110) and Bialik, who asks if there "be a G-d" in heaven.

Ben Yosef (1989:37) agrees with Kohn that Greenberg had a deep-seated faith and says that Greenberg was probably the most prominent religious poet in the last generation and his traditionalism and faith is best seen in his Holocaust poetry. An example of this belief can be found in *Lu'ach-Bamavo Gimmel* in Greenberg's *Rehovot Hanahar* in which he says:

The word of G-d to Abraham of yore and his seed forever is:

Lo yitzlach alav goi kardumim sho'ro'shav l'hakh'rit.

The heathen's axes will not succeed in cutting off his roots.¹³

Lindenbaum finds Alter a biased and hostile critic who has had to admit that there is really poetic genius in Uri Zvi Greenberg. Lindenbaum believes that in the entire *oeuvre* of modern Hebrew poetry, Uri Zvi Greenberg has no peer in terms of his command of the language and use of metaphors, myth and sound, as well as his exposition and argument (Lindenbaum, 1997:108). I endorse the fact that Greenberg's poetry is riveting, dramatic, imaginative and graphically described. The poet Sadan said that except for a few short chapters, such as the Book of Lamentations, *Zion Halo Tish'ali*¹⁴

¹³ Greenberg (1951:7) In 1951:37, *Acharit Davar*, "The End of the Matter", the poet says: "... I will trust in the future ... This is a vision and a song. *Selah*, and *Halleluyah* and Amen - -". In (1951:130) *Shir Asir Tzav*, he says: "I will teach the generation the beautiful song of my Father, and that generation will hand it to the generation to come, the song of the great nation."

¹⁴This poem was written by Halevi who longed for the rebuilding of the Temple and the ingathering of the exiles.

and *Sha'ali serufa ba'esh*¹⁵ and the like, "there has been nothing like it and it is quite unlikely that there will ever be anything equal to it" (Lindenbaum, 1997:110).

"Kinat Habein B'vorcho Mibeit Avi'v V'imo"

c) LITERARY ANALYSIS

Theme : The poem is concerned with the communication of subtle and complex experiences and attitudes. The title tells that a sorrowful and painful matter is being dealt with. It is the lament of a young man who left his parents in Europe, where they were in a situation of grave and certain danger. His life was saved, but his parents perished.

Racked with remorse¹⁶ he questions his conscience-stricken soul with thoughts that are embodied in the past and in the "present".

Alter (1973:61) finds the role of the parents and the anguish of separation crucially important in Greenberg's poetry because the sense of reality often radiates out of the image of his parents. The parents, in particular the mother, play an important role in conveying the heart-rending pathos of the poem. "How is it possible that my father once wrote to me 'Little son!'" he says, and "How is it that my mother caressed me and said 'My shining son!'" (He frequently mentions his parents in his anthology *Rechovot Hanahar*. One is aware of a warm family atmosphere: the father feeding the birds on the window-sill, the mother baking in the kitchen with her daughters, the father singing *chazanut*).

The poem starts with the conjunction *Achein*, "Indeed". It is as though this is the middle of an argument or discussion, or a continuation of the thoughts of the speaker. He has never forgotten the traumatic episode of leaving his parents.

The typical lamentation expression *Eich* (as in *Eichah*, which opens the Book of Lamentations) starts line 10: *Eich esa?* "How can I bear it?" This has similarities with

¹⁵A dirge composed by Rabbi Meir of Rothenberg which mourns the burning of the *Talmud* in Paris in 1242. All three poems are included in the Book of Lamentations of *Tishah B'Av*, Lindenbaum (1997:114).

¹⁶This guilt feeling is common amongst those who lost family. "Uncle Melech" in Klein's "The Second Scroll" laments about himself: "Why? Why did this one escape? What treaty did he strike with the murderers? Whose was the blood that was his ransom?" (Klein, 1951:24)

the *Eikhakha*, "How can I endure it" in the Book of Esther.¹⁷ However the poet-speaker in Greenberg's poem is lamenting what has happened whereas Esther in the *Megillah* intends to prevent destruction from happening. Esther took action, whereas Greenberg could not. He felt helpless and his conscience now torments him. He confesses that he did a terrible thing. He certainly saved his body he tells us, but he lost his peace of mind.

d) ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE

Style : The poem is written in monologue form in a personalized narrative style, similar in structure to a ballad. It is written partly on behalf of the poet himself, and partly on behalf of all young men who owing to circumstances had to move from Europe to seek safety, leaving behind parents who were subsequently killed by the Nazis.

The form suits the content of the poem. In *Kinat Habein B'vorcho Mibeit Avi'v V'imo* Greenberg uses elements of style in the poem to express passion, as an intensification of the general manner of narrative, to clarify and enrich the idea presented and add vitality to the dramatic scene.

e) USE OF LANGUAGE

In order to reach the reader, Greenberg employs an abundance of literary devices in his poetry, of which the most prominent is the mood.

There is a distinct mood, a mood of sorrow, a grieving for the parents, parents who were deprived of their last crust of bread, of their children, of their lives; the pathos is poignant, as is illustrated in the blessing of the parents over their child upon departure. "And my father said to me: 'that angels should accompany you on the way!' (line 58), and my mother said, 'that you should reach Jerusalem in peace, my baby!' " (line 59)

¹⁷ Esth (8:6): For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? Or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?

V'amar li avi: Shemal'akhim y'lavukha baderekh!

V'am'ra li imi: Shetagi'a b'shalom y'rushalaima, tinoki!

(lines 58-59).

The second line of the refrain is longer, it adds the melancholy "My baby!" – "her baby" whom she would never see again. The tenderness and love expressed are made more poignant by a feeling of sadness inherent in the organization of the words. The rhythmical chant in the refrain *V'amar li avi* and *V'am'ra li imi* could be a self-comforting attempt on the part of the reminiscing poet-speaker after some years, but it transparently recalls the painful distress felt by the family in this grief-drenched moment.

Motifs and Metaphors : The poet with choice of words, and rich imagery, refers to a happy childhood; there was vitality, animation, *tziftzuf* as of birds chirping in a nest, *ken tziftzufai beit dami uz'havi*.

The happiness did not last long. We have the picture of a bird, fleeing but unable to fly, its beauty plucked of feathers, its wings ill-favoured; and the peaceful loving dove-like prayers of his parents no longer touch him with their wings. The birds who left were not a vibrant lot, they might only "perhaps" reach their desired destination, *afot ulai li'rushalayim* (line 5). In line 42 he speaks of *meitei ofot*, "dead birds". It was clearly distressing that, while the younger ones still had the ability to fly in some manner, with regard to the older generation, *ein lahem k'nafayim* (line 51), there was no chance.

In addition to the river which is a favourite theme of Greenberg's, he uses the snow-frost imagery to denote the country where his parents were left and massacred, and this frost and snow can never be dug out from his heart with a spade or from the letters of his poetry, nor can it be melted out with fire.

There are many motifs; that of sin, sorrow, depression, *kavush*, *karush*, anger, burning, altar, lament, forgetting, "Will I ever forget?", wordlessness, self-deprecation and soul-examination. His soul cannot be redeemed and the glory of the morning prayer that his mother and father taught him no longer shields or guides his poetry. He is haunted by the smell of fire, *rei'ach gofrit*, a "brimstone smell".

There is also a lament motif, the words introduced by "if only". The introduction to line 26 maximises the lament.

Lu hikani oyeiv v'cha'y'ta imi v'am'da yom valeil al gufi

*k'Ritzpa vat Aya v'sofedet: Bni, bni,
aval lo khein ani haloveish tz'chorim v'oneiv shani--.*

The small word *lu* is pregnant with guilt: "If only ...!", "Oh that ...!", "Would that ...!" "If only the enemy had smitten me," he says, "and my mother were alive ..." He refers directly to the Biblical character *Ritzpah bat Aya*, Saul's concubine, mourning over her two sons Armoni and Mephiboshet (2 Samuel, 3:7; 21:8). The *-ni's* in *hikani* and in *b'ni*, *b'ni* bring to mind David's lament over his son

*B'ni Avshalom;
B'ni V'ni Avshalom;
Mi-yitein muti ani tachtekha,
Avshalom, B'ni V'ni!*¹⁸

The poet laments that his mother died and he had to mourn her. Parents normally die first, but the manner in which his mother died increases his distress.

The poet uses "if only" again in line 67:

Lama varachti v'ilu lo varachti- - tugat kalon mam'eret!
Why did I flee, and if only I had not fled - -
Sorrow of accursed disgrace!

(these two dashes are a strong exclamation) followed at the end of the line by an exclamation mark expressing guilt.

Rhyming : In the rhyming words *haborei'ach*, *v'harei'ach* and *mizbei'ach* he refers to the glowing coal of the young fleeing son, the glowing coal of slaughter, and burns which are described in different ways: *mikhva*, *tz'ruva*, *tzaruv*, *chom*, *ritzafat* and *ritzafat* (again) (lines 17,18,19). There is also internal rhyming, as in line 2:

Beit chi'yuti kan tziftzufai beit dami|u'z'havi.

The rhyming creates a sound pattern, a grammatical pattern and a pattern of meaning.

Contrast : We see contrast during the entire poem.

There are aeroplanes flying high above in the sky and the poet's parents are way down below the snow.

The poet contrasts the past with the present. Previously a happy soul, his unhappy soul now goes down to lowest hell in darkness, sorrow and a despised and bitter feeling of guilt, cowardice, *nefesh mug leiv* (line 4) and tears.

¹⁸ Second Samuel 19:1

Punctuation : The constant use of two dots (..), two dashes (- -), exclamation marks and question marks, expressing emotion, tells the reader more than words can. They are an expression of the inadequacy of words. As in Katzenelson, he is using punctuation to show the inadequacy of words, itself a motif in the convention of laments in literature.

Rhetorical Question : *Ha'eshkach?* "Will I ever forget?" (line 40) and *Lama?* "Why?" (line 43) *lama rag'shu goyim* introduces a type of lament. It was the end of the summer and also the end of the lives of the mother and father who were now angels in heaven and he questions the sense in agonizing over the past and what could never be undone.¹⁹ Another rhetorical question is asked:

B'ein yonat ahavatam t'filatam od masheket alai bikh'nafeha? (line 12)

Again in line 31 there is the rhetorical question, *Eich?* - the lamenting vocalization par excellence. "How is it possible that my father once wrote to me 'Little son!'" And the repetition, *Eich?* "How is it possible that my mother ravished²⁰ me with the words: 'My shining son!'"

Alliteration : as in *tziftzufai* (line 2), or as in the kisses of the "holy martyrs" which have a special sound in the combination of the three words, *u'n'shakuni n'shikat k'doshim*, where the *sh* alliteration sanctifies the kisses between him and his parents, (as in *kadosh kadosh Hashem Tz'va'o-t* in the *Kedushah* prayer) (Singer, 1975:212).

Gapping : The most critical moment of the action, when the son actually takes his leave, is described simply, in a short line *V'heicheil hamasa ..* (line 60), two words ("and the journey began"), followed by two little dots.

Synaesthesia : Greenberg creates a synthesis of sensations, a sense modality described in terms of another, as in "the sight of the parting is burnt into me, the warmth of their body and their smell" (line 18).

Typography : He arranges words in various parts of the poem in order to draw these parts together, to magnify the pain, as in line 23 where *Api* is arranged in a way so as to

¹⁹The quotation *lama rag'shu goyim* comes from the Psalms (2:1) : "Why are the nations in an uproar? / And why do the peoples mutter in vain?" The theme of the Psalm is that it is hopeless to set oneself against what has happened.

²⁰Lehrmann, (1946:15) See "Song of Songs" (4:9) : "You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride; you have ravished my heart ..."

draw attention to the rhyming with *v'khapi* in line 24. This arrangement emphasizes the depth and extent of anguish experienced.

Words of Pity : The poem starts *Akhein* (line 1). It seems a matter of fact statement: "Indeed I saved this, my body." But this small word *akhein*, "indeed", gives a hint that there will be some negation of the statement. (The word *akhein*, it has been suggested is derived from *akh* and *hein*, "but" and "if").

The translation of this opening sentence would be: "But even if you know I saved my body, you need to know that I did not save my soul."

This first word, in the *exordium*, *Akhein*, immediately connects the *ani hashar* with the reader in whom pity and sympathy are aroused. This is one of the conventions of the lament.

The word *akhein* sounds like the conventional lament expression *eich* or *eichah*. *Akhein* is followed by *aval* in line 3, which also plays its part in drawing out the contrast between the past and the present, or between the desirable and the undesirable. In line 10, the speaker says, "*Eich*, How will I bear the crowd of calamities inside this little material self?"

In line 13 there is *eich* again, in line 25 *lu*, "if only the enemy had killed me and my mother had lived", and in lines 27 and 28 *aval*, "but ... I am the only one left from this orchard that has been cut down". The guilt "controls" the poem from the first word and adds sorrow to the calamity that took place.

Lines 58 and 59 *v'amar li avi* (58) and *v'am'ra li imi* (line 59) are filled with pathos. The poet remembers the love with which these words were said, and the memory gives him pain, although he hardly uses the word love or pain.

Hyperbaton : The poet also uses hyperbaton when he moves over an important thought or feeling, which is begun in one line and completed a few lines later as in 69,70,71:

- Hargashat chaya habodedet, ...* (69)
-* (70)
- o shehi m'charperet-* (71)
- the feeling that she is a lone animal .. (69)
-* (70)
- or that she is a rat* (71)

Limping meter : Occasional use is made of the "limping" or *kinah* meter; for instance in line 65:

*Yeish kodesh b'chumat bikhyi leilohim-r'choki,
aval ein od gil bitzchoki.*

There are five beats in the first half of the line and three beats in the second half.

There is also *chiasmus*, and by the "crossing over", the poet-speaker provides multiple readings and ambiguity, and could be saying-

"my cry to my far-off G-d, but no more joy in my laughter"

or he could be saying-

"my cry in my laughter, but no more joy in my far-off G-d".

Allusion to other Sources : As befits a product of a Hassidic education, the poet makes extensive allusions to Biblical sources. Some examples are:

- The poet speaks of his soul with its "conquered harp" (line 20). This may refer to Job (30:31) says, "My harp also is turned to mourning, and my organ into the voice of them that weep."
- In an article on the theme of "Job" in "Modern Jewish and World Literature", Neher refers to a view of "Job" whose sufferings in the period following Auschwitz and Hiroshima are now arising from his own condition. Greenberg is one of the writers singled out as holding this view - that the mark of Job is the symbol of Jewish identity (Neher, 1976:66-70).
- In line 2, *Beit dami* could be based on *Damim tartei mashma*; *damim* has two meanings: "blood" and "money"; *Midrash Megilla* 14, *Damim*, "money", and "golden" tie up; because the children were happy and contented it seemed to them they were short of nothing; also *dam*, "blood", could have a sinister hint of what was to come .
- In line 3, he says *lo hitzalti nafshi* - "I did not save my soul." In Psalm 86:13 there is reference to "saving my soul from lowest hell" (*v'hitzalti nafshi mish'ol tachtiya*) but in the poem it is the opposite; there is no saving of his soul. The allusion is more to "lowest hell" which the poet-speaker is experiencing.
- The river motif, frequently used by Greenberg, taps into the many allusions found in Biblical literature and the name of the anthology from which the selected poem has been taken is *Rechovot Hanahar*, "Streets of the River". *Pashat nahar*, line 6 could

line up with the Aramaic expression *Nahara nahara uf'shatei*, "every river has its own streams", "every river has a different course." It could simultaneously connect up with Ps 2:2,3: *V'naharu eilav kol hagoyim : / V'halkhu amim rabim v'am'ru / L'khu v'na'ale el-har-Hashem : El-beit Elokei Ya'akov / v'yoreinu midrachav*. "And all nations shall flow unto it. / And many peoples shall go and say/: 'Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,/To the house of the G-d of Jacob; / And He will teach us of His ways." In the Greenberg poem the river is described in a negative way. In line 6, *Pashat nahar ko achor mikismei hashav ... bidrakheha*, the river is turbid, and, metaphorically, is as troubled, gloomy and dejected as a stream of people, stripped of the enchantment of finding their way to Jerusalem. In Ps, 2:2,3 the flowing to the mountain has positive connotations.

- In line 21, the poet-speaker refers to a "brimstone smell". He could be referring to Sodom and Gomorah who were punished for sinning, with "brimstone and fire", Gen (19:24). See also Gen, 19:28: "for Sodom and Gomorah and all the land of the plain went up in smoke, as the smoke of a furnace." He could also be referring to the smell of the furnaces of the extermination camps.
- In Greenberg's poem in lines 17,18, and 19, there is mention of *ritzafat mizbei'ach*, an altar theme. This is reminiscent of Isa 6:6: "Then flew unto me one of the seraphim, with a glowing stone, *ritzpah* in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he touched my hand with it, and said: 'Lo, this hath touched thy lips; And thine iniquity is taken away, And thy sin is expiated.' The altar, *mizbei'ach*, in Is 6:6 is different from the *mizbei'ach* in Greenberg's poem (19). In Isaiah, the fire on the altar was heavenly and holy, and as such burnt away the impurities of sin. In the Greenberg poem the "sin" of the fleeing son and the departure from his parents is burnt into the soul and onto the lips of the son, and it can never be expiated. His lips are not touched by the glowing coal, but they are burnt by the frost and snow of destruction, and they can never be healed. Isaiah continues, Is 6:8): "And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, And who will go for us?' Then I said: 'Here am I; send me.'" This touching of the lips hints at a feeling in the poet that he too has had his lips touched, in order to "Go, and tell this people". See also Is (6:9)

f) **COMPARISONS WITH STANDARD LAMENT**

Uri Zvi Greenberg's poem fits into the pattern of standard topics in laments.

These topics include-

- i) *a summons to and list of mourners*;
Greenberg summons the entire nation.
- ii) *praise of the deceased*;
He eulogizes mother, father, family, nation.
- iii) *depiction of their death*;
There are frequent descriptions of the "trees" (victims) being cut down in the forests and lying under the snow.
- iv) *the ubi sunt topos "where are they?"*
He does not know where they are buried: he sees them as birds or angels flying over the heavens.
- v) *complaints about the cruelty of fortune*;
He complains on a personal level, and on a national level sees the Jewish nation as sheep for the slaughter (see also Greenberg's "*Kinat Hase Levadad*") (Greenberg, 1951:56).
- vi) *the "then and now" motif*;
Glorious childhood and warmth of family life is compared with the "present" day.

g) **EXPRESSING FEELINGS**

The poem *Kinat Habein B'Vorcho Mibeit Aviv V'Imo* expresses feelings of love and family involvement, feelings shattered by the destruction of families through the slaughter of the Holocaust. The poem arouses pity because of the loving rapport between parents and child, which was terminated, not only because of a physical wrenching apart but also because of the pain of the memories which remained. The reader is moved to pity by what happened, as if present, seeing the last loaf of bread and jar of jam being lovingly given, and hearing the loving words of mother and father at the critical period of leave-taking.

The setting of the poem is significant, for example the happy childhood of the young "chirping nestlings" is compared to the sorrowful days to come; the love given by the

parents is contrasted with the hatred of the murderous enemy. When he leaves home, he and his parents have only one goal, for their son to be safely in the land of his people, in Jerusalem. The poem reflects memory of past happiness and regret that the family unit is no longer intact.

The tension between the contrasts serves to deepen the sorrow and to deepen the understanding of the human condition. Awareness of the reality of the past, makes it seem alive and present. The past becomes relevant and valid to us when we see its distance from us.

Greenberg also expresses survivor guilt. Unlike his family whom he left behind in Europe, he escaped death. "Why did I flee, and if I had not fled...will I ever forget? sorrow of accursed disgrace" he mourns. He is filled with guilt. His mourning is made more difficult because he did not know what happened to his parents.

It is difficult to effect closure of one's grief when one does not have a grave to mourn beside and a certainty of death. *Lo eida kivram, k'et sof m'goram, b'nam al boram lo yikhra berekh.* Their son will not bend the knee at their pit, (grave). These feelings, frequently shared by other survivors are expressed clearly in this poem.

h) FAITH IN REDEMPTION THROUGH THE RETURN TO ZION

A keen Zionist who came on Aliyah to Israel, Greenberg brings his belief in redemption through a return to Israel where he writes: "My mother said to me, 'that you should reach Jerusalem in peace, my baby!'"

Mintz says that Greenberg "projects magnificent visions of restoration even from under the shadow of immediate destruction" (1984:268). These visions of restoration provide comfort.

i) CONCLUSION

Hebrew literary critics recognize the poetic genius of Greenberg. Mintz calls "Streets of the River" the single most important work of poetry on the Holocaust in Hebrew literature (1984:165).

A poet of intense feeling and often of explosive power in his expression, his poetry calls out for alertness, for wakefulness. His poetry might be described as a *melody* and

a *shriek*, which is the name with which Hanna Yooz entitles her book on Greenberg, *Hanigun V'Hatz'akah*.

Mintz (1984:173) regretted that as a result of the great reputation that Greenberg's laments achieved, their status as literary texts was undermined as they were appropriated into an awesome sacred discourse. However, I think this criticism is not accurate. If a work is of such power as to become recognized as a representative voice of the people, this recognition should elevate, not undermine a work. The same applies to the spiritual power of the Book of Lamentations as a sacred discourse. In both these cases it is the aesthetic and cathartic power as a source of healing that contributed to their status.

Greenberg seemed to penetrate the collective soul of the nation, and help the nation to come to terms with loss and catastrophe by expressing their feelings, thus Greenberg's laments in *Rehovot Hanahar* have become part of the *Shoah* liturgy.

They owe their reputation to their ability to alleviate despair by expressing the nation's feelings.

AVRAHAM SHLONSKI

1900-1973

a) ABOUT THE POET

Shlonski was born in Karyokov in Ukraine in 1900 to a family of *Habad Hassidim* who in addition to their attachment to Judaism, were followers of Ahad Ha-am's cultural Zionist ideology. His father was interested in folk music, and his mother in her youth played an active part in the socialistic revolutionary movement in Russia. At thirteen he came to Palestine to study at the first secondary school established in Tel Aviv, but returned to Russia during the First World War to complete his studies. He began writing poetry while young, and his poem, *Bidmei Yei'ush* appeared in *Hashilo'ah* when he was 19 years old. When he was twenty he returned to Palestine with a group of *chalutzim*, working as a road labourer in the Valley of Jezreel, and in building construction in Tel Aviv. He also studied the humanities in Paris.

He became literary editor of various periodicals, namely *Davar*, *Ha'aretz*, *Al Hamishmar*, *Ketuvim*, *Turim* and *Orlogin* (Penueli, 1966:313). He was a leading individualistic poet, an innovator, drawing upon the best existing literature, yet building his original creative world of words and forms. A brilliant and prolific translator, he translated into Hebrew works of Brecht, Blok, Gogol, Pushkin, Chekhov, Gorky, Trotsky, Moliere, Rolland, Shakespeare, and Shaw. His poetry collections include *Shirei Hamapolet V'hapiyus* (1938) and *Al Mil'eit* (1947), and the essay collection *Yalkut Eshel*. Several of his poems have become popular Israeli songs.

