

RETURNING HIGHER

Hasidic & Neo-Hasidic Inspiration for the High Holy Day Journey



Volume I: Elul to Rosh Ha-Shanah

Edited by Or N. Rose and Aubrey L. Glazer
with Jonah Mac Gelfand and Jacob Chatinover

Contents

Acknowledgements	ix
Let Us Look For a New Way Together – <i>Hayyim Halberstam of Sanz</i>	xi
How to Use This Book – <i>Jonah Mac Gelfand</i>	xiii
<i>Tzimtzum (Time and Space): Artist Statement</i> – <i>Elyssa Wortzman</i>	xiv
Preface – <i>Mimi (Miriam Sara) Feigelson</i>	xvi

Introduction

Returning Higher – <i>Or N. Rose</i>	3
--	---

Elul

Entering Elul – <i>Jonah Mac Gelfand</i>	21
“Callings” – <i>Rami M. Shapiro</i>	22
“The King Is in the Field”: A Short Story – <i>Avidan Halivni</i>	25
Moving Day: Elul, Psalm 27, and the Inner Temple – <i>Adina Allen</i>	31
Knowing the Songs – <i>Ariel Evan Mayse</i>	35
Who Do I Want to Become? – <i>Laura Duhan-Kaplan</i>	43
“The Buttonhook” – <i>Yehoshua November</i>	47
Cultivating Spiritual Friendship – <i>Leah Aran Miller</i>	51
The Shaman Blows the Shofar – <i>Or N. Rose</i>	55
“Queen and King” – <i>Alden Solovoy</i>	60

Selihot

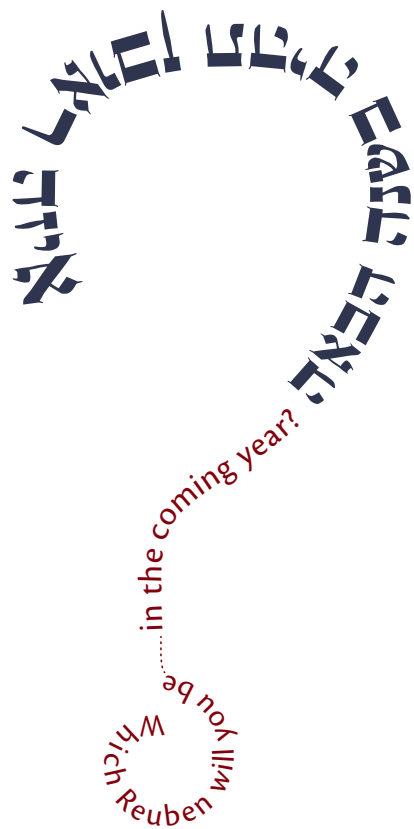
Entering <i>Selihot</i> – <i>Jacob Chatinover</i>	65
“Gates” – <i>Rachel Barenblat</i>	66
<i>Selihot</i> : “God’s Cry to God” – <i>Ebn D. Leader</i>	69
Unveiling Redemption through <i>Selihot</i> – <i>Risa Dunbar</i>	75
Interpretive <i>Ashamnu</i> (We Have Sinned) – <i>Howard Richler</i>	79
A Positive <i>Vidui</i> (Confession) – <i>Avi Weiss</i>	79
<i>Hatarat Nedarim</i> (The Release of Vows) – <i>Zalman Schachter-Shalomi</i>	83
“Moon Teaches <i>Tanakh</i> ” – <i>Zelda</i>	86

