

What is a Jewish Poem?

*'And if you have even more Jewish poems around,
please let's add them to the pile being considered.'*

What is a Jewish poem?
Does it wear a yarmulka
and tallis?
Does it live
in the diaspora
and yearn for homeland?

Does it wave the lulav
to and fro inside
a plastic sukkah
or recite
the seven benedictions
under the chupah?

I wonder—
what is a Jewish poem?
Does it only go to synagogue
one day a year
attaching the t'fillin
like a tiny black stranger
to its left arm?

Does it open
the stiff skins
of the prayerbook
to reveal the letters
like blackened platelets
twisting within?

Little yeshiva bocher,
little Jewish poem,
are you a race
or a nationality,

waving your sidecurls,
whispering piyyut to me
in my sleep.

Little Jewish poem
in your shtreimel hat,
little grandfather
sing to me,
little Jewish poem
come sing to me.

Myra Sklarew

A Short History of Judaic Thought in the Twentieth Century

The rabbis wrote:
although it is forbidden
to touch a dying person,
nevertheless, if the house
catches fire
he must be removed
from the house.

Barbaric!
I say,
and whom may I touch then,
aren't we all
dying?

You smile
your old negotiator's smile
and ask:
but aren't all our houses
burning?

Linda Pastan

Linda Pastan's poems have appeared in many journals; her most recent collection is ASPECTS OF EVE (Liveright Press).

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