Shlonski founded Israel's Symbolist school, a new "modernistic" style of Hebrew languages and brilliantly introduced vivid colloquial speech into Hebrew verse. He is an undisputed master of language (Penueli, 1966:313) who constantly invented new words and similes to suit his creative works, along with a richness of metaphor, imagery, associations, rhythms and symbolical representation of ideas, and the modern *S'fardit* pronunciation. (His contribution to the development of modern literature goes beyond his achievements in poetry. By his manifold activities as editor, translator, polemicist, popular lyricist, editor for the theatre, and author of children's literature, he set the

literary tone for an entire generation. The shift to symbolism and expressionism in Hebrew literature is in no small measure due to him.

Shlonski never favoured complete dissociation from literary tradition. He advocated the blending of poetic tradition and new values suffused with the cultural heritage of the nation.

Shlonski's themes often centre on the joy and dignity of toil and the national goals of reconstruction, especially the conquest of the soil. In addition scenes of horror in World War I, riots against Ukrainian Jews, and the inherent contradictions of the Russian revolution are themes in his poetry. He wrote agitatedly to warn his people of the further trouble that was to come. He shows "an affinity for tragic themes that mirror the Jewish people's historic experiences. Like so many other sensitive Jews he suffered psychic shock, following the catastrophe that consumed one third of the Jewish people in the Nazi furnaces" (Ausubel, 1975:212). He died in Tel Aviv-Yafo in 1973. His last volume of poems, *Sefer Ha'sulamot* was sent for publication on the day of his death and appeared posthumously in 1973 (Rabinowitz, 1974:385).

I have selected this poem because like Bialik's *Be'ir Hahareigah* and Tchernichowsky's *Al Harei Gilboa*, this poem contains a message to the Jewish people that in times of trouble, they must make a stand and fight for their rights and for their right to live. In this poem Shlonski expresses his anger at their passively accepting their catastrophic fate (Kohn, 1979:61).

“*Otot*”

b) INTRODUCTION

Shlonski in the poem cries out to awaken the world and to warn against the apathy of man towards death, suffering, and the impending catastrophe. Like Greenberg, Shlonski laments the fact that the multitude in the years preceding the Holocaust did not heed the signals concerning the imminent massacres (Yoffe, 1971:1423). The horrors of the approaching Holocaust are expressed in *Shirei Hamapolet v'Hapiyus*.

The last line of *Otot* has two words: *Y'hi Or!* "Let there be light!" In this exhortation to "light" there can only be darkness. It is a call to courage. Surrounded by hatred, - as mortars in a siege, the poet-speaker says, they surround you with disappointment - as a forest to be chopped down - but you will not be cut down, *Akh lo l'kha kareit!* The poet turns to G-d:

I know, you and again you, will command again,
Let there be light!

Al kein, ani yodei: Ata, v'shuv ata, t'tzav od: Y'hi Or!

Within the parameters of the definition of a lament, the speaker laments that the people are totally deaf and blind to their own danger. This is a translament.

c) LITERARY ANALYSIS

Theme : *Otot* is a harsh declamation to the people that they have had warnings of disaster of which they failed to take notice and make provision for their protection. *Otot, otot, otot!* "Signs, signs, and signs". The hints of flashes of lightning and thunderbolts and storm have come as a warning to them, and the hint of fire. What is extraordinary is that the words *otot, otot, otot*, in the Yiddish vernacular sounds like "ototot!", "any minute!", it is already upon them!" The conflagration is already spreading through the forest, and they close their ears, and seal their eyes and are unperturbed.

d) ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE

Style : In his own powerful style Shlonski expresses himself in a new brand of vivid diction and "modernistic" features.

The poem is written in a dynamic conversational way. Throughout the poem, he switches from the symbol to the subject and the subject to the symbol; for example the passage below constantly shifts between the trees and the people.

U'kh'var hatav'eira ach'za bikhnaf haya'ar

V'heim ar'lu, heim tachu milir'ot!

U'kh'var ba'amirim, kata'ar hashochetet

U'kh'var mibad el bad, hikhri'a v'tashod.

Hi ba'a k'yom din. V'heim om'rim k'chetef.

Hi ba'a k'onsha shel ha'cheirshut.

The people are the "forest" and "tree tops", and then they are referred to as "people" again, as victims of the "slaughtering knife":- then the "branches of trees" are mentioned, *u'kvar mibad el bad*, and then on the "Day of Judgment" "they", the "people", will be "punished for their deafness".

e) USE OF LANGUAGE

Expressionism : Shlonski explosively hits out at his people's lack of alertness. Shlonski uses "treetops" as the theme and motif of his poem, and as a powerful intermittent symbol. Shlonski expresses urgency throughout the poem, as in *Otot, otot, otot!*, in *Ukhvar ... ukhvar ... ukhvar*, in *Hi ba'a ... hi ba'a ... hi ba'a*, and in *V'eish, v'eish, v'eish*.

Rhythm : Verses are broken up into short sentences, as if the flashes of lightning are moving from place to place, suddenly, unexpectedly, rapidly. Sudden changes and improvisations of rhythm are powerful. In the last few lines of the poem, there is a change from sarcasm and anger, and the tone changes to a call to G-d, the saviour and hope.

Rhyme : The rhyming scheme is mostly abab in section *aleph*. In the first verse of section *bet*, the rhyming is different, abba. The last verse of the poem has a unique rhyming, all of its own, in five lines, abbca.

The words-

... matzor,

... l'gadei'a

... yodei'a

... od

... *y'hi or*

have a male rhyming, *charuz zichri*, with a dominant sound of “o”. This feature of rhyming constitutes a connecting theme, leading to a unity of hope. Even though the poet is distressed at the complacency of the people who ignored the signs of trouble (the *otot*) the rhyming knits the idea of hope together and pulls this positive idea through to the end.

This pattern of rhyming creates a closed unit, which after the critical attitude takes a turn towards a vision of hope. This is, in fact, the typical format of a lament.

Sarcasm : In *Otot* the storm, which is described as a forest fire, comes as a Day of Judgment; they say it came upon them *k'chetef*, suddenly, out of the blue, like a shot, like a sudden attack. But, says the poet-speaker (as if in a dialogue between two speakers with opposing opinions) it was clear that whoever listened to the signs, did not want to hear. They had many warnings. They were given *otot* of threatening trouble on the horizon. It is no use people saying that the storms came *k'chetef* and they did not hear in time. Whatever goes on "eternally" is not new, and the word "eternal" is used four times in the poem *lanetzach, nitzchit, lanetzach, hanitzchi*. The message in the poem is that the warnings could have been felt before. The *ivchat p'ladot vasha'at* is *nitzchit*; the slaughter of the steel swords and the galloping of the horses is eternal, and fighting and slaughter is not new. The people are deceiving themselves. It may be that the swords and galloping horses are as old as nature and forest fires.

Allusion to other sources : These warnings are reminiscent of Isa 42:18,19,20:

Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see.
Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf,
as my messenger that I sent?
who is blind as he that is perfect,
and blind as the Lord's servant?
Seeing many things, but thou observest not;
opening the ears, but he heareth not.

The symbol or Biblical reference serves indirectly to avoid the pathos, at the same time re-affirming and strengthening the timelessness and eternity of the disaster situation.

Nature : One of the ways of going away from, yet describing the actuality is going to nature: the *shoah* becomes the *sa'ar*; the *ya'ar* represents the people; *hatav'eira*, could be a warning of the coming of the enemy:

Ukhvar hatav'ei'ra ach'za bikhnaf haya'ar.

The edge of the forest is already catching alight! Already... already... already.

The whole of nature is affected by warfare and fire. The fields lament in a thousand sobs.

Contrast : Contrasted with the noise of battle is the whisper of a prayer in every language, (*b'chol shiv'im lashon*, in seventy languages). The poet achieves effect through antithesis as well as dynamic expression. There is resolute determination in the prayer. A whisper of prayer says, "I will not die".²¹

Rhetorical Devices : There is a directness in style as though the poem is spoken directly to listeners. The poet uses repetition to drive his point home i.e. the fire theme is repeated, *v'eish, v'eish, v'eish baya'ar he'avot*; *otot* is also repeated.

The eloquent rhetoric of the colloquial style lends itself well to sound effects. The sounds in *lanetzach lo yavshilu* link up with those in *v'leilot kol kokh'veihem hishilu*.

Sudden changes and improvisations of rhythm in the pen of Shlonski are effective in maintaining attention. They vary in each line. He uses onomatopoeic devices; for example the frequent use of the sound "t", sounds like a knife cutting, as in *otot, otot, otot, kata'ar hashochetet* and *k'chetef* or the sound "sh" which sounds like the whisper of prayer on the one hand and like the licking of fire on the other.

He also uses rhetorical questions. G-d is questioned: are only the prayers of the Jewish people everlastingly rejected? He curses the everlasting proverbial enemy, *Amalek*. We must be on guard against our enemy, in this case the Nazis.

He says, "Blessed be the Judge of Truth". The expression *Baruch Dayan-Emet* (verse 5), said after somebody dies links up with *Hi ba'a k'yom Din* (in verse 2).²²

²¹This reminds us of Ps (118:17,18): *Lo amut ki ech'ye va'asapeir ma'asei Adon-ai ...* - "I shall not die, but live and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord hath chastened me sore: but He hath not given me over unto death." "The will to live becomes a divine imperative with a national mission and redemptive possibilities". Yuter (1946:42)

²²*Yom Din*, the "Day of Judgment", is referred to in the *Netaneh Tokef*, recited in *Musaf* on the High Holy Days, in the context of *mi yichye umi yamut, ... mi vamayim, umi va'eish, mi vacherev, ..., mi vachanikah ...*, "Who will live and who will die, ... who by water, and who by fire, who by the sword, ..., who by strangulation.

There is a rhetorical question addressed to the people: how did you manage to become so soaring in sorrow when you, from the stock of the Hebrews as an offshoot from the trunk of the tree, are an "eternal" prey? Once more we have the image of the tree and the forest. Again there is a reference to the "eternal" disasters, pogroms, sufferings, afflictions.

Fear motif : At first the fear is personal; the speaker-poet tells of his own experiences and laments: *Beiti ole b'eish*, "My house goes up in fire." Once again there is the image of "fire", connected with the "fire in the forest" symbol at the beginning of the poem and a hint of the Temple going up in flames. Could it be juxtaposing G-d's view of His house, the house of Israel? This could be an individual lament of the speaker or the lament of G-d over His house. There is fear everywhere. *Magor mei'avarim / B'chol asher tifne / naval b'elef dyokan*. "Fear from all sides. Wherever you turn. A vile man with a thousand images."²³

f) COMPARISON WITH STANDARD LAMENT

In the standard lament the victim is often addressed, in this poem the nation, or it could be the deceased, or an unseen presence, and rhetorical questions may be asked, as here: *Eich ramta ad m'od batza'ar u'vazoken / Hateref hanitzchi migeza ha'ivrim?* "How did you reach such heights ... when you were a perpetual prey ... ?" In the Book of Lamentations, "Zion" is addressed: "What thing shall I liken unto thee, O daughter of Jerusalem?" (Lam 2:13). In David's lament, Jonathan is addressed: "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan." (2 Sam 1:26). Shlonski finishes the lament with the plea, as of G-d's command of yore, "Let there be light". In the Book of Lamentations, too, there is a glimmer of hope in the prayer to G-d, "Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old" (Lam 5:21).

In the Book of Lamentations, the emphasis is on an admission of sin, *religious sin*. In *Otot*, the censure is because of having failed to have taken heed; Greenberg also scolded his people vehemently for not taking heed, (*Sefer Ha-Kitrug v'ha'Emunah*).

In *Be'ir Hahareigah*, Bialik was angry with his people for failing to take action. Shlonski, too, could not tolerate apathy and he believed in the power of the pen to awaken the sleeping conscience; an impending calamity should not have been ignored.

²³Compare *magor misaviv*, Jer (20:10); Jer (46:5)

However, throughout history people did not want to know. "These three and twenty years ... I have spoken to you, betimes and often; but ye have not hearkened ... nor inclined your ear to hear" (Jeremiah 25:3,4).

The metaphors are similar to those found in the Book of Lamentations, in that they turn to nature, both in keeping with their times. In Lamentations G-d is described as a "lion", a "wild bear" (Lam 3:10), a hunter; (Lam 3.12 ff); "[G-d] hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, / He hath made me to wallow in ashes" (Lam 3:16). Shlonski has different images, in accordance with his time and place. Here the fields of corn lament with a thousand sobbings; in seventy human languages a whispered prayer is heard; the nights drop their stars.

g) **ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE**

In the poem *Otot*, Shlonski like Bialik scolds his people, they should have stood up for themselves, and have protected their lives by fighting if necessary, or fled. He too was angry, angry with the nations, those whom he had thought were friends. This poem is a call to courage.

Shlonski describes the situation of the Jews as being "surrounded by hatred, - as mortars in a siege". "They surrounded you with disappointment as a forest to be chopped-down". It is not entirely negative because the sentence continues with a message of hope, "but you will not be cut down". Meantime fire is spreading through the forest, and the people are ignoring it. They are not concerned. The speaker turns to his people, and warns them that the signs of trouble are already upon them, *Otot, otot, otot!*. Any minute. In fact the fire is already there and they are doing nothing about it.

This is a dynamic poem and is designed to arouse, using vivid language that is at the same time Biblical yet modern, individualistic and innovative.

Despite the imminent tragedy, there is in Shlonski a strong element of hope and trust that there will be a resolution. Light will come. Shlonski calls for courage. He gives courage. Although there is a fire in the forest he reassures his people that they will not be cut down - *Akh lo l'kha kareit!* A whispered prayer gives the message of hope, "I will not die".

This is a positive conclusion which intimates that even if the whole world appears to be destroyed, G-d will help build a new order, as in the Creation, when He said "Let there be light".

The poet turns to G-d:

I know, You and again You, will command again,
Let there be light!
Al kein, ani yodei: Ata, v'shuv ata, t'tzav od: Y'hi Or.

The most positive is the last line with two words:

***Y'hi Or* –**
Let there be light.

FAITH AND PRAYER

The poem with this sense of urgency and impinging doom, makes use of the words from *B'reishit* -

Y'hi Or –

The poet recognizes a universal need for prayer:

And in seventy human languages a whispered prayer is heard.

G-d is praised: "Blessed be the Judge of Truth", but he is also questioned. The poem has a strong element of faith in it, and a call to G-d, the saviour and hope. This is a pattern running through the genre of Jewish literary laments throughout the centuries (Kohn, 1979:61) and the inspiration provided by Shlonski and his predecessors has helped Jews to summon up strength and bravery for all time.

i) CONCLUSION

Shlonski was "the leading poet of his generation and a secular socialist" (Ben Yosef, 1989:37) whose poetry is moulded out of the world in which he lived. Scenes of war, riots, violence, pogroms against the Jews are some of his themes. He feels he is bound to his people, persecuted men, women and children. Above all, he felt he had to give a message.

In the 1930's Shlonski wrote articles explaining his demand for a poetic renewal. He claimed that the literature of an uprooted generation should be as stormy and bewildering as the generation itself. It should be as full of contradictions and fears as

the period in which it was created. This poem itself is a poem of storm and fear and also encouragement. Shlonski feels that "upon us rests the sacred duty to remember not to forget," and this is what he tries to do in this poem.

Despite the tragedy of our people, in this poem there is a major element of hope and trust that light will come. He calls for courage and gives courage and in this way he alleviates despair. G-d's message "Let there be light" is a powerful message to alleviate despair.

University of Cape Town

NATHAN ALTERMAN

1910 - 1970

a) ABOUT THE POET

Alterman was for a time the most influential poet since Bialik. He was born in Warsaw in 1910 and moved to Tel Aviv when he was 15. After completing his secondary school studies, he specialized in agronomy and later took up a journalistic post and became deeply involved in the events of his time. He published his first poem when he was 21. In 1934 he began to write political verse on a regular basis, first for *Ha'aretz* and later for *Davar*, in which he took snippets of news and turned them into poems. By rooting his words firmly in the current historical events, his poems had an authenticity that made him the voice of the "here and now" in Israel (Palestine in his time) (Slutsky 1971:38). In this weekly versified satirical "Seventh Column", *Ha'tur Hash'vi'I*, he reacted sharply to topical matters, and this column played an important part in expressing and shaping public opinion.

Some of the "Seventh Column" poems, became adopted nationally. One such was *Al Magash Hakesef* which was a lament published in *Davar* on 15th December 1947 to honour those who died struggling for Israel's establishment. It so epitomized the nation's grief that it was used on the first day postal cover issued to commemorate Israel's 50th year for Memorial Day 1948-1998.²⁴

He wrote five books of poetry, including *Simchat Ani'yim*, *Shirei Makot Mitzra'im* and *Ir Hayonah* which dealt with the Holocaust. He also translated Shakespeare, Racine, Moliere, old English and Scottish ballads. He wrote plays like *Kinneret*, *Kinneret* (1962); *Pundak Haruchot* (1963), *Mishpat Pythagoras*, *Ester Hamalkah* and a book of critical essays (Carmi, 1981:139).

He showed keen sensitivity to the rhythms of the spoken language and was known as the "imagist". His verse is lyrical and contemplative, rich in imagery, symbols and innovations in style and language. He wrote from a universal standpoint, although his images and symbols have Jewish and Biblical connotations. Protagonists were "father", "husband", mother", "sister". Readers could relate to this.

²⁴Israel Philatelic Services (4/1998:572)

He spoke of children as victims and survivors. Like other poets who were not in the Holocaust he uses emotional distancing and metaphors rather than writing from personal traumas as did Greenberg. As Barzel said he has the ability to look at events from the outside, thus making the scene more abstract and more elevated (1990:293). He did not refer to Nazism or Germany but made use of metaphors and images in his descriptions. He wrote about dying and death and the "living dead", which represents those who died in the Holocaust, but who will never die, and thus will never grant victory to Nazism.

He was a successful poet on two levels: both as a political satirist opposing the British policies in the 1940's and as one of Israel's leading *avant garde* poets. He died in 1970. I have chosen *Al Ha'yeled Avram* because it is a poem of deep feeling and nationhood with a vital interplay of characters, and a gripping sense of the dramatic. As Ben Yosef (1988:1566) says, a concrete episode has been transformed into a symbol of past horrors and future hopes.

University of Cape Town

“Al Ha'yeled Avram”

b) INTRODUCTION

This poem was published in the "Seventh Column" in *Davar* in 1959, and enacts in a manner, akin to a play, the story of a small helpless boy, Avram, in a situation of crisis. It is based on an article, which appeared in the press the previous week,²⁵ as all poems in the Seventh Column, and describes the boy Avram who dares not close his eyes and go to sleep because of the visions that appear before him.

This poem still has significance to modern Israeli thinkers. The historian Algazi recently wrote that he remembered his mother reciting this poem to him and he recalled her doing so in 1976 when he was travelling with his father to the refugee camps on the Gaza strip. "Alterman", Algazi (1998:22) wrote, "without mincing words superimposes the decree that thundered on Abraham the father. 'Fear not Abram for I shall make you great and immense.' " His mother, Algazi felt, had wanted to remind him not of the promise of being great and immense, but that they too, had once been refugees.

c) LITERARY ANALYSIS

The poem is in balladistic style and has a second heading of two lines, which gives the background and details necessary to understand the poem: this allows the attention in the poem to be given largely to the important sparse links of extracts of tense dramatic dialogue, which help to develop the plot. These lines state:

*Bi'h'yoto yashein al madreigot beito b'Polin k'tom
hamilchama, mipachad lishkav b'mitato.*

When he was sleeping on the steps of his house in
Poland at the end of the war, afraid to lie in his bed.

These lines Algazi (1998:22) highlights as indicating that the boy was afraid to lie in his bed because he was unable to remain on Europe's soil because of the Holocaust experience. Alterman used this personal individual episode to draw symbolic parallels and evokes the memory of the patriarch Abraham who despite all difficulties will arise and go to the land which G-d shows him.

²⁵Ben Yosef, (1988:1566) ; Hagorni (1970:38)

Theme : Three themes are interwoven in this poem.

- Biblical Theme : The poem, the title and the main protagonist, refer to the archetype, the forefather Avram, and his relationship with G-d.
- Child Theme : The image of small helpless children evokes in the reader a feeling of pity and pathos and they are frequently used in lament literature to emphasize the horror of the catastrophe. "The child" as a hero is sometimes used especially in order to convey a message of the future and of hope²⁶ and to increase the tension between the future and the loss of the past. The child in this poem is named *Avraham*, which stands for the Jewish nation as a whole. Children are also repeatedly described in the Book of Lamentations²⁷ and as well as in modern laments such as in Greenberg²⁸.
- Living-dead Theme : What is being described can be perceived and experienced by the reader, as a near and far relationship between the living and the dead - near, since they are all close family members, and far, since the dead are in heaven.

The theme consists of a dialogue between the living and the dead, whose phantoms walk among the living in the hearts of those who love them. The flesh and blood members of the family are supplanted by symbolic representations and the real and unreal persons depicted merge into one being. The Holocaust is represented in the use of the term "the living dead", the one who stands between two worlds; "he is dead, but somehow alive" (Ben Yosef, 1988:1564) and the "living dead" is therefore the symbol of posthumous victory over Nazism. Another interpretation is that it is difficult to come to terms with the reality of death if the dead have not been suitably mourned with appropriate ceremonies or graves. If there is no body, there is always the possibility that the loved one is still alive, somewhere else. This uncertainty makes it difficult to accept the finality of death and acceptance of that person's continued absence. These incorporeal individuals are represented as being the "living dead" - not really alive, but not really dead.

Auschwitz did not dispense death certificates. How does one mourn smoke in the chimney? Whose smoke is it? The difficulty of mourning when there is no corpse to

²⁶Ben Yosef, (1988:1566) ; Hagorni, (1970:39)

²⁷Lam (1:16; 2:11,12; 2:19; 4:4; 5:13)

²⁸*Kinat Habein B'vorcho Mibeit Avi'v V'imo*. See also Katzenelson's *Harishonim*, Alterman's *Ha'efro'ach Ha'asiri* and Leah Goldberg *Sefer Hateva Ham'zameret*.

weep over was discussed by the Chilean poet and playwright Ariel Dorfman.²⁹ Dorfman poses the question as to how one can cope psychologically in life and literature with the insecurity of not knowing what happened to one's family, the "disappearing ones". What do you do if there is no body to mourn over? What if the body is not there? It is difficult to come to terms with death, and to start the cycle of healing.