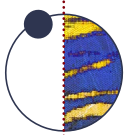
Rosh Ha-Shanah

Entering Rosh Ha-Shanah – <i>Jacob Chatinover, Jonah Mac Gelfand</i>	93
“This Is the World” – <i>Ruth Kara-Ivanov Kaniel</i>	94
A World Pregnant with Possibility – <i>Nehemia Polen</i>	97
“Rimonim” – <i>Shoshanah Tornberg</i>	101
Seeing Creation as a Holy Gift – <i>Natan Margalit</i>	105
From Anew (excerpted) – <i>Hillel Zeitlin</i>	108
The Light of Re-Creation – <i>Batya Hefter</i>	111
The Shofar as Cry of the Birth-Giver – <i>Jill Hammer</i>	117
“Do Not Raise Your Hand Against the Boy” – <i>Abraham Joshua Heschel</i>	123
“Isaac Re-dug the Wells...” – <i>Eitan Fishbane</i>	125
Crowning Glory – <i>Nancy Flam</i>	129
“The Broken Tablets” – <i>Rodger Kamenetz</i>	134
Crowning the Dysphoric Body – <i>Lexi Kohanski</i>	137
“A Song in Hannah’s Voice: Marble Floor” – <i>Alicia Jo Rabins</i>	141
“Rachel” – <i>Carol Rose</i>	145
“After the Judgment Has Been Decreed”: Rebbe Nahman on Defeat & Defiance – <i>Aron Wander</i>	149
<i>Unetaneh Tokef</i> Upended – <i>ALY / Ahava-Liba Lilith evershYne</i>	155
Prayer of Mothers for Life and Peace – <i>Ibtisam Mahameed, Tamar Elad-Appelbaum</i> .	158
“There is Nothing Else”—Consciousness and Creation – <i>Nathan Wolski</i>	161
A Contemporary <i>Tashlikh</i> Meditation & Liturgy – <i>David Mevorach Seidenberg</i>	166
A Curious Custom – <i>Israel Joseph Benjamin</i>	171
Like the Bird and the Worm after Catastrophe – <i>Aubrey L. Glazer</i>	173

The Journey Continues: The Ten Days of Teshuvah

Prayer and Practice for the Days In-Between – <i>The Editors</i>	181
Glossary – <i>Jacob Chatinover and Jonah Mac Gelfand</i>	185
Biographies of Masters and Teachers – <i>J. Chatinover, J. Mac Gelfand</i>	199
Contributors.	203
Lineage of Hasidic Masters – <i>Yitz Muroff</i>	212
Artist Statement: Seeking the Divine Feminine – <i>Elyssa Wortzman</i>	214





Who Do I Want to Become?

Laura Duhan-Kaplan

R. Kalonymos Kalman Shapira of Piaseczno, *Tzav ve-Zeruz* 2, 431

If you desire to serve God and to elevate your consciousness, do not show up in the seventieth year of your life as you did on the day of your bar mitzvah! Do the following practice: Every year set a goal for yourself. Picture it in your mind. If your name is Reuben, for example, which Reuben will you be in the coming year? What will his growth be like—his spiritual work, his virtues, his inner life? Measure yourself against this imagined Reuben for reference. What is still needed for you to become the Reuben you envision? Are your daily spiritual practices and the shedding of your negative habits enough to realize the Reuben-of-the-coming-year?

If, when next year comes and you take stock of yourself and have not even reached the “heels” of the Reuben-of-the-coming-year, regard it as though, God forbid, you have not really lived another year. For only last year’s (or even last decade’s) Reuben is alive, and not this year’s Reuben. [When the Torah states] “Abraham was old, advanced in years” [lit. *ba ba-yamim* “come in days”] (Gen. 24:1), it means that the Abraham of today (*ha-yom*) is present—not the Abraham of yesterday.^[1]

Commentary and Reflection:

In this brief textual selection, R. Shapira (d. 1943), the Piaseczno Rebbe, offers us a clear and concrete template for making New Year’s resolutions: Do you want to grow spiritually? Then imagine who you want to be a year from now. As the year unfolds, check in with yourself regularly. Are you moving toward your goal(s)? If not, what do you need to change—internally and externally? The master’s presentation weaves together his finely developed understanding of human development, education, visualization, and Torah interpretation.^[2] He invites each of us to envision our spiritual journey anew every year—on our own terms, by setting our own goals, and engaging different parts of ourselves. For this Hasidic master, it includes, of course, established Jewish sacred practices, but also

personalized exercises to stimulate growth and transformation.