Eli Wiesel also deals with this lack of closure, and recognizes the fact that "If my mother had told me, "Good-bye, my son, I am going to die", perhaps I could believe it more now."³⁰ The same insecurity is found in Greenberg who says referring to his parents; "Indeed I saved this, my body, you need to know I did not save my soul".

I do not know their grave, as I do not know their ultimate dwelling place. Their son cannot mourn for them at their graveside". Had he known what happened to his parents it would have been easier for him to come to terms with their death.

The Nazis went to considerable expense to transport Jews vast distances by train, in order to kill them *en masse* and to ensure that the graves could not be used as points of remembrance. The result was that the survivors had no bodies to mourn over or graves at which to mourn. This lack of closure blocks the process of healing. Thus the Nazis attempted to extend their domain into the realm of death itself, to deny death a final resting place.

d) USE OF LANGUAGE

Lyricism : The poem is written with lyrical grace, in the nature of a satirical sequence of dream transparencies, and is clear and precise. It is the middle of the night, *yarei'ach ram*, "the moon is high", and the clouds are floating, *ananim bashayit*, "sailing along".

Symmetry : Most of Alterman's poetry, especially the poems which were published in the "Seventh Column", are built upon fixed forms, as is this poem. Alterman uses symmetrical repetition as a supreme value of order and beauty. Each of his poems has a fixed number of stanzas and sentences, a rhyme scheme, and a constant number of feet.

²⁹Dorfman "Disappearing Acts", lecture given at the University of Cape Town (1.7.1997), in press

³⁰ Wiesel (1962:103). Likewise, the dropping of shovelfuls of earth on the coffin during a burial helps. Lamm (1969:65) considers the "heart-rending thud of earth on the casket" to be psychologically beneficial because it signals finality and helps the mourner overcome the illusion that his relative still lives. See also Kolatch (1996:107).

Hence in line 3, verse 12, the word order is changed and *Avraham* is used in the place of *Avram*.

There is also use of *kinah* meter, in this and other verses of Alterman's poem, as in the Book of Lamentations.

Surrealistic Narrative : When poets were ready to depict the terror, it was found that surrealistic dreams could be applied to suit the subject. Some of the Shoah poets wrote in surrealistic formulae, as for example Greenberg and Gilboa. This was a comfortable mode in which to describe the "indescribable".

Truth and illusion blend into one another and it is hard to know where truth ends and illusion begins (Birman, 1968:83). In this way the reader participates with his own imagination. In this case the boy Avram sleeps on the stone steps of his house, afraid to go to sleep in his bed. His mother appears before him, close to him, but her feet don't touch the ground. There is no movement. She speaks to him

V'omeret: Avram, kar haleil v'ratov.

Baita bo, lamita hamutza'at.

She pleads gently with him to come into the house to his laid out bed, for the night is cold and wet - which is a normal reaction. These are the words of a loving mother to her child. He answers that he cannot: *Imi, imi*, he repeats four times. He cannot sleep in his bed like ordinary boys,

Ki otakh ba ra'iti,

imi, imi,

y'sheina u'v'libeikh ma'akhelet,

for he has seen her sleeping in it with a knife in her heart.

Likewise his father urges him to come home. He repeats *Baita bo*. These words recur in similar forms. "Come home at once," the father says, and he repeats, "My son, Avram, come home quickly!"

Bo habaita miyad

b'ni Avram, chish habaita bo'a.

The father is strict with his son; he rebukes him. He is transparent and tall and stretches out his hand to him. In a way he protects him. He has not seen him for some time. "Come home," he says, "at once". Avram answers his father as he answered his mother, addressing him directly: "he cannot, for there he is afraid to close his eyes";

sham efchad la'atsom ha'einaiyim.

He names his father four times as he named his mother. He has seen the father there, in the house, sleeping quietly, without a head.

Repetition : The repetition of *imi*, *imi* and later *avi*, *avi* is a standard convention in the lament, namely, repetition of addressing the dead: this is part of the code of mourning. In a way, it brings the mourner nearer to the dead, and helps him to adjust in the grieving process. Also, *imi*, *imi* has a line to itself, as has *avi*, *avi*. The parents are central characters in the boy's mind and heart, and the small boy *Avram* is the central motif in the poem. It seems as if Alterman in his poem has reorganized the Biblical narrative concerning the forefathers. This could be Alterman's idea of the turn of events in history as opposed to G-d's promise in Genesis. It is the child, the future that is important, not the parents who represent the past generations. He is a frightened boy, who grows into the mature *Avraham* and has an important mission to fulfil; despite the "knives" and difficulties *Avraham* will still go and inherit the land. "Don't fear *Avraham*, don't fear, I will make you a mighty nation".

Pathos : He calls out to his father *Avi!* and also to his mother, for now he is terrified, and the surrealistic nightmare persists; they do not come to his help, but his mother tells him that if the knife were not in her heart, her heart would be broken into two.

Irony : The irony is that although *Avram* cannot sleep in his bed, his family are all sleeping there, the sleep of death. The bed is a symbol of safety. It is a warm place in the heart of a home; whereas in the poem these "safe places" are perceived to be dangerous.

Hyperbole : And then comes the cruelty of the seventy nations,³¹ (all the nations as conceived by Jewish sages) who say,

We are upon you!

This is a line on its own -

Hin'nu alekha!

With seventy laws and seventy axes

we will bring you back to this house.

³¹ Seventy is according to Rabbinic tradition the number of the nations of the world and is also symbolical of a very large number. As seen, for example, in the Midrash, *g'dola hakivshah she'omedet bein shivim z'eivim*, "great is the lamb who stands amid seventy wolves" (*Esther Rabba* 6). describing the nation

And we will place you in the bed made up for you
 say the "seventy nations,
 "and you will sleep silently as your father!"
V'yashanta bah dom k'avikha! -

Seeing his father lying dead in his bed, this is a shock. The bed is made, *mita hamutza'at*, for the boy Avram (the symbol for the Jewish nation), and this seems to indicate that his destiny is carved out for him, to sleep in such a bed.

Allusions to other sources : This poem is based on references to Avraham, the father of the nation in the Torah, and it is necessary to have a thorough knowledge of the Biblical allusions underpinning the whole poem from the boy's name at the beginning to the revelation at the end.

The father is associated with G-d, and the father says

*... Al tira / al tira, Avram,
 ki gadol v'atzum asimeka.
 Lekh l'kha, derekh leil ma'akhelet vadam,
 el ha'aretz asher ar'eka*

and G-d repeats,

*Lekh l'kha, derekh leil ma'akhelet vadam,
 k'chaya, k'tola, k'tzipor.*

This is an ironical comfort, "Do not fear," and repeated, "Do not fear, Avram, I will make you a great and mighty nation: go by way of the slaughtering knife and blood, to the land which I shall show you; as an animal, a worm, a bird."³²

It has to be compared to the Biblical text in Gen 15:1 where G-d says, "Fear not Avram; I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward," and to Gen 12:1 where G-d says *Lekh l'kha*, "Go from thy father's house to a land that I will show you ... and I will make of thee a great nation." This same verse is quoted in Bialik's *Be'ir Hahareigah*, but in that case the viewer is commanded to go and see with his own eyes what terrible things have taken place.

Israel who takes a stand throughout the generations amongst all the nations of the world who wish to destroy her.

³² From Is (41:14) we are aware that G-d said to Jacob: Fear not, thy worm, *tola*, Jacob, and you men of Israel; I will help thee, sayeth the Lord, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

Avram too must get up and go, *lekh l'kha*, but in this case he is not going to a future of promise but to one of blood and slaughter (mentioned twice). The word *ma'a'khelet*, a symbol of torture, does not appear many times in the Bible, but is a key-word in the poems of Alterman, Gilboa and Gouri in this thesis, as in *derech leil ma'achelet vadam*. There is a blessing and a curse in the Biblical text and in the poem. The four words of the blessing and the curse in Alterman's poem are repeated almost word for word from Genesis 12:3 "I will bless those who bless thee and I will curse those who curse thee." The text is pregnant with allusions to Jewish texts including the *Brit*, (the Covenant), the *Akedah* (the trial of Avraham), as well as to cultural symbols such as "home" and "bed" and "family love and concern".

Lament motif : His little sister appears to him, crying to him to come home.

Ach o'ne la Avram: shamma at y'sheina

Im dim'at hameitim al le'chi.

The word *ach* "but" links up phonetically with *achot* "sister" and it also connects up with *eichah*, the word of lament, as does *le'chi*. She sleeps with the tear of the dead on her cheek.

Verse 10 contains a quotation from Amos 8:3, which implies a dire lamentation. The poem reads *Az balayl hoshlach has*.³³

In the following line of the poem,

and the moon becomes dim

v'yarei'ach hu'am

the word *hu'am* is like the word *yu'am* in the Book of Lamentations (Lam 4:1). *Eichah yu'am zahav*, "How is the gold become dim!" In the latter, the "gold" is a symbol for "the precious sons of Zion" (Lam 4:2) who have become wretched and "dim like dross". In *Hayeled Avram* this is going to be a period of darkness and slaughter, *leil ma'akhelet va'dam*. In both, the situation is catastrophic.

Symbolism : The mother, standing near him with her feet not touching the ground,

mityatzevet imo l'fanav mikarov

uv'ragleha ba'aretz einena noga'at

³³In Amos 8:3 we read: *V'heililu shirot heichal bayom hahu n'um Adon-ai Elokim rav hapeger b'khol makom hishlich has*. "And the songs of the Temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord G-d: there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence."

could be the Divine Presence, the *Shekhinah*, the feminine side of G-d, who is the Father also in this case.³⁴

The *ma'achelet* is an important symbol in the poem. The *ma'achelet*, "slaughtering knife", was intended for sacrificing the son of the patriarch Avraham (Gen 22:10). There is also mention of a *sakin* and a *pigyon*.

e) **DENOUEMENT**

This is a nightmare for a small boy. The crux of the matter lies in the last verse: Avram realizes the sublimity of his mission, he falls on his face in obeisance, goes out, as told, *lekh l'kha*, from the house and the gate, because the command that G-d ordered and "thundered on to Avram the father, thunders on to Avram the son" and thence follows, "I will make you a great nation." For this responsibility courage is needed.

There is tragedy in the helpless fears of the child.

In the introduction to his book on English and Scottish ballads Alterman wrote that the most important factor in a ballad is the spirit of tragedy loaded with dramatic tension (Loren, 1984:51-56) and this idea shows up clearly in the poem, which is a combination of the old and the *avante garde* in literature. The poet uses images, symbols and allusions taken from traditional Jewish literature but his language and rhythms are those of modern spoken Hebrew and the Biblical archetypes are ironically subverted as in Bialik, Gilboa & Gouri.

In reading the darkest poems, such as the Book of Lamentations and the laments in this thesis one sees that throughout history there always remains a little hope and faith as to the outcome, even after the Nazi Holocaust which is nearer to our own time, and as a result, the eye sees and the mind questions.

f) **ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE**

Alterman did not lament or cry as much as he identified and empathized with his suffering fellow Jews, only rarely did he protest or admonish them, but he did express his rage and shame at the Jewish suffering (Ben Yosef, 1988:1565).

³⁴The *Shekhinah* frequently appears in Hebrew poetry, as in Bialik, *Be'ir Hahareigah*, *L'vadi* and in *Tabib*. The *Shekhinah* is said to be in all places, *Baba Bathra* (25) and when Israel goes into exile, and is redeemed, the *Shekhinah* is exiled and redeemed, Meg 29a; (Horwitz, 1972:1351).

Hayeled Avram, with its lament motif refers to mournful grief as much as to public fear. This particular poem ends on an uplifting note of encouragement to the nation to overcome these horrific challenges. Whatever happens in history, the child Avram, who through the symbol of *Avraham Avinu* represents the Jewish nation, will emerge victorious.

In spite of its disturbing imagery, this poem is actually a poem of hope going from darkness to light. The boy Avram is afraid to lie in his bed in Poland at the end of the war as he has nightmares about the fate of his family during the Holocaust, yet the poem shows the “communication” between the young Avram and his family. There is love between them, even if they are unable to care for and protect each other.

However, no matter what happens in his dreams and in history, the poem indicates that youth will emerge victorious as symbolized by the child Avram. Children stand for our future and our hope. The life of the child stretches ahead of him.

g) **FAITH AND PRAYER**

This poem is imbued with religious symbolism.

There is a change in the protagonists, from “*Avram*” and the “living-dead” family-members, to “*Avraham*” and G-d. Ezrahi (1982:105) maintains that the use of the prebenedictal version of the name Avram indicates the orphan son bereft also of his heavenly Father. While in the Holocaust, he is called *Avram*, and in the post-Holocaust time, when the blessing will come with the birth of Israel, he is called *Avraham*. I would like to take it one step further and suggest that symbolically the horror of the Holocaust is seen as parallel to the patriarch’s early life before the blessing; that indeed a *gilgul*, i.e. a change of fate, awaits the young boy (as was the case with the father) when his name changes. (The poet selects the names of Avram according to the rhythmical needs of the poem).

For the command that thundered upon Avram the father

Thunders on Avram the boy

The message given is that the living son will continue the family process, going out, *lekh l'kha*, as G-d commanded the patriarch Avraham to life, deliverance and nationhood. Avram stands for the past and connection with G-d. Avraham stands for the future. Past, present and future are one continuity.

The choice of name of the child, *Avram*, (not *Avraham*) i.e. pre-benedictal, gives hope to the future. This could be Alterman's way of implying a message, that of the blessing *Avram's* father gave him "Do not fear, *Avram*, I will make you a great and mighty nation", which G-d gave the original *Avram*. This puts G-d in the role of the Father.

Alterman adds to the message G-d gave to *Avram* in Genesis: go by way of the slaughtering knife and blood, to the land which I shall show you; as an animal, a worm, a bird". Alterman adds that *Avram* will endure suffering on the way to the land which *Avram's* father will show him, i.e. the land of Israel which G-d showed the original *Avram*. With this message Alterman refers to one of his oft repeated themes, the British embargo on *aliyah* into Israel and the suffering of the illegal immigrants in their struggle to get there and the efforts of the *Aliyah Bet* to assist.

Thus *Hayeled Avram* ends on an uplifting note of encouragement to the nation, to overcome, that out of this dreadful suffering they will be shown to their land.

G-d's injunction in Genesis must be carried out. "Go from thy father's house to a land that I will show you and I will make of thee a great nation."

G-d will show him the way and will make him big and mighty.

He will overcome the night of the slaughter, the knife and the blood that is shed. The present dreams are full of horror but there is hope for the future in their promised land.

This poem has a strong message and offers a look into the future.

h) FAITH IN REDEMPTION THROUGH THE RETURN TO ZION

Alterman combines destruction and redemption, thereby giving new hope to the survivors and to the Jews in Eretz Yisrael. This consolation is reinforced by allusions to the Biblical patriarch and to the Ancient Promise, the covenant with Abraham (Ben Yosef, 1988:1566)

Alterman urged the Jews to go on *Aliyah* and condemned the British for restricting it. He ends his poem with G-d's promise to Abraham: "I shall make you great and mighty. *Lekh l'kha...* 'to the land which I shall show you' ".

I suggest that in fact the descriptions which affirm what had happened in the Holocaust are secondary to his message that they will go to Israel and build a new future. As the forefather *Avram's* fate changed, as symbolized by the change of name, when he moved

from the past towards the future so too would the hero of the poem, the child Avram, have a blessed future ahead of him in spite of his nightmarish past.

i) **CONCLUSION**

Alterman was forever coping with self-made challenges, his heart tied to the roots of the distant past yet fiercely responsive to his own day and age (Slutsky, 1970:37) as can clearly be seen in this poem.

Alterman lived in a period which he described as a time of "life on the razor's edge" (Shaked, 1985:30) and used his poetry in his regular newspaper column to comment on current affairs and encourage his readers.

In this case his message is

Go, get thee out, the way of the (darkness, night,
suffering, misery, gloom) of knife and blood,
To the land which I shall show you.

By giving a message that the Jews should move from the nightmare of Europe where they were persecuted to the land which G-d will show them, to Israel, where they could live as free people, this lament carries a powerful statement that alleviates despair.

AMIR GILBOA

1917-1984

a) ABOUT THE POET

Amir Gilboa was born in Volhynia, the Ukraine, in Russia in 1917, where he attended the Hebrew Gymnasium. He arrived in Palestine in 1937 as an illegal immigrant and worked as a labourer. He also fought in the Jewish Brigade in military campaigns in Egypt, North Africa, Malta and Italy during World War II. His various experiences gave inspiration to his poetry and it is at that time that he started publishing.

Among his publications are "Seven Domains", "Songs in Early Morning" and "The Lips of Those Asleep".

In the 1940's there was an accent on linguistic sensitivity that prompted Gilboa to abandon flowery rhetoric, while still preserving the multilevel allusions inherent in this style. Gilboa's poetry with its developed lyrical sense and complex structure speaks with compassion, and his blending of personal and national motifs is reminiscent of Bialik. Gilboa sensitively and at times enigmatically describes the feelings of the individual within the crowd in a surrealistic dream atmosphere. These feelings range from the fear and expectation of the apocalypse to an expression of wild and childlike joy. Carmi (1981:141) states that Gilboa has consistently been one of the most original and experimental Israeli poets, combining traditional elements with colloquial usages, and personal concerns with national motifs. He has the ability to transcend and compress time so that past and present are one, and to connect his personal life to the life of a people (Kaufman, 1979:11).

Gilboa, "hailed as the voice of his generation" continues the Bible tradition in an associative way, "forging his own poetic diction" and creating his tensions in the different aspects of the imagination and reality (Kaufman, 1979:12,13).

He has been awarded many literary prizes including the Prime Minister's Award for Creative Writing (1969) and the Bialik Prize (1971).

I selected Gilboa's *Yitzchak* because it straddles two worlds. It is modern, based on the Holocaust. It involves a father and son, the individual and the collective. It is the story of a little boy, yet it is the story of the nation's history. It deals with nature, innocence, love and compassion. It deals with blood, nightmare, death and guilt. It uses the theme

of the *Akedah*, with a twist, to reflect on the Jewish condition. It is all embracing and in its simplicity and depth it is a wonderful example of the power a modern lament can have and it also has archetypal qualities, based on the Biblical story of the *Akedah*.

“Yitzchak”

b) LITERARY ANALYSIS

Theme : This is a poem about the encounter of the poet, in a dream, with his father who died in the Holocaust. The viewpoint of the boy *Yitzchak* is central to the poem. As in the previous poem, Alterman's *Al Hayered Avram*, there is a child theme, a Biblical theme, and a living-dead theme. The poet, using a child's voice, intertwines the experience and the remembrance of his family into Biblical narrative, creating its own myth, the innocent world of youth. This poem, like Alterman's, subverts the foundational myth of Avraham the forefather of the Jewish nation by transvaluing the actual death of the father in Europe that haunts the son in Israel.

The dream motif is a form of acknowledging the speaker's distance from the event.

The poem displays emotion and tension between himself and the memory of his father which mounts up in the conflict of the realization of this joyful dream scene, which is soon about to change.

Towards morning

the sun took a walk in the forest
Together with me and with Father
And my right hand in his left.

There was an aura of childlike carefreeness and wonder and freshness in being part of the primordial order of nature, a feeling of oneness in a joyful world and a feeling of compassion and tenderness between father and son, *vi'y'mini bis'molo*, "and my right hand in his left" (Cf Song of Songs 2:6). There was a warmth in the sun, and in the grasp of his father's hand. A feeling of childlike joy is conveyed in this simply described idyllic experience of a leisurely stroll in the outdoors, at one with creation, in an ecstasy of awareness, close to the first primeval light.

There is a hint that he is going to be the powerful one, not the father, when he states that “my right hand” which is a symbol of power, is “in his left”. He already subverts the order of power in nature where the father is usually the stronger one.

The poem starts off as a pleasant story told by a small boy, but turns into a frightening reversal of roles and atmosphere, time and place. Ostensibly the theme of the poem is that of the *akedah*, but it is subversive, as in the *Akedah* there was no death whilst there were uncountable deaths in the Holocaust.

The *akedah* as an example of self-sacrifice in obedience to G-d's will is the symbol of Jewish martyrdom throughout the ages (Jacobs, 1971:480). This motif recurs repeatedly throughout Hebrew literature. The most famous *akedah* in Hebrew poetry was written by Judah Samuel Abbas, a native of Fez and resident of Aleppo who died in 1167 and his poem was used as a model for inspiration by later poets including one by Maimonides. Sephardic communities chant it to an impressive melody before the blowing of the *Shofar* during the New Year service. Abbas wrote another *akedah* poem using *midrashic* motifs as did Ephraim of Bonn (d.1200). The symbol of the *akedah* is found also in laments by the Ashkenazi *payettanim*, such as Rabbi David bar Meshullam of Speyer (who wrote one of the strongest texts of the First Crusade) (Carmi, 1981:357,374). After the war, the *akedah* was used by many Israeli poets and artists as a symbol of the Holocaust.

Gilboa's poem is overlaid and underlaid by themes of the Holocaust and the loss of innocence.

In this poem the father is the person slaughtered in this modern time, not in the *Moriah* of the Biblical Avraham and Yitzchak, but in the forests of twentieth century Europe. Unlike Genesis, the angel does not intervene and does not stop the killing. There is blood on the leaves and like lightning a knife flashes between the trees.

Sachs states that Gilboa identifies himself imaginatively and directly with characters of the Bible (1965:137). He alludes to the *Akedah* narrative in so many ways that to me there can be no doubt about this in the reader's mind. For example, his choice of names, *Yitzchak*; his choice of words, like *ma'a'khelet*; his choice of imagery of the father and son, walking together, emphasize his point, so that all readers will see the connection between the poem in modern times and the archetypal narrative. When this

connection is made, Gilboa can manipulate and subvert the original message to create his own new message.

c) ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE

Style : Striking stylistic effects are created by unusual ideas and images. The poem speaks mainly in the voice of the child at different stages of his development:

Abba, Abba, maheir v'hatzila et Yitzchak

Here one realizes that it is not the Biblical father ready to sacrifice; he is the victim who has actually been sacrificed. The danger is coming from another greater power. The style derives much of its effect from sound patterns of associative assonance *haya'ar / yachad*, emjambement ... *b'tokh haya'ar / yachad imi...*, alliteration *al he'alim, ha'y'ta yad yamin*, internal rhymes (*ani, b'ni, dami*), fragmentation (the sudden changes, in the voice of the father and in the different varied verses), the gapping between the psychological dream and the real physical episode of the "hand".

The voices play an important part in this night of dreams; first, the child tells of the walk, calmly and idyllically; then comes the hasty rhythm expressed in the fear when the small boy calls out in distress in his baby voice:

"Daddy, Daddy save Yitzchak"

Then the father tells of his slaughter and his voice is cut off, and the boy wants to scream and cannot, as often happens in a nightmare when one is dumbstruck with fear. The different voices are in keeping with the fast-moving kaleidoscopic dream scenes;³⁵ the style suits the context; there is the child-become man who thinks deeply about himself and his father. These thoughts merge into the archetypal Abraham-Isaac *akedah* narrative.

Irregularity of Structure : The irregularity of the structure of the poem is suitable for the context of an unpredictable nightmare, which had started in a compassionate lyrical way. On awakening from a nightmare the sleeper often still has horrific visions in his mind's eye. This awakening is resonant with the description of the bloodless hand, which happens physically when one sleeps in an awkward position and awakens with the hand temporarily paralyzed.

³⁵On the importance of voices in the Book of Lamentations see Lanahan (1974:41-49).

There is fragmentation, a leaping over from verse 11 to verse 15.

Verse 11 states

and his face pale

and this theme is repeated in verse 15

And bloodless was the right hand

Rhythm : The meter changes to suit the text. The poem has a little of the traditional "limping meter", the lines in verses 1, 4 and 5 becoming shorter and shorter respectively. These diminishing lines imitate the speech of a small boy: in the first verse ending *vi'y'mini bis'molo*, "and my right hand was in his left hand"; in the fourth verse, ending *ufanav chivrim* "and his face was pale" and the fifth verse, *v'nit'orarti* "and I woke up".

The first line of verse 3 is written in the rhythm of the panic-stricken ironic calling, "Daddy, Daddy, quickly, save Yitzchak so no one will be missing for lunch!" This is the dividing line between the childhood world and the cruel world of slaughter.

The fourth verse, *Ze ani hanishchat, b'ni* "I am the slaughtered one, my son", is grave and after two lines the father is silent. He can no longer speak. The internal rhymes and alliteration and puns and sounds which are associated with the ideas and images help convey the meanings in Gilboa's poem - but these are hard to translate into other languages.

Surrealistic dream atmosphere : This poem with its flashbacks to past and present has a dreamlike atmosphere. In the dream, the child, when young, enjoys happiness, and the companionship of both the father "and the sun". Then the dream turns to nightmare, and when the boy awakens, he finds that the dream is not a dream but reality. The stroll described in the first verse is idyllic. Suddenly a bewildering thing occurs. There comes the shock; a lightning-like slaughtering knife, the *ma'achelet* (alluding to the knife in the *akedah*) (Gen 22:10) flashes amongst the trees - and we have a picture of the boy, terrified when he becomes aware of the fear in his own eyes at the sight of the blood on the leaves, calling to his father in his childlike way,

Abba, Abba, maheir v'hatzila et Yitzchak

V'lo yechsar ish bis'udat hatzohorayim.

And then

I am the slaughtered one, my son,

says the father

Ze ani hanishchat, b'ni.

And already my blood is on the leaves.

The father and son talk to each other. There is an eerie atmosphere.

The image of the father's blood spattered on the leaves is repeated in the short mythopoeic poem and refers directly to the Nazi massacres in the forests of Eastern Europe. The "leaves" play an important part in the poem, in the myth of primeval nature, (the wood or trees,³⁶ for the burnt offering - *atzei ola*); there is the myth of the child's world, and the myth of the archetypal story of the *akedah*.

Analogies : There are certain correspondences or inherent analogies. The boy takes fright because of the blood on the leaves, because the father's voice is blocked and because his own hand is powerless. The powerless hand could be that of the father or the son. The "pale face of the father", *ufanav chivrim*, and the *azlat dam* of the *yad yamin*, "bloodless right hand" of the boy, correspond. There is the tension of a closeness between the father and the son, and suddenly a blockage and inaccessibility between them. The closeness is analogous to the closeness of the original Yitzchak and Avraham (Gen xxii:6,8) where the father and son "went both of them together", *yachad*, which is repeated.³⁷

Gilboa also uses the word *yachad*, emphasizing the closeness of the relationship. One can observe the intimacy of the relationship in the phrase that "the sun walked towards morning in the forest together with me and with daddy, my right hand in his left hand". Gilboa steps back into transcendental time and enters into the narrative of Biblical literature as one of the personae, namely the young Yitzchak. As the sun and the boy Yitzchak and his father go for a walk, there is *dam al he'alim* "blood on the leaves", symbolizing the slaughter which takes place.

This is ominous. There are numerous cross-references, i.e. Abraham in Moriah, the *ma'a'khelet* and European Jewry in the European forests. The child's voice is parallel to the Biblical voice. *Avi* (Gen 22:7) becomes *Abba*. *Eitzim*, "wood" becomes "trees".

³⁶Gen (22:2,3,6,7,9). In addition the ram was caught in the thicket of branches and leaves – (Gen 22:13)

³⁷ In the *Tanakh*: "Avraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Yitzchak his son; and he took the fire in his hand and the knife; and they went *together*. And Yitzchak spoke to Avraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here I am, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Avraham said, My son, G-d will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went *together*". Gen, (22:6-8)

The boy-poet is *Yitzchak*, supposed to be sacrificed, until the father *Avraham* becomes the slaughtered one. The Holocaust and the Biblical story are intermingled and the awake-asleep nightmare goes on ...

The love between father and son represents the compassion that typifies Gilboa's attitude towards human beings and is also seen in his relationship with trees and plants, their tactile values and biological vitality replacing human attributes (Tsalka, 1971:569). His attitude is subversive, not only to human values, but also to the trees, and when it comes to the crucial point of the story, it is not known whose blood is on the trees. In *B'reishit* it is supposed to be *Yitzchak* who is bound, *ne'e'kad*, and the angel is supposed to save him. In Gilboa's poem it is the father *Avraham* who is sacrificed, *Avraham* who represents the Jewish nation, and no angel appears at the last moment. There is no miracle. It could be wondered what kind of a G-d it is who could allow His children to be slaughtered. He does not appear and He does not intervene.

Lament convention : One of the many repeated codes of the lament generally, is the inadequacy of words to express the suffering.³⁸ In this poem the boy wanted to scream - in his dream, he too, is dumb: *v'ratziti litz'ok*.

The scream is aborted, he remains without strength, the blood has gone from his right hand; *V'azlat-dam ha'y'ta yad yamin* seems to indicate that this hand, once powerful, is powerless to write. This makes the nightmare even more realistic.

There is a tension between innocence that lives in a paradise and innocence that sees things as they really are. This is a variation of the "then and now" theme of the ancient standard lament. The hand of the writer, once powerful, freezes in stress, the most sensitive organ suffers: the hand of a writer-poet represents his most sensitive tool.³⁹

Symbolism : The *yad yamin* is reminiscent of Ps 137:5,

Im eshkeikh Yerushalayim tishkach y'mini:

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget ...

The poet seems to say, "Let me not forget" (Bar-Yosef, 1972:186). This is feasible, because the feeling of guilt at being powerless to save his father, fills him with remorse that gives him no peace. He never wants to forget. He wants to immortalize the dead.

The expression *azlat yad* occurs in Biblical texts (Deut 34:36) and is vital to this poem.

³⁸*Ma ashveh lach va'anachameikh, betulat bat Zion ki gadol kayam shivreikh mi yirpa lach? Lam (2:13). See also Bialik's Al Hashechitah: - ani - libi-meit v'ein od t'fila bisfatai.*

³⁹*Azlat Yad* - "strength has failed".

The last line *V'azlat-dam ha'y'ta yad yamin* is a verbal converging of the conflicting emotions in the poem, manifested by a simple physical symptom.

The poet is freed of the responsibility of the pressure created in the poem, because it was "only a dream"; the realization of the actual physical pain of the hand is an excuse, which explains the reality of the nightmare; the painful hand had caused the dream.

Use of Archetypes : There are archetypal references in modern form, a modern *akedah* in reverse; the father "Avraham" has now become the sacrifice.

There is a tension between the *akedah* in Genesis 22, where there was a *willingness* on the part of the father to sacrifice his son because of G-d's instruction and his faith in G-d, and on the other hand the *powerlessness* of Yitzchak in the Gilboa poem to prevent the sacrifice of his father, his meaningless death.

Contrast : The contrast is marked between the happiness of the boy in the forest with his father, and the sudden fright because of the events and even more so because of the fear in his eyes when he sees the blood on the leaves. Here Avraham is slaughtered, Avraham, the symbol of the nation. Are we to understand that the nation is annihilated and the end is near?

d) EXPRESSING FEELINGS

Gilboa expresses feelings of guilt and denial both of which are common to the bereaved. A feeling of guilt is expressed in the allusion that perhaps the poet has forgotten his father, and his pen has run dry (Bar-Yosef, 1972:186).

This is a significant line. The "right hand" is normally a symbol for *strength* and *power* (See Lam 2:3,4). The ancient myth is built anew, namely the guilt: the sudden lightning glitter of the knife in the trees, is reminiscent of the guilt of the knife in the hand of the father.

The speaker is also in a state of denial. *M'far'peir lo l'ha'a'min*. "Convulsively he does not believe" as if there is literally a hovering between life and death (Barzel, 1990:278).

He is not sure in the dream if the death of his father is true or not.

Shock and trauma can result in post traumatic stress disorder, a common result of horrific experiences. A very frequent symptom of PTSD is nightmares, and this is something from which many Holocaust survivors suffer. Coming out of a bad dream is

one of the symbols for coming out of the *Shoah*. Dreams, real, imagined and personal, play an important part in the poetry of Gilboa because they reveal memory. To wake from a dream is to forget. To awake in a dream is to be at the heart of it. Usually adults are less in tune to dreams unlike prophets and children who do this more easily (Kaufman, 1979:11). In this poem Gilboa conveys an aura of nightmare which is presented through landscapes and figures of childhood and youth which are darkened by the Holocaust and the death of the poet's relatives. The conflicting feeling of this nightmare is always present, during both dreaming and waking hours.

The boy cries for his father as he feels helpless. It is a bad dream. The dream goes on. The power of the magic scene of childhood has vanished forever. In this poem the child had to force his eyes open; perhaps in the dream he was already awakening and he did not forget; the pain in his hand may have caused him to have the dream and may also have awakened him, and both the dream and the hand may have caused him to remember, even though he could not write. It could be that his hand became powerless because he forgot. That "dreams reveal memory" is right in connection with this poem.

The child has dreamt himself out of the original story of Abraham into the Nazi forest, and the poet wakes up with a mental image of his father, voiceless and his face pale and his own hand "drained of blood". There is a fine line between dream and reality, and he would like to be relieved of the haunting discomfiture of both. He *would* like to forget, but at the same time, ambivalently he *cannot* forget.

It is not only Yitzchak but Gilboa himself who has awakened, and realized that he has been witness and participant and speaker throughout the nightmare experience.

e) **FAITH AND PRAYER**

This poem has completely reversed the Biblical account because the protagonists have become victims of something incomprehensible - and the language has been bent and torn to fit this nightmare (Sachs, 1965:138). It is as though Gilboa implies that faith in the Bible is no longer complete in itself but requires some adaptation.

f) **CONCLUSION**

This poem combines the virtues of innocence, love and compassion. A sorrowful and nostalgic mood predominates in this poem. The sun, the boy Yitzchak and his father go

for a walk together in the forest, hand in hand, a picture of purity of heart and paternal affection.

The *Akedah* is the core of Gilboa's *Yitzchak*. In this poem *Avraham* is the one sacrificed. *Yitzchak* survived, that is to say the people, the nation lives. The "hand is paralyzed", yet when awakening from this nightmare, there is a recovery and with the new young generation arising, there is hope and a future, a healing and an alleviation of pain.

University of Cape Town

CHAIM GOURI

b. 1923

a) HISTORICAL SETTING

Chaim Gouri belongs to a different generation of Hebrew poets to those whose poems of mourning I have been analyzing. Those grew up as a persecuted minority in an antisemitic Europe and emigrated later to Palestine, whereas Gouri was born in Palestine and grew up facing the administrative hostility of the British and the military hostility of the Arabs. He was a member of the *Palmach* and participated in the Israeli wars.⁴⁰

Because of this different background, the poets of his generation, known as the Palmach generation, had different priorities to those from Eastern Europe. Their priority was to develop the land of Israel, to build up a homeland and to fight for it. As a result they were less inclined towards the “isms” such as universalism, romanticism, pacifism and mysticism that marked the older Hebrew writers who mostly came from Europe and [were] attracted more to a hard bitten realism and militant nationalism (Ausubel, 1957:212).

The writers of the Palmach generation had more secular humanist values, criticized the Diaspora, and saw Israel as being separate from Jewish history. The poems of the Palmach generation focused on political and social subjects including commemorating heroic exploits against the British and military conflict against the Arabs highlighting the *Sabra* identity and heroism.

b) ABOUT THE POET

Gouri was born in Tel Aviv in 1923. He studied agriculture, and served in the *Palmach*. He was affected by the intimate experiences of war and death of the *Palmach* fighters and began to write light verses which appeared in publications of the *Palmach*; and in

⁴⁰The *Palmach* was a national and regional fighting reserve of unpaid volunteers from the *Haganah* established in 1941 to carry out guerilla warfare against possible German and Italian invasions and after the war to operate against the British mandatory regime, punish Arab terrorists and establish strategic settlements. They played an important part in the War of Independence.

1943 began to publish in literary magazines. After the Second World War the *Haganah* sent him to work in the Displaced Persons' camps in Europe. Long afterwards he wrote, "I was sent in 1947 to Hungary and Vienna on a mission of the *Haganah*. For a year and a half I taught people and trained them in self-defence. The first meeting with the survivors shook me. Only years later did these experiences find expression" (Ben Yosef, 1988:1578).

He returned to Israel to fight in the Israeli War of Independence and also took part in other campaigns. In his work he longed for certain distant experiences, but felt a gap between the original experience and the life as lived by his own generation. *Pirchei Esh* was his first collection of poems.

From 1954 he wrote a weekly column in the daily *La'Merhav* and between March and September 1961 he reported daily on the proceedings of the Eichmann Trial and the destruction of European Jewry. At first Gouri had the feeling that the Jews should have defended themselves. But as he observed and listened at the trial, what he saw and heard changed him.⁴¹

His willingness to question some of the fundamental assumptions of his generation prepared the ground for a potentially deeper and more sustained encounter with the Holocaust than had been undertaken by his Palmach generation up to that time.

He published an account of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem *Mul Ta haz'khukhit* in 1961 and a novel *Iskat Ha-Shokolad* (1965) about the Holocaust in which the symbolic references create a mood where the real and the imagined merge. He also translated French poetry and drama into Hebrew, and he wrote volumes of poetry.

He published two major books after the Six-Day War; *Dappim Yerushalmiyyim*, "Jerusalem Pages" (1968), a miscellany and *Temu'ah l'Magga*, "Seek and Destroy" (1968), a collection of poems. He also included sketches written before the war. His instinct is strongly nationalistic.

⁴¹"The imputed submissiveness of the slaughtered victims was a shame difficult to exorcise. Early in the trial a witness, Morris Fleischman, relates how, as an act of public humiliation, he and the chief rabbi of Vienna were ordered to go down on their hands and knees and wash the sidewalks, and how the rabbi - dressed in a *talit* - endured this as an act of G-d. Gouri's immediate response is disgust: "I had no desire to listen to this broken, decrepit man go on and on about his afflictions ... I would prefer being present at the *Nahal*, the army pioneer corps ceremonies taking place at the stadium and seeing attractive and strong young people. But Morris Fleischman's testimony grabs me by the throat with incredible force and says to me: 'Sit down and listen to every word!' Gouri does persevere, and in time the pained accusation 'How could they go like sheep to the slaughter?' is dissolved by a growing awareness of the complexities surrounding the issue of resistance" (Mintz, 1984:241).

Ben Yosef suggests that Gouri admits to being a poet of the generation who did not know quietness and private happiness but was always engaged in national duty and action (1988:14) yet one has to take cognizance of his later personal poetry.

His early poetry was influenced to some extent by Natan Alterman. G-d, death and time, were for him tangible realities, but his world view is marked by a search for certainty, a quest for faith, but not by actual religiosity (Ben Yosef, 1989:3). Later his early concrete grasp of reality was replaced by abstract expressions and conceptualizations (Megged 1971:833) and as stated above I believe that the mood of his more recent poetry is personal and retrospective.

He wrote on war and death, adolescence and memory, looking at the past, from which he finds there is no escape. He uses symbols and emotions, which are rooted in his ties to his homeland, in a collective responsibility, and in the demands of the times made on the individual. His Holocaust poetry was a result of his mission to Europe to help survivors, in which he was confronted by the events and the destruction of his people.

Gouri is an original lyrical poet, rich in symbols and images, whose life and creativity were shaped by the suffering of the twentieth century and its calamities, wars and the Holocaust (Ben Yosef, 1988:14).

I have chosen Gouri because unlike the previous Holocaust poets who came from eastern Europe, he represents a different generation, known as the Palmach generation. The poem I have selected, *Yerushah*, is an interesting poem on a number of levels. Although written by a modern poet the theme is very old and is also based on the *akedah* and concerns the Jewish heritage of suffering. Although Gouri is indicating the horror of destruction, he is also giving a message of the hope of survival and revival. Redemption will come.

“Yerushah”

c) LITERARY ANALYSIS

Theme : The title tells us that something is being handed down from father to son. Usually a *yerushah* implies a benefit but this is subverted in this poem.

The theme of the poem, like Gilboa's Yitzchak, is based on the *akedah* story (Gen 22).

The pathos and drama of this story as well as the simple and direct method of its telling make it one of the great seminal episodes in Western cultural history. The reverberations of the event continue to echo down the ages. The absolute trusting nature of Avraham, who was willing to offer up the son whom he had desired passionately for many years, and the resignation of Yitzchak, have impressed themselves on the Jewish mind as the supreme example of perfect faith (Goldstein, 1987:57).

In *Yerushah* Gouri uses the *akedah* theme to imply that Jewish suffering is the inevitable heritage handed down to Avraham's children, and to the future. He uses a child, *Yitzchak*, to represent the nation's future, as does Gilboa. The modern Israeli poets use the same *Akedah* theme in a subversive manner. Unlike the poets of previous generations, they do not praise the *Akedah* as a symbol of heroic belief, but use Yitzchak as the example of an innocent sacrificed victim.

d) ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE

Style : The poem is written in a simple lyric, dramatic and allusive style. It flows in a loosely patterned colloquial way, and starts as though it is a mere retelling of the Biblical *Akedah*. Ben Yosef (1988:14) observed that Gouri used Biblical events in a modern and striking way and this is evident here in the poem's striking interpretation of the *Akedah* legend.

In an ironic remark the poet plunges directly into the subject, *Ha'ayil ba acharon*. We are not told what happened before the opening words *Ha'ayil ba acharon* "the ram came last of all" which implies an arbitrary poetic fixing of time. We are not told what came first of all. As in the case of Job, where "G-d blessed the latter end of Job (*acharit*) more than the beginning" (Job, 42:12) so the lateness of the ram in coming *acharon* may be an omen that good will come in the end.

Gouri refers to Job as a sign that good will come in the end, as G-d blessed the latter end of Job, (*acharit*) more than the beginning (Job 42:12), so the lateness of the ram (of the *akedah*) in coming *acharon* may be a sign that good will come in the end. The use of this statement in this poem is a reference of irony. With this image this lament looks to tomorrow as well as to yesterday, indicating the horror of destruction as well as the hope of revival. Job is a common theme in Holocaust poetry. The children of Holocaust

survivors have even been termed "Children of Job" by the Holocaust historian Berger. (1997). Why should Job be punished? Why should the Jews suffer? This question⁴² is tellingly expressed by the Talmud (*Baba Batra 16a*): "Job said to G-d: Perhaps a tempest has passed before thee, and caused thee to confuse *Iyob* [Job] and *Oyeb* [enemy]". Like the *akedah*, Job is a theme that is used across the centuries to refer to Jewish suffering with amazing continuity.

The story in the poem, which is in three verses, is told in a straightforward Biblical way. The first ten lines of the poem unfold in a narrative that appears remote and impersonal. The two triplets at the end of the poem are more colloquial and free, for example, *Yitzhak, kam'supar, lo ho'ala korban*. Most of the poem is written in free verse. The rhyming in the two triplets is interesting. *Korban* rhymes with *libam* and *rabim* with *noladim*: these are key-words, and when associated together, they are meaningful: many are born with sacrifice implanted in their hearts.

One feels the presence of the speaker in the triplets, because of the colloquial style and his different tones. *Ra'a ba'tov* is an enigmatical statement in its irony. With the word "but", *aval*, the speaker reflects that there is a closing of the circle of Abraham's trial, and that was the end of the trouble, *ra'a batov*. He saw good, but there are more *akedot* to follow (Gorpein, 1974:19).

Repetitive Techniques : Certain key words are repeated. The word *ra'a* occurs in different forms three times in the poem: in verse 2, "the old man saw he was not dreaming a dream"; in verse 3, "the boy saw his father's back"; in verse 4, the son Yitzhak lived long and "saw good things" (this time he is the old man). This is ironical because the Bible tells us Isaac was blind. Time passes, there is no escape, and the offspring are doomed and born with a knife in their hearts. Perhaps the angel transmitted this to Avraham and that is what made him drop the knife.

Alliteration : There is alliteration, as in *lo chalam chalom / v'hamal'ach nitzav*, and assonance as in *ha'ayil ba'acharon...Avraham ... malach*, which helps to unify the seemingly disjointed story.

Metaphorical language : Gouri uses metaphorical language to create a powerful impact. The strong emotion evoked on the readers by this poem is produced by its ability to provoke the readers' participation by involving them in making their own interpretations

⁴²as pointed out by Neher (1976:67)

based on their knowledge of Biblical narrative. The reader has to think about the emotions behind the words. For example, in the words *V'lo yada Avraham ki hu / meishiv lish'eilat hayeled*, "Avraham did not know that the ram came to answer the plea of the boy", one wonders what Avraham was thinking and feeling concerning his treatment of Yitzchak, the cherished child of his old age. There are also the feelings of the boy to be considered.

In the Biblical text there is a closeness between the father and son. In Gouri's poem we understand that the father and his son went together. The warmth of the relationship can also be observed in Gilboa's poem when father and son went hand in hand, *yachad*. In the Bible the "togetherness" is repeated and emphasized by the words "and they went both of them together".

Another example where the metaphorical language illustrates the relationship between the father and son is the moment when Yitzchak is released from his bonds; *ra'a et gav avi'v*, he sees his father's back. This is an unusual image expressing the silent tension between father and son.

Avraham has realized that this was not a dream, *ki lo chalam chalom*. Yitzchak is now saved and would live a long good life, *hu chai yamim rabim*, *ra'a batov*, but the implication of the poem is that what would be bequeathed to the offspring, is not the blessing with which G-d blessed Avraham's seed, but the curse in which *noladim / um'a'chelet b'libam*.