In his 1932 book *Hovat Ha-Talmidim* (*The Students' Obligation*), R. Shapira presents his philosophy of spiritual education. Spirituality, he teaches, is the capacity to experience God's presence, and education is the lifelong journey of spiritual development. If we pursue such a path sincerely over the course of a lifetime, we will certainly not arrive at our seventieth birthday as we did on the day of our bat mitzvah!

When we embark on this voyage, says the Piaseczno, we bring to life the Hebrew word for education, "*hinukh*." The word comes from the Torah where, according to Rashi (d. 1105), it refers to "the beginning of personal development" or "the entry of a person into an art in which one will eventually become adept."^[3] For R. Shapira, spirituality is just such a creative art. There is no "one-size-fits-all" path of spiritual development; rather, each person must make the most of their own learning.^[4] At different times, a soul may benefit from special attention to a particular practice: prayer, study, meditation, song, movement, etc.

R. Shapira often suggests the use of visualization practices for different life circumstances, as it allows us to view ourselves from a more elevated perspective and to respond more creatively to specific challenges.^[5] Do you wish to deepen your yearning to feel God by your side? If so, imagine yourself as a small child, separated from a beloved parent, longing to be reunited.^[6] Do you want to heighten your awareness of God's presence through music? Then picture yourself singing with the angels around the Throne of Glory.^[7] If you want to become a person of greater spiritual awareness, design new possibilities in your mind: envision your challenge, your emotional response, and your attitudinal and behavioral shifts. Then return to these inner images regularly. Are you becoming the person you want and need to be?

The Piaseczner teaches that our ancestor Abraham is a model of reinvention. This suggestion emerges from a creative reading of the phrase *Avraham zaqen, ba ba-yamim*, "Abraham was old, advanced in years" (Gen. 24:1). In biblical Hebrew the verb *ba* means "to come" or "to arrive." The phrase *ba ba-yamim*, literally "come in days," idiomatically means "advanced in years," paralleling, for example, the biblical expression for sunset, *ba ha-shemesh*, "the sun has come." Contextually, *ba ba-yamim* means that the "sun is setting" on Abraham's life. But R. Shapira reads *ba ba-yamim* to mean that the patriarch's spiritual consciousness "came forward" or "advanced" every year. He was not only "advanced in years," he steadily became a spiritual elder.

As I read R. Shapira's words, I reflect on my own spiritual evolution. When I was a tween, I wanted to learn prayer leadership skills; as a teen, I wanted to engage in long conversations about the nature of God; as a young adult, I yearned to hear the Divine respond to my prayers. Over the years, I have worked diligently in pursuit of these spiritual goals. Now, as an older adult, I want to dwell in gratitude and awe. I am attempting to continue to "climb" the spiritual "ladder" step by step, year after year. Blessedly, I have learned to choose the rungs myself as part of my unique and ongoing spiritual education. Where do I wish to go next? Can I see it in my mind's eye? What practices will support me in achieving my goals? What version of Laura will I be this year?

Questions:

1. What are your spiritual goals for the coming year? How do they differ from your goals in earlier years, and how are they similar?
2. Which spiritual practices and exemplary actions have been helpful to you in recent years? What else might you experiment with this year?
3. Are there particular images that could support your High Holy Day journey? How might you utilize them in your individual and/or communal prayer experiences?

[1] Translation mine. Full English translation available as *To Heal the Soul: The Spiritual Journey of a Chasidic Rebbe*, trans. and ed. Yehoshua Starrett (Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

[2] For an introduction to R. Shapira's life and thought, see Nehemia Polen, *The Holy Fire: The Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto* (Jason Aronson, 1999).

[3] Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, *Hovat Ha-Talmidim* (Feldheim, 2011), section 1. R. Shapira cites Rashi on Deut. 20:5 and Gen. 14:14.