Abraham's seed, the nation, is throughout history being born with a knife in its heart. The picture of every Yitzchak with *ma'a'khelet b'li'bam* is a precursor of Jewish history. The Jews suffered the pains of the knife in the pogroms, persecutions and catastrophes that confronted them.

Gapping : The appearance of the angel and the ram was a dual miracle, sent by G-d. They both saved the situation and the ram answered the boy's question. ...*hu / meishiv lish'eilat hayeled*; this was a communication between G-d and the boy. There is gapping: in the poem: we are not told what the angel said to Avraham; we are not given the details of the appearance of the ram.

The ram is not mentioned again after the first line, only the "angel" standing by, but we do know from the introductory line of the poem that "the ram came last of all". Understanding the poem requires a knowledge of the Biblical narrative in which the

angel of G-d said unto him, "Avraham, Avraham, lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything to him" (Levner, 1946:92). In Gen 22:13 we are given the details of the appearance of the ram:

"and Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Avraham went and took the ram and offered it up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son."

The omission of details in Gouri's poem creates a suspense of not knowing what is going to happen next. The knife slips and thereafter, we don't know what happens; "the offspring are born with a knife in their hearts".

Lament Motif : This is a silent, condensed mournful poem, a lament expressed in a simple way, but with layers of meaning. There is no dialogue as in Gen 22. The fact that the "ram came last of all" does not detract from the tragedy.

The poem has a clear ideological meaning that there is a unity of historical links which are loosened from time to time (a sequence of *akedot*) in the transition from the "then" till "now". The "then" and "now" are not contrasted, as is the case in laments but there is a strong sequence in them. There are continual *akedot*. Gouri was outspoken and said in his poem that every Jew is born with a knife in his heart, and can be a victim of time and circumstance and there is hardly a way to overcome the tragedy of existence. (Ben Yosef, 1988:14).

Traditional Allusions : The poet writes in short sentences, full of allusions to Avraham and Yitzchak in Genesis and particularly to the *akedah*. For example *V'lo yada Avraham ki hu meishiv lish'eilat hayeled*, "And Avraham did not know that it [the fact that 'the ram came last of all'] was the answer to the child's question."

To understand this we have to look at Gen 22:7: Yitzchak had said (Gen 22:7) "Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? " and Avraham said, "G-d will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering, my son, So they went both of them together". Abraham's answer is not a satisfactory answer, because it is unlikely that Abraham believed what he told Isaac. In the end, as in the poem, the *ayil ba acharon*, and this is the answer to Yitzchak's question, the answer that Abraham did not know.

After Abraham's answer, we are told in the Biblical narrative once more "So the two of them went both together." Spieser (1964) comments that "The father's answer, 'My son, G-d will himself provide a lamb...' is tender but evasive, and the boy must by now have sensed the truth and this moment covers what is perhaps the most eloquent and poignant silence in all literature. The narrator's skill is great, yet if it were not for the fact that the reader is told at the beginning that this is a testing of Abraham, he could be left speechless at the impending horror".

e) **ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE**

In *Yerushah*, Gouri uses the child Yitzchak, to represent the nation's future.

The story is a tragedy; but in the significant first line "the ram comes last of all" lies the miracle, the hope.

Ha'ayil ba acharon.

Redemption will come, even if the knife is already in the heart.

This poem carries in it a clear participation in the destiny of the Jewish people, beyond time and condition. In its absolute conclusion, the fact is assured that there is no place for doubt of the future (Gorpein, 1974:19). I agree with Gorpein's interpretation. The poem maintains our belief in our future survival and the heritage that G-d will guard and guide us and give us the strength to carry on.

f) **FAITH AND PRAYER**

This poem also seeks to provide comfort through faith, in the belief in G-d and his promise to us, even if this poem were to be construed in another way with an interpretation that however bad things seem - redemption will come,⁴³ eventually - but in time. This faith in redemption helps alleviate distress.

⁴³ in terms of Midrash Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer (31); Midrash Rabbah: Va'yera Rosh Hashanah (16) Levner (1946:92)

g) **CONCLUSION**

This is an enigmatical poem. "And the ram came last of all". This was the answer to Yitzhak's question in the Biblical story, where Yitzhak asks "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?"

In most literary works the important climax comes later. In this poem by Gouri the climax is in the first line of the poem when the ram comes.

Another irregularity is that in the poem, Yitzhak is referred to as Avraham's first born, "*reishit ono*"; Sarah's first born certainly, but what about Yishmael?

Another enigma appears in the middle of the poem, "when the old man realized he was not dreaming and saw the angel standing there, and thereupon the knife fell from his hand, the boy saw the back of his father". It is possible that the boy "saw the back of his father" because his father was ashamed of what he was about to do. He might have turned his back because he could not face him. Perhaps he was crying with shame or relief. According to legend "tears ran down from Avraham's eyes, for he felt deep compassion for Isaac, delicate and tenderly nurtured" (Levner, 1946:91).

The poem subverts the Biblical text. It does not praise Avraham for his faith, but criticizes him for his behaviour to his child.

There is further irony in the second last verse. "Yitzhak lived many days and saw the good." Yet Yitzhak became blind when he became old.

Another subversion is in the title, *Yerushah* - Heritage. What heritage did Yitzhak leave his children?

They were born with a knife in their hearts.

In the poem, as in Genesis, the ram appeared. What does the ram represent? The ram represents the Jewish people who were sacrificed in the Holocaust, but the fact is that the Jewish nation still survives. The knife is in the heart, the pain is there; the heritage is subversively the survival of Yitzhak.

The redeeming aspect, the seed of hope, is that the Jews have not been totally annihilated; we survive and it is this message that gives this lament the power to alleviate despair.

CONTEMPORARY LAMENTS

LAMENTS: THE GENRE OF DYING - NOT A DYING GENRE

INTRODUCTION

Laments as an expression of emotion at the death of a loved one are not an archaic form practised in the olden days, but are still in use today. In societies where oral traditions are strong, as in African societies, laments still form part of the memorial rites, for example there are special lamenters at funerals; in Xhosa they are called "isithethi."¹

But even in more literate societies the role of lamenting is of importance, and not necessarily as an academic exercise - even at the "popular" level. For example, after the death of Princess Diana in September 1997, her family received more than 300,000 letters and poems of lament (Argus 13.9.1997).

After the triple suicide bombing in Mahaneh Yehuda in Jerusalem in August 1997, the head of the Child Guidance Clinic, Rami Bar Giora, in an interview said that "the two most natural mental health cures are to express one's emotions and to turn it into something concrete - to write a letter or a poem". (Jerusalem Post International Edition, 9th August 1997, p5). The poet seeking a style to portray his feelings, turns to an old format, which is the lament, the poetic genre concerned with dying. It is my contention that it is not a dying genre.

To illustrate the continuing relevance and the use of this form of poetry, this chapter will focus on four laments, two from South Africa and two from Israel.

As this is a comprehensive survey of Hebrew Literature throughout the ages, from Biblical times to modernity, and as this thesis is being produced for a degree at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, it seems appropriate to include some Hebrew laments that have been written here. Few realize that Hebrew literature is produced in this country, but there

¹ Makeleni, Nowandle. Personal communication. 20 June 2001.

is a comprehensive project underway at the University of Cape Town to collate and study such Jewish and Hebrew literature.

It has become clear that even in South Africa, the genre of lament is alive and well.

I have examined two laments, one from the era of the emergence of Hebrew literature and the other one of the most recent Hebrew poems, both written and published here. The inclusion of these poems was to demonstrate my hypothesis that laments are not a dying genre because they have the power to alleviate pain and fulfil a psychological need when meaningful significant individuals die.

University of Cape Town

BENJAMIN TURTLEDOVE

1872 - c 1930

a) ABOUT THE POET

Turtledove was born in Medzerich, Poland in 1872 and studied at *Yeshivot* in Volozhin, Pressburg and Vienna. In Vienna he also attended university as an "Extraordinary Scholar". He studied French in Paris, settled in Manchester and then came to Cape Town as principal of the *Talmud Torah* and established a hostel. He was a Yiddish and Hebrew journalist, publishing under the pseudonym *Ish Ploni*, Mr X, and was recognized as an excellent poet (Hoffmann, 1996:45).

I selected this poem because I wanted to show that laments are being written in Hebrew in Cape Town. I did this because there has been some criticism that academic work in South Africa is Eurocentric and not related to life in Africa. I wanted to show that the need to write laments to alleviate suffering is universal and is found here just as much as in Europe and I chose Turtledove as an example of this. Turtledove represents the generation of the great Eastern European migration that started to come to South Africa during the 1880's.

(I have included another SA lament writer, Rachelle Mann, as a representative of a later generation).

Another reason why I chose Turtledove's poem is because it includes many of the lament techniques that can be found in the other poems selected for this thesis.

This lament is resonant of both antiquity and modernity.

Al Mot Yehudah Leib Schrire - 1912

b) INTRODUCTION

This lament was written in 1912 by Turtledove at the death of his friend Yehudah Leib Schrire, who was born in Vilna into a scholarly family, and died at the age of 61. Schrire

was a poet and writer in Hebrew and Yiddish and wrote articles for the press.² He left many Hebrew books, poems and other writings and also devoted himself to promoting secular and Hebrew scholarship. This lament in Hebrew was included in Hoffmann's "Book of Memoirs" (1916), the first Yiddish book ever published in South Africa, recently translated into English and published through the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, University of Cape Town, making it available for research and information to a new generation of readers.

The lament addresses the listeners as if they are standing at a funeral; they are mentioned as the grieving family, friends and associates, co-workers in the institutions, scholars, young and old.

The Hebrew is eloquently formal and constrained. The poet is sparing in metaphors and poetic devices. He comes directly to what he wants to say. "Where is Schrire"?

However, the poem refers to traditional sources, and uses words influenced by the Aramaic of the Talmud. He uses homophones, like *ayin* (with an *aleph*) and *ayin* (with an *ayin*). The rhyming is *abab*. In each verse either the verse itself or one of the lines starts with the word *Ayei* or *Ayeihu* which is very much like a refrain of *Eichah*. The mainstay of the poem are the constant rhetorical questions "where is he?" and "why did he die so young?" *Madu'a maheir azav cheled?*³ and *Halo yipaked m'komo*⁴ *bveiti, bein rei'a'v v'mosdim rabim* "Will he not be missed in my house, (also) among his many friends and [among] many institutions?"⁵ he goes on to say "The work is much and there are no workers".⁶

The poet repeats that Schrire died so young, *Ha-omnam meit vayispe b'lo yomo...* In Gen 18:23 the word *tispe* is used, *Ha'af tispe tzaddik im rasha* "Will you sweep away the righteous, the *tzaddik* with the wicked?" We are told in the poem that the greatly missed

² His novel *Shoshane Novelet*, "A Fading Rose" and many of his poems and articles were published in journals, such as *Ha-Or*, *Der Yedisher Herold*, *Der Afrikaner Telegraph*, *Yedische-Volkszeitung*, *Der Afrikaner Israelit*, *Ha-Ohav* and *Kimmeret*, (Hoffmann, 1996:39).

³ "Why did he hasten to leave this world, or lifetime, or duration of life".

⁴ Cf., Sam (20:27). Cf also 1 Sam 20:18. Both of these verses are from the frequently recited *Haftarah* of *Machar Chodesh*.

⁵ The Barkusky translation is: "He has left a void / His many friends and associates feel his loss".

⁶ This alludes to Rabbi Tarphon in *Pirkei Avot* 1:20 "The work is much and the labourers are idle".

Schrire was a righteous man and the implied reference seems to question again why the righteous had to die as though wicked (Gen 18:23).

He left his house and his friends to sorrow and pain.

V'et beito v'et rei'av azav la'atzavim

The word *atzavim* has many meanings and could also mean "melancholy" or "toil". In modern Hebrew *etzev* would probably be used.

"Schrire, where is he? the one who knows about books?"

Schrire, ayeihu ha'askan v'hasafra?

Safra is an Aramaic word used in the expression *safra v'sayafa*, that is a "knower of books and a swordsman". This could be an intimation that he is a fighter for what he believes in. Not only was he a "knower of books", but also an *askan*, a communal worker.⁷ He was also a "basket full of *Torah*, *chochma v'da'at*".

The poet continues: "Will not every one, the hoary head, the young and the child wait for his advice; he was like an eye to them". Barkusky translates the last verse as "Where is he? Listen and I will tell you!" although the original poem reads in archaic Hebrew *Ma'du'a? A'yei'hu? Sh'ma a'shi'v'kha a'ma'rim* "Why? Where is he? Hear and I will answer your words". The English version continues "He was a truly noble soul"⁸ and then "The vanities of this earth being too much for him, / He ascended to a higher plane." This latter quotation is a translation of *Va'y'hi ki ozen v'cheiker ha'b'li iha'yitzurim vayikatz bam - va'ya'al hashamayim*. (In using this unusual Hebrew Turtledove tells the reader that Schrire hated idle conversation and gossip.) Herein there could be a hint that he is leaving this plane and joining the angels, which is more suitable for him.

⁷ Ahad Ha'am also used the expression *askan*, "worker for the communal good" in conjunction with an expression relating to working with books, as follows: *Bayamim haheim lo ha'yiti od lo sofeir v'lo askan*, "In those days I was not yet a writer nor a worker for the public good". Even Shoshan, (1970:1001) sv *Askan*. The word *askan* was also used in the Talmud, *Chullin* 57 in a slightly different sense. *Askan bid'varim* meant a person of initiative, an inventive person. (Alcalay, no date)

⁸ a more correct translation of the Hebrew is Schrire *haya ish na'a'le bein hachayim*. "Schrire was a man elevated amongst the living"

c) CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE LAMENT

The lament is in the nature of a complaint about the cruelty of destiny; why did this death have to happen?

The speaker begins the exordium by arousing the empathy of the listeners and speaks of the relationship between the deceased and those left behind:

His many friends and associates feel his loss,

Halo yipakeid m'komo

B'veiti, bein rei'av u'mosadim rabim

Will he not be missed in my house and amongst his friends and many institutions?

Questions are asked in refrains. The mourner says- "Where is his place? *Ubi topos? Ubi sunt?* The mourner finds the death difficult to accept. This is a type of denial .

Where is Schrire?.....Where is Schrire?"

Where is he?

Is there an equal in this ungodly land of Africa?

Where is he?

Why was his departure so sudden...?

Where is he?

"Where is he?" is repeated five times.

There is rhetorical repetition, the name of the deceased is frequently mentioned, and a complaint about the shortness of life.

His many friends and associates feel his loss,

Leaving behind his grieving family and friends.

and

Will he not be missed in my house,

Among his many friends and among many institutions?

The departure is repeated:

He departed this world before his time

Why was his departure so sudden?

Word similar in intonation to *eichah* or *eich*, such as *ayei?* or *ayeihu?* are repeated. These are mourning words.

Allusions are made to sources such as the *Tanach*, and Aramaic *Talmudic* expressions are used⁹ such as *safra* and *afra* and *tzana*.

The style is stilted; the vocabulary and grammar are unusual. Use is made of archaic words such as *Sh'ma a'shi'v'kha a'ma'rim*.

There is a play on words. In verse 2, *afra* / *afar Afrika*, "the dust, dust of Africa" could be considered a play on words, a contrivance to match up with the Aramaic expression *Afra d'ar'a* (that is, considered "to be of no value").

The *afra* and *afar* could intimate that from "dust to dust" one comes and goes.

Distressed but restrained, the mourner expresses praises of the deceased. He was an encyclopaedia of knowledge and wisdom and a noble soul. *Ha-omnam meit vayispe b'lo yomo*. In Gen 18:23 the word *tispe* is used, *Ha'af tispe tzaddik im rasha* "Will you sweep away the righteous, the *tzaddik* with the wicked?" We are told in the poem that the greatly missed Schrire was a righteous man and the implied reference seems to question again why the righteous had to die as though wicked (Gen 18:23).

As in the Book of Lamentations and other laments, references are made to the young and the old. "All will yearn for his counsel, young and old". "Why did he die before his time?", *b'lo yomo?* He was so young.

The past and present are compared. Life was rich when Schrire was there. Who will be helping them now? There are no people to continue the work. He was the watchful eye and adviser of the people. He was great among the living and now he has gone to another sphere, to heaven. Life is void.

The poet grapples with his grief using similar techniques.

⁹ Gen (18:23); Ps (49:2); Ps (39:6), Ps (39:6); (49:1); 1 Sam (20:27).

d) **ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE**

Even though the pain is so great now, there is the recognition that this is *derech olam*, the way of nature. In the poem, the mourner asks “Why did he leave while the work is so much?” and there are no people to help (stanza 3). *Pirkei Avot* 2:2, says “It is not thy duty to complete the work, but neither art thou free to desist from it...” but to the mourner it seems as if all is lost, and there are no people to take over Schrire’s work. The reader knows life will take its course and somebody will rise to the occasion to do it. From early times in history, it is not expected of any human to finish the task, only to do as much as possible. Life goes on, this is an outlook for the future. Also there are scholars and students to carry on the work.

e) **FAITH AND PRAYER**

This poem is written from a background of traditional learning and imbued with religious belief and a belief in the importance of faith and prayer.

In accordance with this belief, the poet would have accepted that Schrire would have been gathered to his people (Gen 25:8) and he would go to the *Olam Haba*.

A comfort for those who are religious (as with Ibn Ezra) is the belief that they will meet with their dear ones again. Death divides and death unites.

The light comes in the answer “listen and I will tell you”, the poet consoles the mourners by saying that the deceased was too noble for this world.

The idea that the deceased went to a better place, the *Olam Haba*, would provide comfort and alleviate despair.

The vanities of this earth being too much for him,
He ascended to a higher plane.

f) **CONCLUSION**

This poem was written to express sorrow at the loss of a friend, and it tries to alleviate despair by providing an answer to the mourner’s feelings of why it had to happen. The

poem takes the form of questions which is common to the lament genre. It presents what amounts to a *hespeid*, a eulogy, almost as though it were written to be delivered in the *beit ha'olam*. It praises his wisdom, his scholarship and his character and then ends by providing an answer to the questions of why this death had to happen.

In this way, Turtledove provides comfort to the mourners and an answer to the questions.

University of Cape Town

RACHELLE MANN**b. 1923-2000****a) ABOUT THE POET**

Rachelle Mann was born in 1923 in Braslaw, Vilna District, Lithuania, where she studied at the Yavneh Institute, emigrating to Laingsberg, South Africa in 1940, where her father was a minister.

The culture shock affected her deeply; she felt devastated when the war broke out as she did at the subsequent realization that she had lost not only her past, but also all her friends and family that were left behind.

She worked as a secretary and when her children grew older she studied through the University of South Africa where she completed a B.A. degree in Hebrew and a B.A.(Hons) degree in English, and joined the UNISA staff as a translator. Among the works she translated was the Holocaust related *Emesh Shoah*, "Darkness and Desolation". She always felt a need to write to memorialize those who perished.

She was a polyglot who spoke seven languages and wrote short stories and poetry in three, namely Hebrew, English and Yiddish.

Al Mot Ben Yosef - 1995

I have chosen this lament because I wish to include SA laments written in Hebrew. This poet's cultural background was rooted in Europe where she was born and educated, but she lived most of her life on the SA highveld. This lament follows in the tradition of personal laments written to mourn the loss of leaders and scholars. It is interesting that grief triggers off similar responses in individuals separated by time and space.

b) INTRODUCTION

This lament, like the previous one, was written in South Africa after the death of a close friend and scholar. More than eighty years separate the two. This is an emotional lament for a young man who died suddenly leaving a small son behind and whose death affected those communities which he served.

In this lament the poet Rachelle Mann mourns the early death of the scholar, philosopher and poet, Professor Israel Ben Yosef who died in Zurich, Switzerland, where he was Rabbi to the *Or Chadash* Congregation.¹⁰ The lament is a link in a long chain of laments over deaths of important figures.

This is a short poem abounding in feeling, written in 1995 in which Mann is not only expressing pain at the death of a friend, she is verbally mourning in resonance with her own soul.

O Father in Heaven,
 What have you done!
 ---Turned your world upside down?
 Left a little boy too young to say *Kaddish*
 Two mothers to weep ---
 And a father to sit *Shivah* for his son!....

Questioning G-d, she still calls him *Avinu*, our Father. She is talking to him like a child to her father. It is as though she is a bereft orphan child, looking up to G-d. Recognizing that as a child, she could not say *Kaddish* for the community she lost in the Holocaust, or come to closure, she is now talking as a child, identifying the loss of her friend Ben Yosef, with her own personal family loss.

In the poem, one can see a metaphorical representation of the poet's life.

¹⁰ Professor Ben Yosef held the Isidore and Theresa Cohen Chair of Hebrew at the University of Cape Town 1984-1989, and was a Reform Rabbi. He wrote works on philosophy and poetry. Among his many published works were *Me'ever Lamaba* (1979), *Itzuv Atzmi* (1980), *Links of Silence* (1983), *Martin Buber on Adult Education* (1985) *Nofim Rechokim* (1985), *Olyfwoestyn. Poesie uit verre Lande* (1987), *Jechasim* (1988) and *Approximations* (1989). He also wrote numerous articles.

By her question, *Ma Asita*, “What have you done?” she criticizes G-d. G-d is the Omnipotent One, *meimit* and *m'chay'e*, makes people live and die. He is named as the Power that controls life and death, and He is questioned as to why he allowed Ben Yosef to die in the prime of his life. The blame of the death of all those who died is put on to G-d. G-d is made the active power, not *hesteir panim*, not “hiding away”.

This poem is the personal metaphor for her whole life, not only for herself, but for all those who perished.

The poem is patriarchal. It begins with the Father and ends with the father. *Avinu shebashamayim*, our Father in Heaven is the Father of all; the grandfather, namely, the father of the son who died has to sit *Shivah*, and there is the deceased father of the orphaned child. The women are mentioned, on the emotional level; they cry. They are not anchored into the Jewish tradition. The emphasis is on the patriarchal tradition.

The poet in speaking of the world says “your world is upside down”, *olam'kha m'humah*.

This is a sound similar to *m'umah* which means “nothing”. This gives an ambiguous reading, *du arkhiyut b'k'ri'ah*. "

The poem expresses shock. “Turned your world upside down? ...” The cry of protest is at the very core of the poem. The protest is poignantly emphasized by the poet pointing out the consequences of what G-d has done by turning His world upside down in this way. He has left “a little boy too young to say *Kaddish*”, “two mothers to weep” and “a father to sit *Shivah* for his son”. The reader is left with a feeling of loss.

The Jewish customs of mourning are mentioned, *shivah* and *kaddish*. The poem is addressed to the Father in Heaven, *Avinu Shebashamayim*. It is He who is the forger of destiny.

This lament is simple and moving. It draws the tears, but there is no comfort.

c) EXPRESSING FEELINGS

This lament is a censure of G-d for taking away a father from a young son who needed him, from his wife and elderly parents. This is an appeal to G-d. How could He have done it. This is a poem of anger and grief.

The initial response to a loss is anger and a questioning of G-d's wisdom. Questionings are typical of laments. Mourners in shock frequently question "Why did this have to happen?" As Kubler Ross has stated, questioning and expressing feelings such as these are stages of mourning that have to be worked through as part of the healing. This poem reflects the writer's feelings and as such connects with the honest feelings of many bereaved people.

Mann's life was one of continuous mourning (Ben Yosef, 2001:56) and in the loss of Israel Ben Yosef she was losing a close friend through whom she had recovered "her own creative confidence". As typically in the genre of lament there are two aspects to a poem, the feelings and needs of the poet composing it, and the feelings and needs of the listeners/readers. Like Turtledove, the act of expressing the poet's loss at the passing away of a friend would have brought some relief to the poet and contributed towards alleviating her own pain.

d) FAITH AND PRAYER

The poem expresses the questions of why *Tzadik v'ra lo*, why righteous people suffer. Not only the pain of the poet herself wells up through the words, there is also the undertone of a long state of personal mourning. For a short poem such as this it is noticeable that the Hebrew and Jewish terminology are overwhelmingly those related to mourning customs such as *Avinu Shebashamayim*, *Kaddish*, *Shivah* and again *Avinu Shebashamayim*. This may give a hint of positive light within the lament. The poet cries out in pain but finds comfort in clinging to tradition. Tradition provides a safety net, a reassurance of continuity.

The poet questions G-d, as in many laments, as in the archetypal Book of Lamentations which starts with *Eichah*. Yet somewhere the answer is found manifested through her own

account of the situation. The orphan may be too young to say *Kaddish*, but traditionally somebody from the congregation will always step in to help and there will always be help from the community to keep the chain of tradition unbroken.

These references to tradition also indicate a strong sense of identity which is a powerful factor in alleviating the suffering.

e) **CONCLUSION**

The poem starts and finishes with the same refrain. It is a closed poem. There are two messages of light and hope. One is in the tradition, the other in the community. The loss is great, but there are mechanical aids to help us cope. There is the continuity in the tradition, and the feeling of community comes through. In order to act out or perform the rituals, the *shivah*, a community is needed. This gives support. The sense of loneliness and the void and the pain is alleviated with the participation of the community. Community and tradition help in the mourning and in the alleviating of the pain.

MORDECAI TABIB

b 1910

a) ABOUT THE POET

Mordecai Tabib was born in 1910 in *Rishon L'Zion* of Yemenite parents. His father emigrated from Hawdan, Yemen in 1907, and founded the Association of Yemenites in *Eretz Yisrael* and was elected to the *Knesset*. Mordecai attended a Yemenite *cheder* and a secular school. He was in the British army from 1940 to 1944, and during the War of Independence did editorial work for the publications of the Israel Defence Forces. His poems and stories appeared in *Davar* and *Ittim* and he edited *Mevo'ot* (1953-1954) and *Mifgash* (1968). Among his books which reveal the authentic life of the Yemenite community in Israel, are *Ke'eisev haSadeh* (1948), *Derech shel Afar* (1953) and *Ke'Afar Ba'Arava* (1957). He has written plays, has been translated into many languages and has won many prizes including the Ruppin Prize (Kressel 1971:690).

His libretto for Mordecai Seter's stereophonic oratorio for radio, *Tikkun Hatzot*, won the Radio Competition held in Verona (Tabib, 1962:32).

I have chosen this lament as a representative of a non-Ashkenazi contribution to the lament genre. Tabib is an Israeli poet from a Yemenite background. Like the Book of Lamentations, *Tikkun Hatzot* is written for public mourning unlike most modern laments which are meant for private reading. Like the original lamentations which were frequently sung at public ceremonies, this is meant to be heard. Furthermore, this lament has resonances with past laments; it has echoes of passages from the Book of Lamentations and the introduction of lamenting words with the characteristic sound of mourning, such as *eichah* and *Oi-li, oi li* and further Biblical and *Talmudic* allusions and similarities to extracts from the *piyyutim* and the medieval *tikkunim* and an emphasis on redemption

I have selected this poem because it illustrates one of the findings of this thesis, namely the continuity of Jewish traditions in the genre of Hebrew laments. I shall be examining a lament that has been extracted from the much longer libretto.

“Tikkun Hatzot”

b) INTRODUCTION

Lamentations were originally written to be read aloud or sung with musical accompaniment, as part of the ritual public ceremonies for collective mourning on occasions of death or disaster.

Since the advent of printing, laments are not necessarily sung but can be read by individuals, although some laments have been incorporated into the *Yom Hashoah* ceremony, or read aloud on *Tishah B'Av*. However, this lament, written in 1963, was designed primarily like the original laments to be sung publicly.

It forms part of the libretto for Mordecai Seter's oratorio¹¹ and is based upon the traditional *Tikkun Hatzot* service as it was, and still is, recited individually or in small groups sitting on the floor (Birnbaum, 1979:662).¹²

Tikkunim, "corrections, reforms, emendations", were initiated by the Safed Kabbalists of the sixteenth century to keep alive the memory of the Temple and Jerusalem (Gorali, 1976:38), just as the recital of the Book of Lamentations is maintained, to mourn and remember, at the same time bearing in mind the restoration of the Land of Israel. It was considered the duty of every Jew to attend the *Tikkun Hatzot* service in order to hasten the return (Tabib, 1962:27). The custom developed from the Rabbinic description of G-d mourning the Destruction. *Tikkunim* were recited at midnight, the hour King David was said to have chosen for study and prayer (Cohen, 1945:402), as stated by the Psalmist (Ps 119:62). "At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto Thee" (see also *Berachot* 3b-4a).

¹¹ Oratorios were developed in the sixteenth century by the Oratorians, a priestly community living under simple vows and founded by Philip Neri in 1556 in Rome, who enacted Scriptural scenes set to music.

¹² The observance of *Tikkun Hatzot* prevailed among the mystically minded Jews who adhered to the teachings of Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534-1572); and also to the teachings of Rabbi Solomon Alkabetz (1505-1576), composer of the Sabbath hymn, *Lekha Dodi*.

These *Tikkunim* build into a tradition of mourning the destruction of the Temple which can be seen in the *Aveilei Zion*, in Yehudah Halevi's "Zionides" and in the *Karaite* liturgy published in Vienna in 1854.

The alphabetic poems to be said responsively when arriving in Jerusalem include themes like :

Lord, build; Lord build—

Build Thy house speedily

and

We sit in solitude and mourn

This particular lament forms part of the libretto to accompany music composed by Seter and makes maximum use of traditional sources. (Seter has also put the lament about Jephtha's daughter to music) (Bloom, 1997:28).

After 2000 years of yearning the Jews have been able to return to their own homeland again. This poem reflects this new reality. The poet has written that the *Tikkun* service "reflects [...] Israel's suffering and the aspiration towards the people's redemption. The beginning of redemption has now come in the reconstitution of the State of Israel and achieves expression both in my own libretto and in Seter's music" (Tabib, 1962:28).

c) LITERARY STRUCTURE

This *Tikkun* starts with the Prologue, in which the prophet Elijah tells a worshipper on his way to a desolate ruin for a prayer, of G-d's grief at the destruction of His House and the exile of His sons, the Jewish people (*Berachot* 3a). This is followed by three scenes, visions seen by the worshipper which had preceded his own prayer.

The lament discussed here forms part of the first scene which is a recitation by the Worshipper.

The first scene forms what Tabib describes as a liturgical poem, "My beloved is gone down into his garden" (Song of Songs 6:2), but it is in a large part of its features a traditional lament, concerning the Exile.

In its form, it consists of a dialogue between G-d and the House of Israel. The beloved, Israel, complains that G-d has forsaken her, to which G-d replies with words of comfort (Tabib, 1963:28).

This scene alludes to the "Song of Songs" with its recurrent theme of the young maiden who is asked "Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest of women?" I agree with Lehrman (1946:22) when he says that as opposed to the Biblical narrative, in this lament the young maiden gives an evasive answer. This has an allegorical interpretation, depicting the spiritual marriage between G-d and Israel.

The lament is followed by a *Midrashic* legend of the resurrection of the dead, following the coming of the Messiah, which forms the third section of the poem. The last scene in the oratorio is Jacob's dream, and G-d's promise to him: "The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed" (Gen 28:14). The oratorio concludes with the Worshipper's return to reality and the recitation of *Shacharit* in the synagogue.

The oratorio ends on a positive note, with a positive resolution:

Open to me, my love,
The gates of Zion that I love

alluding to Isaiah 26:2

Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which
keepeth the truth may enter in.

and see Ps 118:19, 20; also Ps 87:2

The Lord loveth the gates of Zion.

The poem thus goes from the destruction of the Temple to the promise of a rebuilt Jerusalem. The poem ends with G-d's promise:

Again I will build thee and thou shall be rebuilt,
O, virgin daughter of Zion. (*Bat-Zion*) (Lam 1:6)
A crown shall be given thee.

Awake, arise, sleepers in the dust!

and finally a triumphant:

Halleluyah! Halleluyah!
Halleluyah! Halleluyah!
Halleluyah! Halleluyah!
Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord!
Halleluyah!

d) ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE

The *Tikkun Hatzot*, although part of the libretto for an oratorio is actually a lamentation written as a mourning service for the destruction of the Temple and the interminable darkness of Israel's exile and massacres. But, as in all laments, I note that there are positive themes and a strong message of hope, ("open the gate"), hope of redemption and praise of G-d, *Halleluyah*.

Refrains : As in most laments there are refrains including the refrains of "Woe..." and "Woe is me!" which are repeated, alternating with statements and questions from the worshipper, and with participation by different choirs.

Symbols : The "voice sighing like a dove" is the voice of the *Shekhinah*, the gentle hovering immanent Presence, the Divine Glory, always presented as coming into intimate contact with humankind on earth.

The "dove", the *Shekhinah*, is a symbol of affection "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled" (Song of Songs 5:2). Tabib recalls the legend that the *Shekhinah*, too, was exiled. Only when the nation and the *Shekhinah* return from exile, will G-d's Oneness be restored (Tabib, 1963:27).

Among the motifs commonly occurring is the 'voice', love, grief and Zion. The 'voice' is a frequent motif especially appropriate seeing that this lament is intended to be voiced, not read silently. Elijah says: "My son, what voice did you hear in this ruin?" and the answer is "I heard a voice sighing like a dove". This is a motif which Steinsaltz (1970:71) says represents the pangs shared by the Holy One.

A further motif appropriate to a lament is G-d's grief which alludes to many Biblical passages:

Woe is me that I have destroyed my house,
 And burnt my Temple,
 And exiled my children
 Among the nations...
 Woe is me, Woe is me...
Oi, shehecheravti et beiti,
V'sarafti et heichali,
V'hegleiti et banai
L'vein ha'umot ... (See Berachot 3a)
Oi-li, oi li... (similar to Kallir's piyyut) (Rosenfeld, 1986:1)

The following passage :

.....
 Why did the father exile his sons?
 And woe to the sons exiled from their father's table.

Ma lo la'av shehigla et banav?
V'oi lahem l'va'nim she'galu mei'al shulchan avihem . . .

is quoted verbatim from the *Talmudic* passage *Berachot 3a*. Steinsaltz (1970:7) says, apropos of these passages – “For this reason it is said: ‘From the day that the Temple was destroyed, there has been no laughter from G-d’ ” *Avoda Zara* (3b).

As stated by Steinsaltz (1970:5), the grief of banishment and dispersal is identical with and emerges from the grief at the destruction of the Holy City and the Temple. (The reference, which is refrained in the poem, to the father who exiles his children, is the antithesis of Ps 128:3: “Thy children like olive plants round about thy table”).

The lament

Woe is me for the destruction of the Temple....

How long? How long?

Oi-li al churban beit hamikdash...

has a strong echo of passages in the Book of Lamentations bemoaning the destruction of the Temple. This echo is emphasized by the use of Biblical parallelism in these lines and by anaphora (the repetition of the first words), as are found in the Book of Lamentations.

The central motif, however, is Zion, since the poem laments the Destruction of Jerusalem but more importantly its beauty and restoration and rebuilding. This is the same as the central motif in the Book of Lamentations which sets out Zion as

The perfection of beauty

The joy of the whole earth

and again

bat Yerushalayim hazot ha'ir she yomru klilat yofi,

masos l'khol ha'aretz

In *Tikkun Hatzot* there are references to

The gates of Zion that I love (alluding to Isaiah 26):

The song proclaims:

Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in." Similarly Ps 118:19, 20. Also Ps 87:2:

"The Lord loveth the gates of Zion."

The poem ends with G-d's promise:

Again I will build thee and thou shall be rebuilt,

O, virgin daughter of Zion. (See *Bat-Zion* in Lam 1 :6)

A crown shall be given thee.

Awake, arise, sleepers in the dust!

The *Tikkun* has been written in a very different age from the Book of Lamentations - one of a restoration of Zion, not of its destruction, so there are differences in resolution. But the similarities are more striking than the differences, and these abound in this poem.

Language : The language used in this lament is very much like the language of the *payyetanim* (for example Kallir) and can also be found in the South African lament written by Turtledove in 1912. This can be seen in the different styles to be found in the poem, which uses multiple references to the Bible, the *Siddur* and the *Machzor*, the *Mishneh* and the *Midrash* and mystic Kabbalistic allusions, such as the return of the dead to Israel at the time of the coming of the Messiah through tunnels and caves. It can also be seen in the archaic language used which is *Mishnaic*, with unusual grammatical usages, for example *she'm'gi'yim* (spelt with three yuds), *mem gimmel yud yud yud mem*.

With the strange spelling, there is also the skilful play on words found in the *piyyutim*, for example the poet makes frequent use of the word *afar* (dust).

The worshipper sings:

Shake thyself from the dust, arise!
Put on thy beautiful garments, my people!
For your saviour has come

From the dust, from the dust?...
But there is dust on my head ...

In the first two lines of this passage the worshipper says, *hitna'ari mei'afar*, ("dust" spelt with an *ayin*) *ku'mi! livshi bigdei tif'arteich, ami!* This comes from *L'cha Dodi*¹³ in the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service and the first line originally from Isaiah: "Arise, shake yourself from the dust" (Isa 52:2).

In the next line, the poet says *Hein, afar al roshi*, "Behold, there is dust on my head", *afar* spelt with the letter *ayin* again. In addition to its usual meaning this could be intended to

¹³ written by Alkabets, (c.1505-1576)

refer to ashes¹⁴ (on the head - an example of paronomasia). "Ashes", *eifer* is usually spelt with an *aleph*. Here is an antithesis, "arise from the dust, your redeemer has come," and then, on the other hand, the poet speaks of "ashes on the head", which is a sign of mourning. The poem has its oscillations, advances and retreats.

e) FURTHER ALLUSIONS TO TRADITIONAL SOURCES

Although this poem is rooted in the Bible there is a strong influence of the mystic teachings of the *Kabbalah*. This is understandable when one remembers that the *Tikkun* was practised in Safed, the centre of *Kabbalah*. It is more like the ancient laments than the modern ones, but it is at the same time a step ahead. It rejoices that redemption has come.

The "gracious ones" remembered, in the line "Morning and evening I remember the gracious ones" could be the *Yod'ei chein*, those who knew the Kabbalistic secret wisdom.

Chokhma nistara, "hidden wisdom", has been abbreviated, by the use of the *rashei teivot* or initials *chet nun*) into *chein*, "grace". Those who know the Kabbalistic secret wisdom are *yod'ei chokhma nistara* or *yod'ei chein*; hence the mentioning of the "gracious" ones.

It could also refer to those "saintly, upright, and blameless" souls remembered in *Av Harachamim*, (Birnbaum, 1949:605, 608) the Memorial Service for the martyrs.

Another allusion to Kabbalistic practices is the virtually direct copying of a verse from *Lecha Dodi*. The *tikkun* says:

Put on thy beautiful garments, my people
For your redeemer has come.

The *Tikkun* reflects many ideas from the Book of Lamentations:- "We have waited for thee ...my soul will live and give thee thanks(be)...our salvation in time of trouble" conveys the same positive message that is found in the Book of Lamentations: "It is good that a man should quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord" (Lam 3:26).

"Morning and evening", used as a refrain, comes from the *Kedushah* of the *Mussaf* service in the prayer book, "evening and morning they proclaim the unity of G-d's name".

¹⁴ "Ashes", *eifer*, being more usually spelt with an *aleph*.

Apart from the references to the Song of Songs dealt with above, there are numerous references to the *Tanach*, the Book of Lamentations (Lam 2:13), Jacob's dream on his way to *Haran* (Gen 28:1-15), references to the priests and the gemstones *Urim* and *Thummim* (Ex 28:30) and the Psalms.

Further reference is made to the prayers. "Those who sleep in the dust" comes from the *amidah* prayer. The choir sings: The ministering angels ask "Where, where, where is the place of His glory, that we may adore Him?" which comes from the *Mussaf Kedusha* prayer as do many other phrases in the poem.

Almost the entire first *b'racha* of the *Amidah* is repeated verbatim. "Those who sleep in the dust" connects with this expression in the second *b'racha* of the *Amidah* dealing with the resuscitation of the dead.

One of the choirs sings of another prayer: "They wake up and repeat the reading of the *bakashot* (the "supplications"). These are the liturgical poems or *piyuttim* which contain humble and earnest entreaties, and possibly requests for pardon.

The work of the *payettanim* has been discussed earlier in this thesis.

"*Halleluyah*, Praise O ye servants of the Lord, Praise ye the name of the Lord. Let the name of the Lord be blessed from this time forth and forever more" (Ps 113:1-2) is sung in the *Hallel* service, as is "In the courts of the house of our G-d, *Halleluyah*" (Ps 116:19).

Tabib has used *eloheinu* in place of *adon-ai* and omitted the words *b'tokheikhi y'rushala'im*.

There are also "*Halleluyah*"s in Ps 150 (the last psalm in the body of psalms), and its last line, "Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord, *Halleluyah*!" This line is said more than once in the *Tikkun*:

Halleluyah! Halleluyah
Kol han'shama t'hallel Ya!
Halleluyah! Halleluyah!
Kol han'shama t'hallel Ya!
Halleluyah! Halleluyah!

This is an allusion to the *Halleluyah* in Handel's oratorio, "The Messiah" which ensures that this lament is not only bound to Jewish sources through the words, but also to a monumental musical work.

f) COMPARISON WITH THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

There are many refrains and repetitions. The many times repeated "Woe is me" is a strong term of lament, which is frequently used as an alternative to *Eichah*, "alas, how now".

There are complaints that G-d has forsaken His people, as in the Book of Lamentations and other laments.

This poem, like the Book of Lamentations, laments the destruction of Jerusalem, the Temple and the Exile.

G-d, too, laments-

Oi, shehecheravti et beiti

V'sarafti et heichali

V'hegleiti et banai

L'vein ha'umot

...

Oi-li, oi li...

In this poem even G-d often exclaims *oi li*.

In the Book of Lamentations the nations feature as the messengers of G-d and later they are cursed. Here G-d speaks of having "exiled my children among the nations" though they are not cursed.

There is mention of the prophet, this time not Jeremiah who is considered by tradition to be the author of Lamentations, nor Ezekiel, but Elijah. Questions are asked: "When?...How long?...How long?" and repeatedly ... "How long?...How long?...How long?"

In the oratorio, G-d is asked for help, and there is hope in G-d, as in the Book of Lamentations. "Give me respite from my sufferings...we have waited for thee" (Tabib, 1963:32). G-d is told in the Book of Lamentations "Behold, O Lord, for I am in distress"

(Lam 1:20) and "It is good that a man should quietly wait/For the salvation of the Lord" (Lam 3:26). In the Book of Lamentations G-d is also implored "Judge Thou my cause" (Lam 3:59).

The core of Biblical poetry is parallelism which is used in the Book of Lamentations and also by Tabib.

Tikkun Hatzot comes full circle – a modern lament, rooted in medieval tradition based on the Biblical Book of Lamentations and like the original, finding redemption from within the ashes of destruction.

Tikkun Hatzot is an all-embracing lament set in the form of a libretto and it has in it destruction, but it also has love, aspiration, hope, redemption and prayer.

Some of these verses sound, in effect, very much like the Book of Lamentations. There are differences, for example the Messiah is not mentioned in the Book of Lamentations. This difference marks the two as very distant in eras.

Both start with the characteristic mourning sound of a *kinah*: *Eichah, ... eichah ...* "How, Alas!" ("Book of Lamentations") or *Oi-li, oi-li*, "Woe is me", *Tikkun Hatzot*. Both bemoan the fact that G-d's House is destroyed, His Temple burnt, and His children exiled. The Book of Lamentations is sung mostly on a sobbing note where as *Tikkun Hatzot* is sung in both a minor and a major key. The idea that it is sung, echoes the oral tradition of reading the Book of Lamentations in front of the community.

By being set to music the *Tikkun Hatzot* takes the lament to the pre-Temple days when laments were sung to musical accompaniment, while also having similarities to the writings of the Book of Lamentations, the *piyyutim*, the Kabbalists, and Zionist philosophy.

And so the lament goes full circle. It has undergone changes and experienced variations, but has never strayed far from its forbear and prototypes.

g) **ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE**

A contrasting feature between the Book of Lamentations and this poem is that although this is a heavy lament, which cries "Woe is me, Woe is me that I have destroyed my House",

this poem conveys comfort in the assurance of the Promised Land in Jacob's dream; more than this, the beginning of redemption achieves expression in the reconstitution of the State of Israel. There is joy between G-d and his people. There are references to the exultation of lovers sporting in the meadows and gardens, based on the Song of Songs. There are praises and the hymn of thanks - *Halleluyah*! Let every living thing that hath breath praise the Lord.

There is hope of redemption and love in the depiction of the spiritual marriage between God and Israel and G-d's promise to Jacob in his dream (Gen 28:1-15).

The ground whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed.

There is hope of redemption and growth in lines like:

L--d, build; L--d build-
Build thy house speedily

There is a flourish of hope and love in the synagogue scene with which the oratorio ends.

Open to me, my love
The gates of Zion that I love

h) **FAITH AND PRAYER**

Although drawing its text from the Book of Lamentations, there is faith and praise to G-d, *Halleluyah*, as a result of the end of the exile and the establishment of the State of Israel.

The poem contains words from the daily prayer, a call to prayer and faith.

O Lord open Thou my lips;
And my mouth shall declare Thy praise
(Ps 51:17)

i) **FAITH IN REDEMPTION THROUGH THE RETURN TO ZION**

A feeling of joy emerges in this poem, and praise to G-d as a result of the end of the exile and the establishment of the State of Israel.