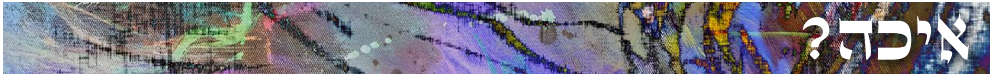
[4] Aharon Sorasky, "Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto," foreword to *A Student's Obligation: Advice from the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto*, trans. Micha Odenheimer (Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), Kindle ed., loc. 462.

[5] For an exploration of R. Shapira's aims in using visualization, see Daniel Reiser, "Historicism and/or Phenomenology in the Study of Jewish Mysticism: Imagery Techniques in the Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira as a Case Study," *Modern Judaism: A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience* 36:1 (2016): 67–82.

[6] Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, *Bnei Maḥshavah Tovah*, 1:2. For a beautiful contemporary translation, see *Conscious Community: A Guide to Inner Work*, trans. Andrea Cohen-Kiener (Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

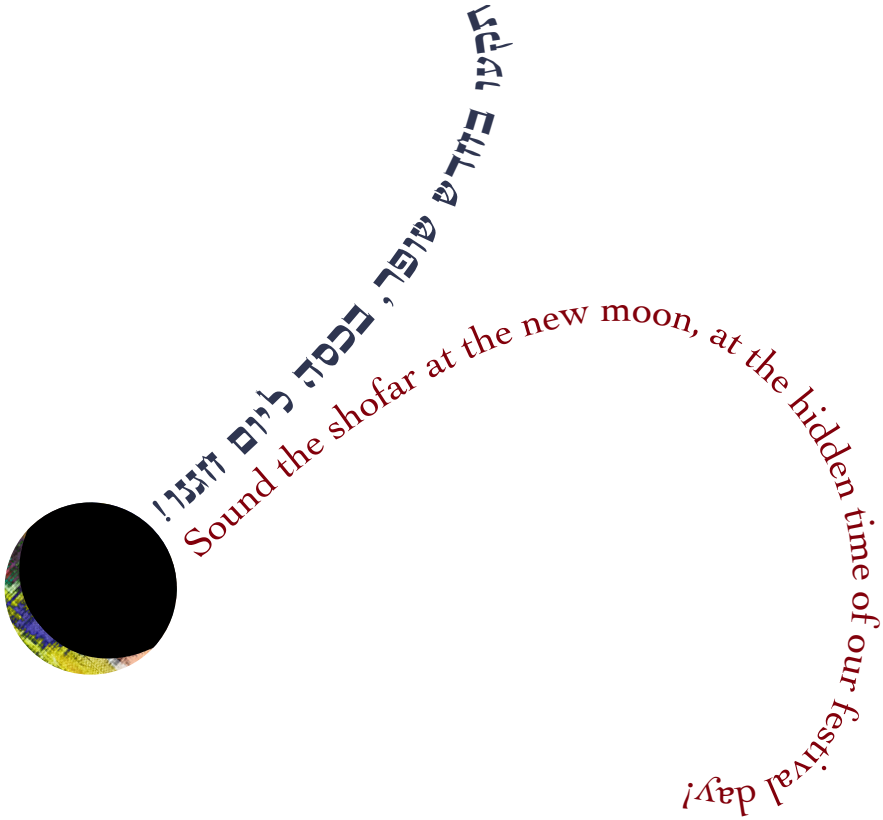
[7] The "Throne of Glory" is an image drawn from the prophet Ezekiel's vision of "a semblance of a throne" in heaven (Ezek. 1:26). In the prophet Isaiah's vision of heaven, angels call to one another, praising God's holiness and omnipresence (Isa. 6:3). The Talmud suggests that the angels sing their praises (bḥullin 91b). This visualization, suggested by R. Shapira, is cited in Reiser, "Historicism and/or Phenomenology in the Study of Jewish Mysticism," 81.

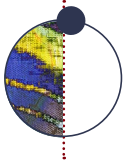
Where are you?



As you delve into this rich treasury and reflect on the meaning of the High Holy Days, what is your intention or *kavvanah*? Use the space below to create an intention statement.