G-d's promise is as follows :

Again I will build thee and thou shall be rebuilt

O, virgin daughter of Zion (see Bat-Zion in Lam, 1:6)

The writer proclaims :

Open ye the gates that the righteous nation which keepeth
the truth may enter in

and

the L--d loveth the gates of Zion

j) **CONCLUSION**

This lament is a mosaic of themes, images, motifs and words from the Bible and the traditional sources, for example *Midrashim*, *Talmud*, etc.

It fits in with a message, that our history, present and future is interlinked and interwoven and cannot be separated. Out of every lament come seeds of hope for a positive future.

ROCHELLE MASS

c. 1950

a) INTRODUCTION

In December 1995, the Israel Association of Writers in English published a book of seventeen lamentations written in Hebrew, Arabic or English in memory of Yitzchak Rabin (1922-1995), who was killed while he was addressing a peace rally in Tel Aviv in November 1995, by a young fundamentalist Jewish student. The Hebrew poets are Rony Someck, Dahlia Ravikovitch, Moshe Dor and Zelda. These laments from the late twentieth century contain most of the features of the lament genre discussed in this thesis.

The lament ^{with} which I have chosen to conclude our study of laments is called "On the Mountains of Gilboa" by Rochelle Mass and it has been selected because its theme reflects both on the lament by David on the death of Saul and Jonathan on Mount Gilboa, and the Israeli lament by Tchernichowsky, *Al Harei Gilboa*, included in this thesis. Thus it demonstrates certain consistencies in themes in the lament genre. There are great differences in style and structure in these three poems, but all three are about a death on Mount Gilboa and are products of totally different historical paradigms. All are laments on fallen leaders, the first by the author of Sam 2 on the death of Saul on Mount Gilboa, c.1000 BCE, the second by Tchernichowsky *Al Harei Gilboa* (1929) dealing with the same topic, and this one by Rochelle Mass "On the Mountains of Gilboa", dealing with the assassination of Rabin. We have come full circle. Three thousand years separate the first poem "On the Mountains of Gilboa" from the third poem on the same theme.

This theme has also been used in a lament by Moshe Tabenkin ¹⁵ on the death in battle of a modern-day Israeli soldier, *Haya n'areinu k'tzuk Hagilbo'a, haya k'ma'of n'urav ne'edar, amitz v'no'az. Gavo'a gavo'a ad acharon r'ga'av mul ha'tzar'tzar*, ¹⁶ the boy was lofty as Mount Gilboa.

¹⁵ Born in 1917 in Palestine, Tabenkin was a lyrical poet who served in the *Palmach*. His published works include *Shirim* and *Tor v'ha Torit*.

¹⁶ Israel Postal Authority (4/1995:508)

b) ABOUT THE POET

Canadian born Rochelle Mass settled in Israel in 1973 and lives in Jezreel Valley facing Mount Gilboa. She is a painter and sculptor who has exhibited in Canada and Israel; she is also a playwright and poet and has been awarded several prizes for poems which have been published in Israel and abroad. She was short-listed in the BBC play competition in 1991.

“On the Mountains of Gilboa”

c) LITERARY ANALYSIS

Theme : A farmer on Mount Gilboa is trying his best to grow crops which are destroyed nightly by a wild boar. The farmer does not give up but replants the delicate plants each day. One day the farmer does not return to tend to his plants; the wild boar returns, the plants wither, and the farmer, the king, is buried. This poem symbolizes Rabin's continual efforts to foster the peace process, “the lettuce leaves” ruined by the wild boar.

withered
to dry bones
as they lay another king in
the grave

d) ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE

The poem is divided into two sections: the first section leads up to a sudden death, and gives ominous hints of what is going to happen. The wild boar-

tears seedlings of sage and thyme
out of the earth rolls away lettuce
heads till they are cold.

Although there is prescience in the first verse, the lines
till the night in November

when a new grave was dug
comes abruptly.

In the second section we are told:

the farmer did not go to
his land
.....
as they lay another king in
the grave.

Although a deep gravity suffuses the composition, there is restraint in the writing and the use of rhetorical devices to symbolically convey the effect of the death of a leader, and to involve the emotions of the reader in the results of the loss. The death of the farmer will mean that there will be no leader to care for the produce, the land (and people) of Israel. Shaked has pointed out that symbolic motifs [such as this] play a dominant role in Hebrew literary traditions (Shaked, 1976:46).

e) **USE OF LANGUAGE**

Rhyme : There is no apparent rhyme scheme. The lament is simply "told" in the format of a narrative allegory:

there is a farm on the mountains of
gilboa where a wild boar comes out
each night.

It could at first sight be thought to be a fable about a vicious animal, lettuces and herbs and a king in the grave.

The verses are skilfully balanced with the lines rolling into each other.

Enjambement : A device used as a "striding over" (Abrams, 1985:104) of a syntactic unit into the next line this is a striking feature of the poem.

Punctuation : There is no punctuation. There are no capitals. It is as though the events are so distressing that there can be no order. It is unreal; there is repetition, an instinctive anchor of people under shock. The poet speaker has to tell and re-tell the episode. The entire poem consists of two long merging sentences.

In the repetition of non-stopping kaleidoscopic scenes showing the farmer, mountains, thyme, sage, lettuces, wild boar, day, night, a surrealistic effect is produced.

These modern devices direct the attention of the reader, who is taken from one scene to another. There are flashbacks and movement of time. There are no delays.

Metaphors : There is a "farmer" on the mountains of Gilboa who plants lettuces and herbs. Rabin studied agriculture at the Khadourie School which is an agricultural academy hence the references to the farmer. The metaphors are powerful:

each night the beast yanks
the tender growth from its
place each day each
night

The thyme and herbs have their own significance.

The "king" (the leader of the nation) had a forebear, also a leader and a soldier, who also died on the mountain, on his own territory.

Refrains and Repetitions : The second paragraph repeats many of the metaphors found in the first, the farmer, the mountains, the thyme, the sage, the lettuces, the wild boar, each day, each night. These metaphors direct the flow unto the death and the grave.

Symbols : The herbs, sage and thyme, have special features: herbs are gentle plants with metaphorical meanings. A "sage" is considered to be wise through reflection and experience, "prudent and philosophic in judgment and views" as was Rabin who sought

peace. An Arabian proverb states, "How can a man die who has sage in his garden?" (Greenaway, 1978). The word also means "saviour" (from the Latin *salvia*, *salvatrix*).

"Sage" saves you from "crossing the threshold" and "thyme" gives you the courage to face death; "thyme" and "sage" complement each other.

"Thyme" is connected with "burnt offerings", "sacrifice", and "the altar". Thyme also symbolizes death and the souls of the dead are thought to rest in the flowers. Bodies were also embalmed with thyme whereas sage was supposed to promote life (Geuter, 1978:19).

Unfortunately Rabin did not achieve long life and could not complete his work.

Allusions to traditional sources : The dry bones (Ezek 37), lettuce leaves, the withered uprooted branch (Isa 40:24), - this is the trunk of a tree that carries the branches. (*Baba Batra* 5:4); (Isaiah 11:1). If the trunk is uprooted, how will the tree carry the branches of the future. This poem, with its reference to the uprooted branch is reminiscent of Shlonski's *Otot*.

Lastly, the title of the poems refers to the tragic deaths of the great leaders, Saul and Jonathan.

f) COMPARISON WITH LAMENTS IN GENERAL

This poem "On the Mountains of Gilboa" compares closely with two other poems in our thesis in choice of topic. The one is David's lament over Saul and Jonathan, on Mount Gilboa, and the other is Tchernichowsky's poem on the same subject. All three poems lament a great leader on the same mountain.

There is no "alas" or "woe is me". One does not know that anyone has died until the end of the poem. This is something like Ibn Gabirol's *R'ei Shemesh* on the death of Yekuti'el which one could have thought was a nature poem - until the end. In both poems there are intimations, but no mention, of death. The poet-mourner diverts attention from the main

subject, the death, by going into the minutest details. In *R'ei Shemesh* the cosmic world of nature is described. In this poem, everything is earthy, until the sudden deaths.

As with other laments this poem has repetitions and refrains.

Nature plays an important but varied role in laments. In this poem there is an implied "then and now" theme. The seedlings could have been a success, but they have withered and died.

This is a modern poem. One is immediately struck by the type setting. There is no punctuation in the poem.

g) **ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE**

As in Ibn Gabirol the poem implies a hope in the reader's knowledge of the cyclical view of nature. The use of the words 'another king' indicate that there were other kings before and there would be other leaders in the future. The plants will grow again. The wild boar will come, but despite the poet's bleak view of the sage, thyme and lettuce leaves withering, they will grow again.

h) **EXPRESSING FEELINGS**

This poem is remarkable for its lack of affect. No emotions or feelings are expressed. It is on the surface a routine description of daily agricultural activities.

i) **FAITH AND PRAYER**

This is a secular poem with no references whatsoever to G-d or to the Bible, apart from the title and enigmatic references to lettuce leaves, withered uprooted branches, and dry bones (Ezekiel). This poem is more attuned to the "New Age" movement with emphasis on nature and a belief in the healing power of herbs.

This is a different form of prayer.

j) **CONCLUSION**

The poem is written with graphic restraint. The gist is that a great "king" has died, and with him the farmer whose nurturing of the seedlings of peace, which would save the nation, has also died. It is a manifold tragedy, for without peace, many lives may be lost.

In "On the Mountains of Gilboa", Mass uses images of nature and also meaningful herbs which apply to Prime Minister Rabin, and describes a unique characterful man who inspires readers, yet there is knowledge that even when great leaders die the nation continues (as with King Saul and Jonathan).

The theme of nature which resonates strongly here provides the continuation. The strength that one draws from this poem and which alleviates despair is that even though after Rabin's death many people sank into despair about the peace process and about the future of the nation, there is a strong message of hope in this lament.

CONCLUSION

HEBREW LAMENTATIONS PAST AND PRESENT

THE POWER OF LAMENTS IN ALLEVIATING DESPAIR: REVISITING HEBREW LAMENTS

Would that misfortune had left them some small solace
Sustaining the soul, consoling their gray hairs!
Behold the fast is ended; the final prayers are said.
But why does the congregation still delay?
Are they also going to read the Book of Lamentations?
Bialik (Trans AM Klein)

Bialik might have intended that last line to be sarcastic, but as this thesis has demonstrated, reading the Book of Lamentations would have brought them solace, sustained their soul, and consoled their gray hairs. Reading the Book of Lamentations like reciting all laments would have helped to alleviate despair.

Throughout the centuries mankind has had to confront the inevitability of death whether natural as a result of illness or unnatural as a result of war or so called acts of G-d. How does one comfort the mourners left distressed and alleviate despair? This thesis has examined in detail a cross section of Hebrew poems of lament starting with the Book of Lamentations, and David's lament over Saul and Jonathan (Second Samuel 1:17) and examples of poems written at different periods of Jewish history and has looked at them as a mode of alleviating distress. I have put forward the suggestion that literature has been utilized to help in pain. This phenomenon has been recognized by social psychologists (Morris, 1996:32) who have explained this, saying "Many who today suffer silently and in confusion might be helped if we learned how to tap the resources of literature in restoring significance to an individual human voice" (Morris, 1996:32).

Most studies, to date, of the lament genre have concentrated on laments as a response to catastrophe. This thesis looks at a different perspective; it revisits Hebrew laments

throughout the ages studying the positive core at the heart of the laments as it appears in its multifaceted ways, thus providing an answer to the question: what is it in these laments which provides a glimmer of hope and alleviates pain and despair? Mintz, Roskies, Young and other scholars recognize that laments help in coming to terms with disaster and that Hebrew poets have a tremendous power to transcend the destructive impact of national catastrophe. This thesis has tried to highlight the mechanisms used to undertake this task.

- I have noted that the power of lamentations comes firstly from the opportunity it provides the sufferers to express themselves on paper in a formal and structured way and through the poet the opportunity of the listener or reader who does not have the same poetic abilities to share vicariously in the feelings expressed by the writer, thereby gaining comfort. The act of chronicling the despair is itself a healthy way to respond to the loss.
- I have noted that the lamentations are a source of emotional comfort by accentuating the positive, by finding some light in the darkness.
- I have noted that lamentations provide emotional comfort by recognizing the realities of the actual feelings of the mourner, which are usually different to those expressed in the ritualized praise format of the *Kaddish*.
- I have noted that lamentations provide spiritual comfort in their emphasis on faith and prayer, although this element is stronger in the earlier lamentations which were written in an environment of stronger religious belief.
- I have noted that lamentations provide comfort through an emphasis on future redemption through a national restoration.
- I have noted that Hebrew lamentations over the centuries have shown a remarkable continuity of Jewish tradition in the genre of laments.

In addition I have noted that certain rhetorical motifs are found in these laments to help produce these mechanisms such as the

- motif of light
- motif of children as a representation of hope for the future
- motif of the beauty and cyclical continuity of nature

- motif of finding strength through taking positive steps
- motif of tears
- motif of G-d's presence and the motif of reunification with loved ones in *ha'olam haba* (the next world)
- biblical motifs

I have also noted certain rhetorical motifs found in these laments that are associated with Holocaust and catastrophe poetry, such as the

- motif of the "living-dead"
- motif of "sheep to the slaughter"
- motif of the *akedah*
- motif of Job
- motif of dreams
- motif of the inadequacy of words

In my examination of these literary sources I noticed that what is striking in most of these laments, is the story of the transcendence over catastrophe, rather than the catastrophe itself.

a) **OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS GRIEF IN A FORMAL AND STRUCTURED WAY**

As Gluckel of Hamelin having lost her mate, "managed to shorten the sleepless nights" by writing, so we too can find relief, not only by trying to put our feelings on paper but also by immersing ourselves in reading about the despair of others and identifying with the sufferers. We too "participate" with them in working through the process of pain and healing. We feel encouraged to see how the suffering was processed and how a better spiritual future can be sought after, planned and achieved. As has been discussed earlier in the thesis, expressing one's thoughts on paper is a healing way of coming to terms with a trauma.

Like their readers, the lament writers have struggled to come to terms with death and catastrophe. This was so whether it was for the Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, or

the death of individuals. For the *payyetanim* it was the persecutions around them, for the Spanish poets the loss of parents, brothers, patrons, for the Russian poets like Bialik and Tchernichowsky the havoc caused by pogroms like that of Kishinev, and for subsequent poets like Katzenelson, Greenberg, Shlonski, Alterman, Gilboa and Gouri, it was the indescribable suffering of the Holocaust.

The writing of laments is a natural response to loss. Laments are written partly to express inexpressible pain and partly to preserve knowledge for the education of future generations. The poets want to ensure that others should know what suffering was endured, and want to give a message of warning to their descendants, to help them avoid such disasters in the future or if prevention is beyond their control, to find ways and means of healing body and mind.

Some poets considered themselves appointed to the task of being prophet to the people like Kallir, Bialik, Greenberg and to some extent Shlonski, who wrote "upon us rests the sacred duty to remember not to forget" (Kohn, 1979:61). Many poets write as an act of catharsis, a deep personal need to do so in order to cope with their grief.

b) **ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE AND FINDING LIGHT**

This thesis has demonstrated how poets endeavour to give positive encouragement or provoke an active response, because the purpose of catastrophe literature was to make creative survival possible and to try to spur people to action, to aid physical survival by helping the mourner move out of the passivity and demotivation caused by depression as well as an attempt to provide comfort.

Comfort can be obtained from the empathy of significant others. Mourning with others helps to alleviate the heart-break and to lighten the burden of healing. The Book of Lamentations says "The ways of Zion do mourn / Because none come to the solemn assembly; / all her gates are desolate ... / And she herself is in bitterness" (1:4). She is bitter because none came to mourn with her. One cannot be comforted alone. The Hebrew expression for "funeral" is *l'vayah* or *halvayat hameit*, the "accompaniment" of the dead. Mourning is undertaken as a group and is part of a healing process after a crippling event.

Comfort is associated with *light*, *dark* with despair. The symbolism of light occurs in Greek laments as part of Byzantine religious tradition and is also found in Hebrew literature (Alexiou, 1974:188).

Yehudah Halevi writes:

Happy is he who lives and waits to see your light rising. (Ode to Zion)

It is a motif that frequently recurs in lament poetry.

Bialik's poem *Im Shamesh*, begins and ends (as does the title) with "the light of the sun".

"You must go and seek the good healing gold and if your eye does not see the light, you must create the light of the sun out of nothing; you must hew it out of the rocks and prize it from the crevices and draw it from the corners of your hearts and let the light of G-d live, and as it is revealed it will spread and not be taken away". In other words, if you cannot find hope, you must take steps to create hope yourself.

"Work, live and hope much! Ho! Those who are redeemed from the darkness, the ancient ones of the darkness, suspend the light over your heads" (*Im Shamesh*).

Shlonski also uses the symbol of light,

I know, You and again You, will command again,

Let there be light!

Laments help to alleviate despair because the poet tries to provide comfort by accentuating positive factors and by finding some aspect of light in the loss. Laments are regarded as depressing negative poetry but I intend to show that they should be viewed positively. We recall the past, the shadow of death, and all that is connected therewith but the future goes on, we must find something to which to look forward.

The motif of children appear in the poems of major poets such as Alterman, Gilboa and Greenberg as well as in minor poets like Rachelle Mann. Children are something to look forward to as well as being a symbol of the future. In the Alterman poem whatever happened in the past, the child representing the future, will emerge victorious. Alterman gives a message of hope that the living son will continue the family process, going out, *lekh l'kha*, as G-d commanded the patriarch Avraham, to life, deliverance and nationhood.

Another motif is family love. When we read Greenberg, we are permeated with a feeling of family love, love that starts in the mother's kitchen next to the wooden stove, or at the window-sill where the father is feeding crumbs to the birds. The memory of the warmth and comfort of the early close family ties is of much consolation to the mourners and is found frequently.

The cyclical continuity of nature, with death and rebirth is also a symbol of the future. This motif has been found in the poems of Ibn Gabirol and Bialik.

In the poem by Rochelle Mass, "On the Mountains of Gilboa" there are intimations of hope because the reader knows that there is cyclical continuity in nature. Greenberg's orchard will grow again, and Gabirol's sun will rise again the next day.

Comfort can be gained in taking positive action, doing something to alleviate the problem, overcoming the passivity of despair. This message can be found in the lament of David on the death of Saul and Jonathan, where David encourages the nation to learn archery and fight well.

In *Harei Gilboa*, Tchernichowsky conveys a positive message of the power of positive thinking even in times of acute danger. The poet looks to the future of the nation.

Comfort is found in Bialik who wants his people to be resolute and to take steps to defend themselves and whose method is to shock the readers by relating what he had observed when he visited Kishinev after the pogrom. Others who try to provoke activism are Shlonski and Greenberg who have a mission, that of warning their people of the danger to come and who are exasperated when no one takes note.

G-d's presence and omnipotence provide comfort even at times of chastisement.

"Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people" (Isa, 40:1) has been described as a response to the laments and to the Book of Lamentations (Gitay, 1981:70).

Understandably, the theme of comfort recurs repeatedly throughout these lamentations. For example in the Book of Lamentations there is an implicit message of hope, comfort and encouragement for those who suffered and thought all hope had gone (Brann, 1987:33). The Book of Lamentations ends with a message of comfort after five chapters describing the horrors of life in the besieged city and the fall of Jerusalem. We have been told five

times, "there is none to comfort her"¹ and the poet speaker says to Mother Zion: "What shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee" (2:13)? Now at the end of the poem, comfort is provided with the words :

Turn Thou us unto Thee, O L--d,
and we shall be turned;
Renew our days as of old.

The lament by Kallir included in the thesis has strong parallels with the body of the Book of Lamentations and this one too has the refrain of hope.

Jeremiah, in Kallir concludes in beautiful rhyme with the same theme, "Restore them, support them and sustain them, have mercy, for the time has come".

The message is that in spite of suffering in life, a covenant has been entered into which in the end will bring joy.

It is beautiful for you to live in joy and to rejoice in goodness.

Gouri's poem, *Yerushah*, is disturbing, as every *Yitzchak* will be born with a knife in his heart. However, in the significant line "the ram comes last of all" lies the miracle, the hope.

Ha'ayil ba acharon.

Redemption will come.

V'sofan l'higa'eil b'karnav shel ayil.

While Gouri is indicating the horror of destruction, he is also giving a message of survival and revival.

c) **RECOGNIZING THE REALITIES OF THE MOURNER'S FEELINGS**

Part of the appeal of the laments is the universality of the feelings they express. The poet's words frequently identify and describe some of the stages the mourner is going through - stages which have been identified by specialists in bereavement. These are *shock*, *grief*, *guilt*, *denial*, *anger* (Kubler-Ross, 1984). By recognizing and expressing these inner feelings so powerfully these poems act as a catharsis to the listener or reader. Newly

¹ As we see in Lam (1:2), there is none to comfort. Similarly in 1:9; 1:16; 1:17; 1:21

bereaved people feel alone in their grief and can identify and empathize with the feelings expressed by Samuel Hanagid, Ibn Gabirol and Moses Ibn Ezra. They gain comfort, knowing they are not the only ones who suffer from these feelings and realize that in an inexplicable way death is a natural function of life.

- The *shock* of unexpected death or disaster is expressed in some of these laments.

In the Book of Lamentations the speaker is in a state of shock.

Mine eyes do fail with tears,
 Mine inwards burn,
 My liver is poured upon the earth, (2:11)

The physical symptoms of shock are described in Gilboa:

and his face pale ...
 And bloodless was the right hand

- *Denial* can be found in Hanagid's *Hayam Beini Uveinekha*, a personal poem filled with pain which expresses feelings we can share. He talks to his brother while visiting his grave, using the first person, as though his brother were still alive. In Tchernichowsky's *Al Harei Gilboa*, Saul ignores his son's deaths, as though the sons were fine and well. Gilboa expresses denial when he says *m'farpeir lo l'ha'a'min* - convulsively he does not believe. Turtledove's keeps asking "where is Schrire? Where is he?" although he knows he is dead.
- Mourners often *question* why the loss has to happen and questions are found frequently in the lament genre, as is asked in Ex 5:22, in Ps 42:10 and in Ps 22:2 ("My G-d, my G-d, why have you forsaken me?" Bialik asks questions "*Ad-matai, ad-ana, ad-matai?*" and Yitzchak Katzenelson asks many times

Al ma, v'lama
Ami meit?
Meit lashav
Al ma, v'lama
Al ma, riboni,
V'lama Ei-l?