Gently close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. When you are ready, open your eyes and write your intention statement in the present tense as if it is already happening. How are you approaching this moment? What are you opening yourself to now? What awareness or emotional state are you bringing to this moment? Are you open to new ideas or experiences? Do you intend to find a path of return to authenticity and responsibility?





The Shaman Blows the *Shofar*: A Neo-Hasidic Story of Sacred Encounter Or N. Rose

R. Zalman Schachter Shalomi, *Essential Teachings*, 186–188

[A] few years ago ... I participated in a symposium on mysticism, with spokesmen for several other traditions. Among us was a medicine man from the Blood Indian Reservation, Brother Rufus Goodstriker. We were all put up at a modern plastic motel, a place which didn't seem to hold much promise for a group of mystics. But the setting was glorious: to the east the Canadian prairies stretched for miles, and to the west the Canadian Rockies soared into the sky.^[1]

So begins a story R. Zalman Schachter-Shalomi (d. 2014) told many times about a transformative Elul experience in the “Great White North” in the mid-1970s.

Reb Zalman (a less formal title he preferred) was born in Poland and raised in Austria, before fleeing the Nazis with his immediate family in 1939. After a harrowing journey through several countries, they settled in Brooklyn, New York, where young Zalman trained as a HaBaD-Lubavitch rabbi and began his career as a *shaliah* (“emissary” or informal educator).^[2] During his long and winding rabbinic career, he evolved into one of the most influential heterodox Jewish spiritual teachers of the last several decades.^[3] He combined elements of Eastern European piety and North American counterculture (among other influences) to create, with several close students and associates, the Jewish Renewal Movement.^[4]

Ever the impish spiritual explorer, Reb Zalman continues his story about the symposium by stating that he decided to seek out an outdoor space to pray the *Shaharit* (Morning) service, so he headed to the motel roof! He took his *tallit*, *tefillin* (prayer boxes), and *shofar* in hand and ascended to the roof by elevator. There, he managed to open the emergency exit door without sounding the alarm. As he reports, “The roof was a forest of air conditioners, vent pipes, and chimneys, but I found myself a corner facing the east [towards Jerusalem] and began to get into my prayers.” As the sun rose and the rabbi took in the beautiful scenery, he became absorbed in the experience.

After several minutes, Reb Zalman heard the creak of the emergency door opening again; it was none other than Brother Rufus Goodstriker!^[5] “He too

had a small bundle under his arm. We acknowledged each other's presence with wordless nods. He also took up a position facing east and began to perform his morning ritual."

Reb Zalman continues,

First, he took out a prayer blanket which reminded me of my tabs [prayer shawl]. Then he lit a small charcoal fire, offered some incense, and made a burnt offering of a pinch of meal or flour. Facing the east with his arms raised in the air, he swayed back and forth, chanting in a language I did not understand. But I did not have to understand the language to know that he was calling to God... At the moment of sunrise, he placed a small whistle to his lips and blew a sharp note in every direction.

When both men finished their morning rituals, Brother Rufus approached his rabbinic counterpart and asked gently, "May I please see your instruments?" As he examined each of the objects, the medicine man nodded approvingly—"I saw respect on his face," Reb Zalman reports. The rabbi was particularly moved when Brother Rufus inspected the *tzitzit*, the knotted fringes at the corners of his prayer shawl. "What's the message?" This revealed his new companion's understanding that "such designs are not random, but deliberate."^[6]

Reb Zalman adds one more important detail about his enlightening rooftop encounter:

After a few moments, he picked up the *shofar* and looked it over. "Ram's horn," he commented. "We use a whistle made from an eagle bone. May I blow it?" He blew a few loud notes through the ram's horn, handed it back, and simply said, "Of course, it's much better than cow."^[7] For a moment I thought, "*Better for what?*" But Brother Rufus was a medicine man. He knew that you blow animal bones to blow the demons away, to clear the air, to connect with God, to bring about change, to say to the sleeping soul, "Hey, there, wake up! Pay attention!"^[8]

In closing the story, our storyteller adds one final thought:

At every step of his examination of my sacred prayer tools, Brother Rufus asked the right questions. He was in tune with the technology of religious artifacts, and he understood them. He, coming from a very different world, approached my religious instruments as if they were not so different from his own ...