Greenberg laments "Will I ever forget?" (line 40) and *Lama?* "Why?" (line 43) *lama rag'shu goyim*. "How is it possible ...?" "Turtledove asks, "Where is Schrire? ... Where is he? ... Why was his departure so sudden? Where is he?" Tabib asks "How long? How long?" Rachelle Mann questions G-d for what he has done. There is *grief* in these poems. There is depression in these poems. Among the signs of depression are *sighs, tears and weeping, feelings of abandonment*, also loneliness and void - all these can be found in the laments. The word for Lamentation, *eichah*, in itself is the sound of a sigh and gives the Book of Lamentations its name; the sigh, *eichah* recurs in Lam 1:1; 2:1; 4:1. This sigh or moan is important and the words were used frequently. In his lament over Saul and Jonathan, David uses the refrain, *Eikh naflu giborim*. The word *eichah* is used by Moses (Deut, 1:12) and Isaiah, (Isa, 1:21) and it is found in the laments by Kallir (verse, 6:2), and Halevi included it in this study (line 3). Similar sounds used are *eich* and *ochal* in Halevi,² and *eich*³ and *achein* in Greenberg (line 1).

Other onomatopoeic expressions of despair that are found in these laments are *oi li, lama, al ma* and the syllables in *ni, hi, aha, ad ana* and *ad matai*.

Weeping co-exists with unhappiness and the laments brim over with tears. The Book of Lamentations is filled with tears. "Hide not thine ear at my sighing, at my cry" (3.56).

The widow is heard weeping and

She weepeth sore in the night (1:2)...

And her tears are on her cheeks;

And again : "For these things I weep; / Mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water; / Because the comforter is far from me" (Lam, 1:16); "Let tears run down like a river / Day and night." (Lam, 2:18). In Kallir, Jeremiah instructs the fathers of the splendid one, *avot hatzvi*, "to give voice in crying" for the sons who have erred. This is a recognition of the comfort to be obtained by expressing one's grief by crying.

In David's lament over Saul and Jonathan, through the refrain, David orders

² line 2 Cf *Midrash Rabbah* (1951:66)

³ *Kinat Hahe'in B'vorcho Mibeit Aviv V'imo*, lines 10,13,31,32

Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,

In Bialik's *Be'ir Hahareigah*, the prophet-speaker is forbidden to shed a tear or to communicate with the victims. This repeated injunction causes the trapped tears to become "a serpent's nest", a "river of curses" and a "fountain of poison"; and in the end the prophet has to "flee to the desert and send his bitter tear into the storm!"

Greenberg writes that "his repulsive cowardly soul is bitter with tears." Katzenelson says "I cry in my sorrow day and night." Alterman in *Al Hayered Avram* writes "There you are sleeping, with the tear of the dead on your cheek". Rachelle Mann is angry at G-d for leaving two mothers to weep.

Feelings of abandonment are expressed. Ibn Ezra's dear ones cannot hear or answer, neither can he expect an answer; he feels betrayed, because they have all left him. Katzenelson mourns "I have no people, my people no longer exist, they are no more," and he repeats his tragic words "they are not".

Greenberg's poem *Kinat Habein B'vorcho Mibeit Avi'v V'Imo* is one of pathos. "I am the only one left from this orchard that has been cut down."

- Another stage faced by the mourners is *guilt* and *remorse*. Guilt is often a response to the shock of a death of a loved one. In the Book of Lamentations the poet attributes the fall of Judah to sin, and the children of Israel accept their guilt.

In Kallir's *Az Bimlot Seifek* everything has "fled" because of her "sin"; Israel had to pay for her sin: *b'avoni nadad* (line 25). As society becomes more secular, guilt becomes personalized.

When it comes to dealing with disasters like pogroms and particularly the Holocaust, the poems produced often reflect on the nature of survival that is marked by the guilt of having survived. Survivor guilt is found in the poetry of Greenberg, Alterman and Gilboa. In *Kinat Habein B'Vorcho Mibeit Avi'v V'Imo*, Greenberg feels smothered with remorse at the thought of having caused sorrow to his mother in having "deserted" his parents and having left them to die, and he torments himself. Greenberg felt he had committed a double sin, one by leaving his parents to die, and the other by giving his mother the sorrow of his leaving. For him this became unresolved guilt.

This poem opens with "Indeed I saved this, my body": "But even if you know I saved my body, you need to know that I did not save my soul." His mourning was made more difficult because he did not know what happened to his parents. He could not "bend the knee at their grave". These feelings, frequently shared by other survivors are expressed clearly in this poem

Like Greenberg, Gilboa in the poem *Yitzchak* wants to write about his father whom he was unable to save, and now, after all these years, feeling guilty, he is unable to write, as his "writing hand" is frozen.

- Another stage in mourning that has to be overcome in processing loss and despair is that of *anger*. Usually the anger is directed against G-d for allowing the disaster to have occurred.

In the Book of Lamentations we read: "The Lord is become as an enemy." (2:5) Bialik's poems in this thesis dealing with the Kishinev pogroms have the power to alleviate despair in a new and different way. Bialik expresses anger at attacks made on the Kishinev Jews, and he also vehemently criticizes the Jews for not taking sufficient steps to prevent these attacks and defend themselves. Bialik is angry with the attackers, with the Jews and with G-d. Just as Auschwitz later became a symbolic name for massive extermination and violence so did Bialik imbue the name Kishinev with connotations of killing and cruelty. He did this with the deliberate intention of stirring the Jews into determined and rigorous self defence and in subsequent attacks did succeed in encouraging the Jews to take active steps with less loss of life.

His angry poems had results - "like a flash, Bialik's poem travelled from end to end of Jewish Russia and everywhere the Jews learned it by heart" (Levin, 1932:253).

d) **EMPHASIS ON FAITH AND PRAYER**

Even with such anger, many poems retain a strong element of faith in them, a reflection of the religious background of many of the poets. This element of religion and faith constitutes a pattern running through the genre of Jewish literary laments throughout the centuries.

Religious feelings have always been a solace in times of despair. An emphasis on faith and prayer is a common thread running through the laments throughout the centuries because the laments are intended to alleviate distress and the writer wanted to provide comfort. However, attitudes to faith and prayer expressed in laments depend on the religious ideas about G-d, guilt and responsibility current at the time the lament was written.

Throughout the Book of Lamentations come the words of a praying people accepting a covenant between themselves and G-d.

It is good that a man should quietly wait
For the salvation of the L—d (3:26)

and

The L—d is my portion
Therefore I will hope in Him (3:24)
Lift up thy hands toward Him (2:19)
For the L--d will not cast off
For ever (3:31)

The nation is able to say: “Renew our days as of old” (5:21).

The Book of Lamentations has for its basic purpose the mastery of pain and doubt in the interests of faith.

In the *piyyutim* repeated expression is given to the undiminished hope that G-d will finally bring to an end the adversity and misery of Israel and humankind. In Kallir's poem *Az Bimlot Seifek*, there is a conversation involving G-d and his people and the intermediary, the prophet Jeremiah. The woman *Tirtzah*, feels she has had enough :

Until G-d will answer and say, *Daya* – ‘enough’.

In the Golden Age of Spain, Shmuel Hanagid in the poem *Hayam Beini Uvei'nekha* prays ardently at the grave of his brother.

May the spirit of G-d rest upon you and upon your soul.

The nineteenth century poets, outraged by the pogroms, were part of a new secular movement developed by the *intelligentsia* of the enlightenment. They rejected the

traditional pietism of the masses, committing themselves to ideas of progress, reform and westernization, ideas not fulfilled in the antisemitic Russian society where they were still officially and unofficially victimized. By the time of the pogroms, feelings of anger were being expressed at the Jews for not having taken steps to prevent such catastrophes. Bialik rages even more at G-d: "Heaven, beg mercy for me! If there is a G-d in you, and a pathway through you to this G-d".

Bialik thunders against G-d.

Let fists be flung like stone
Against the heavens and the heavenly throne!
... All are damned, the heavens, G-d, Justice.

Bialik's attitude to prayer has been poisoned by what he saw at Kishinev, but even Bialik in his anger recognizes the importance of prayer for comfort:

Arise, my brother, pray - there is place for prayer.

Tchernichowsky refers to the arch-stone in the Hallel prayer (Ps 118) which the builders rejected and which becomes the chief cornerstone of all the stones (this applying to Israel), and which prayer continues:

"The L--d is G-d, who has given us light."

Tchernichowsky's "As long as the key-stone of the arch stands ..." is resonant with these prayers which are repeated twice (said three times each) by all the worshippers in the synagogue.

Shlonski throws an angry question at G-d: are only the prayers of the Jewish people everlastingly rejected?

Even in his despair Katzenelson cries: For what reason, Oh G-d?

Although in despair, he still turns to G-d accusingly demanding:

Why, God?
For what purpose?

Shlonski's works also have faith. He says, "Blessed be the Judge of Truth". ...

I know, You and again You, will command again,
Let there be light

and “in seventy human languages a whispered prayer is heard”.

Turtledove held traditional attitudes to G-d and answering the eternal question of why his friend had to die, he provides comfort in his answer, which was that the deceased went to a better place, “the vanities of this earth being too much for him, he descended to a higher plane”.

This is similar to the message found in Ibn Ezra's, *Hekitzuni S'Ipai*, which finds comfort in the belief of an *Olam Haba*, “the world to come”, and the knowledge that on a higher plane he would be re-united with his deceased family who are waiting for him at the *m'lon horai*. Death is seen not as a finality but as a crossing over in a journey of transition.

Tabib's *Tikkun Hatzot* is imbued with religious references and Kabbalistic symbols:

Halleluyah, he rejoices,

Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord!

e) **FAITH IN REDEMPTION THROUGH THE RETURN TO ZION**

The laments look to tomorrow. Hopes for a future of redemption were integrally bound up with ideas of the return of the Jewish people to Israel and this idea gave positive hope for a happier life to come for the oppressed and suffering Jews. This theme occurs in much of Hebrew literature. The Book of Lamentations begins with Jerusalem, “How doth the city sit solitary”. The book mourns the destruction of Jerusalem and ends with the hope that the Jews will return to Zion and be returned and restored.

A similar plea for redemption in Zion is found in Kallir.

Restore them as formerly...

You will have compassion upon Zion, for the appointed time has come.

In the Middle Ages there was a movement called *Avelei Zion*, the Mourners of Zion, that encouraged their followers to bring redemption by going to Israel (Beinart 1992:33).

In the *Zionides* of Yehudah Halevi, the yearning and hope of seeing the Shrine of Jerusalem gives inspiration.

In *Libi V'Mizrach* he dreams of Zion which is on a “a strip of enemy country” and longs to see the “dust of the ruined Shrines”. This longing for Israel permeates the poem.

Even Shmuel Hanagid who became a political and military leader under the ruling Muslims, regarded life in the Diaspora as one of suffering and longed for a return of the Jews to Israel and donated olive oil to the synagogues in Jerusalem.

The positive theme of redemption through *Aliyah* is found in many periods, and gained impetus in the nineteenth century with a strong movement from the Eastern European heartland to Palestine. Nineteenth century poets were throwing off the shackles of customs and traditions.

Bialik in his criticism of the Jews in *Be'ir Hahareigah*, implies that they should leave their homes and go to Israel, which he later did. Greenberg reflected sadly: "My mother said to me, 'that you should reach Jerusalem in peace, my baby!' " Alterman urged the Jews to go on *Aliyah* and condemned the British for restricting it. He ends his poem with G-d's promise to Abraham: "I shall make you great and mighty, *Lekh l'kha...* to the land which I shall show you".

Tabib, writing in 1963 in an independent Israel, wrote in a period of the restoration of Zion. A feeling of joy emerges in this poem, and praise to G-d as a result of the end of the exile and the establishment of the State of Israel.

The poem ends with G-d's promise:

Again I will build thee and thou shall be rebuilt
O, virgin daughter of Zion

The writer proclaims :

Open ye the gates that the righteous nation which keepeth
the truth may enter in The L--d loveth the gates of Zion

f) **CONTINUITY OF JEWISH TRADITIONS IN THE GENRE OF HEBREW LAMENTS**

Comfort can also be found in the reassurance provided by the continuity of one's traditions and beliefs. Even if one's world seems to have been shaken, this continuity can provide a sense of stability. A lament written in South Africa in 1995 by Mann finds comfort in Jewish mourning custom, the *Kaddish* and the *Shivah* week and the implication of the sense

of community and tradition, that helps alleviate the shock of the loss and the loneliness accompanying it.

My work reaffirms Kohn's statement that "the most outstanding characteristic of the Hebrew poetic genius was that this poetry was grounded in the ethos of traditional Judaism" (Kohn, 1979:133). Despite the poets' familiarity with Arabic poets, Homer, Shakespeare or Goethe, Eastern or Western allusions pale remarkably in comparison to allusions to Jewish sources. For example, even Alterman, Gilboa and Gouri, who had secular labour Zionist backgrounds, wrote themes based on the *akedah*.

The laments studied in this thesis abound in Biblical allusions. No matter the time, the place or the disaster, the poetry reflects Biblical themes and stories. They are found in the *payyetanim*, in the Spanish poets, in the Russian poets; they are even found in the modern Israeli poets like Tchernichowsky, Alterman, Gilboa and Gouri.

It seems as though no matter how innovative and individualistic, or how secular the modern poets may be, they do not ignore their own traditions when they take up their pen to write a lament. Bialik refers to Kallir (Roskies, 1988:159) and Kallir refers to the Book of Lamentations and the Book of Lamentations is connected to many of the laments. As Bialik says: "Are they also going to read the Book of Lamentations?"⁴ Although Kallir's *Az Bimlot Seifek* is a short poem, thirteen verses of four lines each, it re-echoes the Book of Lamentations throughout its length.

The Biblical motifs appear again and again, although the interpretations may differ, this depending on the poets, their spirit, and the historiosophy of the time.

This can be clearly illustrated in the use and reuse of the *akedah* theme in lament poetry. The *akedah*, "the Binding of Isaac", is used to represent the suffering of the Jewish people and this has been a favourite archetypal mythopoeic topic throughout the ages. Only a few paragraphs in the Bible refer to the *akedah*, yet it has been a theme in religious poetry throughout the centuries and is still greatly used as "a haunting metaphor of reality and a twentieth century echo of an ancient legend but has lost its religious connotations" (Kampf, 1990:135). Through the *akedah* feelings of grief, bereavement and despair were expressed

⁴ *Be 'Ir Hahareigah*

for the sons, husbands, fathers, the Abrahams and the Isaacs who gave their lives; and therefore the theme is prevalent in Holocaust poetry. Even the loss of fathers and sons in the Israeli Wars since the War of Independence in 1948 have been compared in literature to the Biblical *akedah* as an act of unconditional devotion to the rebirth of Israel. We find references to the *akedah* in Bialik's poem *P'reidah*, in Greenberg's poem *Shir Hayachas Hagadol*, in Alterman's *Al Hayered Avram* as well as in Gilboa's *Yitzhak*, and in Gouri's *Yerushah* and in many more.

The *akedah* binds the poems to the poetic tradition of the *akedot* of the Middle Ages of which the *Torah* narrative is only the point of departure.

Wiesel (1965) has observed that since Auschwitz one can no longer view the story of Isaac's binding as an imaginary tale. In Auschwitz it was the definite and irreversible reality.

The attitude to G-d in the interpretation of the *akedah* in lament poetry has changed through the centuries. In Gen 22 the significant feature was Abraham's remarkable faith that allowed him to bind his son and with complete acceptance do as he was commanded.

To non-religious Jewish poets and artists, the *akedah* represents the sacrifice of Jewish lives, as in Gilboa who reflects the *akedah* theme differently. For Gilboa, it is the father who is being sacrificed - "I am the slaughtered one, my son" - and it is the son who feels powerless to help the father.

Contemporary artists omit the angel protagonist from the story as faith in the divine intervention has been lost. A notable exception to this is Gouri's *Yerushah*, in which "the ram", brought by the angel in the Biblical text, "came last of all". However, this poem is written subversively. The ram came ultimately, but every Yitzhak is born with a knife in his heart.

In time the theme of the *akedah* became one of protest against blind and almost naive obedience to authority, as in Gilboa's poem, *Yitzhak*: "Father, father, quickly save Isaac." The focus is now not on Abraham, but on Isaac, and all the Isaacs to come, which may indicate the importance of the new generation - the "Isaac generation", which represents revival and rebirth and the future. These poems of lament like Alterman's *Al Hayered*

Avram "reflect the concerns and anxieties and mirror the complex and desperate predicament of a conflict which seems insoluble" (Kampf, 1990:137). It is an attempt to find meaning in a massive carnage.

The struggle for survival has brought the reality of the ancient myth of the *akedah* from the collective subconscious of the nation into the consciousness of contemporary Jews⁵. However, sometimes the myth has been transformed and subverted. The inversion of father and son can be seen in Gilboa's *Yitzchak*, in Alterman's *Al Hayered Avram* and in Greenberg's *Kinat Habein B'vorcho Mibeit Avi'v V'imo*.

Martyrology is born of the *akedah* in the Bible. To sacrifice what you loved the most was considered virtuous and pious and a peculiar merit was attributed to the sacrifice, or "binding" of Yitzchak. Martyrology is no longer acceptable, even though it represents a high moral triumph of humanity - unwavering steadfastness to principle, even at the cost of life. It is not considered an honour and a privilege, as it was in the Middle Ages, to die for G-d's name and thereby to be elevated in a *kinah* to *akedah* status. The lament writers today use the *akedah* theme to show the horror of human sacrifice, the tragic repetition of Jewish history in which every *Yitzchak* is "born with a knife in his heart", yet using this ancient theme, even in a most subversive way, serves to affirm continuity of tradition.

As well as the *Tanach* the lament writers over the generations also allude to the Talmud. This is noticed in the *payyetanim*, for example Kallir, who uses the expression *gozrani alayikh* from Tractate *Rosh Hashana*⁶ in *Az Bimlot Seifek, pilel* from *Sanhedrin* 2, and *almana shovavit* "the naughty widow" from *Sotah*. 22a.

The Spanish poets also refer to the Talmud. Ibn Gabirol, *R'ei Shemesh*, (upon the death of his patron) and Moses Ibn Ezra, *Hekitzuni S'ipai*, at the grave of his family, both make use of the expression, *talim* from *Midrash Mishlei* 9 which says: "Happy are you, Rabbi Akiba, that you have found a *malon tov bish'at mitateikh*". There are many more examples.

⁵ The *akedah* appears not only in the lament poetry through the ages, but in the other arts, such as in oratorios, texts for musical compositions of Brahms, and in the work of artists such as Rembrandt and 20th century artists like Zorach, Horn, Bezem, Lipschitz, Ardon, Weil, Baskin, Wilansky and Segal.

⁶ *Rosh Hashanah* 2:9.

Writing about 1000 years after Kallir, Bialik also turns to the Talmud for sources, but he subverts it. The phrase *Tol makeil v'hakh kodkodam* from Sanhedrin 8 "Take a stick and smite their heads", becomes in his *Al Hashechitah*, *hakh kodkod!* "Strike then; the skull dissever!" Bialik also twists *Yikov hadin et hahar* from the Talmud, Yevamot 92a into *Yikov hadam et hat'hom*.

Not only do we find references to the Bible and the Talmud in the laments, both old and modern, but also quotes from the prayer book, especially from the solemn *Yom Kippur* and *Yizkor* services with their implications of death and G-d's judgment, concepts relevant to poems about death and disaster. The Jewish writers, no matter their historical period, still find their sources in their religious identity, religious sources and traditions.

Yehuda Halevi uses the language of *Kol Nidrei* in relation to vows when he says, "How shall I pay my vows?", *n'darai v'esarai*, in *Libi V'mizrach*.

Among the poets Bialik with his background as a *Yeshiva Bachur* stands out in his references to Jewish sources. He refers to the Yom Kippur prayer *Ashamnu*, *Bagadnu*, *Gazalnu* ... in *Be'ir Hahareigah*, and in the same poem parodies the High Festival prayer *Avinu Malkeinu*, "Our Father, our King" In the poem, G-d is asked in the synagogue to "deal (kindly) with the slain, the children, and the sucklings" but G-d's answer is - "I will harden my heart".

These subversive statements have to be seen in the context of Bialik's anger and bitterness at the fate that had befallen his beloved people. It is the obverse side of the coin of faith.

Be'ir Hahareigah which attacks the Jews for their passivity in the face of a pogrom, uses the prayer over the Chanukah lights *Baruch she'asa nisim la'avoteinu* ... "Blessed is He who has performed miracles for our forefathers ..." but in Bialik's poem, immediately after their women have been attacked, the men selfishly say, *Ribono shel olam asei neis* "Lord of the universe, perform a miracle [so that the evil does not come to me]!". This poem is abounding with angry references to prayers said in vain including *Va'y'chal* and *Aneinu*, normally said on fast days.

Another angry and ironic allusion to a prayer, by Bialik, is in his *Al Hashechitah*, where the words *Shamayim bak'shu rachamim alai*, "Heavens, seek mercy for me" refer bitterly to the

Martyrs' Commemoration Prayer *Av Harachamim* and *Yizkor* in the Siddur, as well as to *Ei-l malei Rachamim* said as part of funeral prayers. *Be'ir Hahareigah* also alludes directly to the prayer *Av Harachamim*, c.1096, which commemorates the martyrs of the first Crusade, who offered their lives for the sanctification of the divine name. Bialik considers their heirs to be "cowards", *ninei ha'arayot sheba'Av Harachamim*, who "hid away" wherever they could. Both the prayer *Av Harachamim* and David's lament over Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel, 1:23) who died on Mount Gilboa contain these words:

They were lovely and amiable in their life, and were not
parted in their death.

They were swifter than eagles and stronger than lions ...

Bialik is not denying his traditions; on the contrary his poems are anchored in Jewish tradition. Tchernichowsky, too, uses Biblical texts, as in the poem "Al Harei Gilboa" where it presents a new slant.

An example of the continuity of traditions can be observed in a chain of laments on Saul's death on the mountain of Gilboa circa 1016 BCE. This death is lamented by David in Second Samuel 1:17, and is used as a theme in 1096 CE (the Crusades in the prayer *Av Harachamim*), in 1903 (the Kishinev pogroms in Bialik), in 1929 (the Hebron massacre in Tchernichowsky) and in 1995 (Rabin's assassination in Mass, the most recent lament in this theme).

I began this thesis with an examination of the Book of Lamentations, which was written over two millenia ago, yet the relevance, the themes, and the emotions expressed in it are as valid today as they were then, and are still copied in lament poetry.

The maintenance of tradition is in itself a light. Those who have forgotten their tradition lost their attachment to the nation.

In conclusion the Jewish nation may be born with a "knife in its heart" as Gouri says in *Yerushah*; but with the light shed by the tradition of the laments, despair is alleviated and we can have hope for a better future.

This thesis demonstrates that Hebrew laments contain the flicker of hope that will give light and alleviate despair.

Roskies writes (1988:11)

Perhaps the whole subject of Jewish catastrophe will some day be rendered arcane, in which case this book may serve as a reminder of how Jews once used the word of G-d, in infinite permutations, to wrest meaning from a violent world.

Like Roskies the writer of this thesis fervently hopes that there will be no further Jewish catastrophe, but even in an Utopia there will always be death, and as long as there is death the genre of lament will accompany us in its various forms, and help to alleviate the pain.

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APPENDIX

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