For me, part of the power of this story is that Reb Zalman had so internalized the method of Hasidic storytelling that he applied it to his own life experiences.^[9] This anecdote reads like many journey tales told by Hasidim, some that include positive interactions with non-Jewish figures.^[10] In this Neo-Hasidic story, Reb Zalman consciously advocates for what he called a “post-triumphalist” position, or what Diana Eck describes as a “textured pluralism,” in which spiritual practitioners from different traditions explore their similarities *and* differences with respect and curiosity, and with a genuine desire to learn from the process.^[11] Neither man felt the need to prove to the other the superiority of his beliefs or practices. As Reb Zalman states, he and Brother Rufus came from “very different” worlds but also recognized that they were both involved in holy endeavors that were related, though not the same. Otherwise, these two men would not have found themselves standing on the rooftop of a “plastic motel” at sunrise bowing, bending, chanting, using hollowed animal bones to make sacred sounds, and then exchanging notes on “the technology of religious artifacts.”

Questions:

1. What is one meaningful experience you have had of interreligious or cross-cultural engagement?
2. How might we apply Reb Zalman’s notion of “post-triumphalism” to the *teshuvah* process?
3. How do you understand the “message” of the *shofar* this year?

[1] Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, *Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi: Essential Teachings*, edited and introduced by Or N. Rose and Netanel Miles-Yépez (Orbis Books, 2020), 186–188.

[2] To learn more about this important Hasidic dynasty, see Naftali Lowenthal, “Lubavitch Hasidism,” in the *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, <https://encyclopedia.yivo.org/article/194>.

[3] See Zalman Schachter-Shalomi with Edward Hoffman, *My Life in Jewish Renewal: A Memoir* (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2012).

[4] See Shaul Magid, “Jewish Renewal: Toward a New American Judaism,” *Tikkun* 21, no. 1 (January/February 2006): 57–60. See also, Shaul Magid and Jerome Chanes, “Renewal” in *The Future of American Judaism*, edited by Jerome Chanis and Mark Silk (Springer Publishing, 2023), 87–108.

[5] Brother Rufus was apparently a multi-talented individual, involved in tribal leadership, spiritual healing, athletics, and acting. See Justin Seward, "Goodstriker Recognized for His Multi-Sport Impacts," *Lethbridge[Alberta] Herald*, May 9, 2023, <https://lethbridgeherald.com/sports/lethbridge-sports/2023/05/09/goodstriker-recognized-for-his-multisport-impacts/>.

[6] The *tzitzit* are intended to serve as a tactile reminder of one's relationship to the Divine. The practice of wearing such a fringed garment (as a shawl in prayer or as an undergarment throughout the day) is rooted in two biblical commands: Numbers 15:37–41 and Deuteronomy 22:12. See also, Karen G. Reiss Medwed, "Tallit," in *The Observant Life: The Wisdom of Conservative Judaism for Contemporary Jews*, edited by Martin S. Cohen (The Rabbinical Assembly, 2012), 23–25.

[7] The cow (and ox) happens to be one of the kosher animals *not* allowed to be used as a *shofar*! The reasons for this ancient ruling include the fact that it is referred to as a "*keren*" and not a *shofar* in the Hebrew Bible, and it is associated with the sin of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32. See the Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Ha-Shanah 26a. See, too, Shmuel Yosef Agnon's classic work, *Days of Awe: A Treasury of Jewish Wisdom for Reflection, Repentance, and Renewal on the High Holy Days* (Schocken Books, 1995), 68–69.

[8] Relatedly, see the early medieval scholar R. Sa'adia Gaon's (d. 9420) influential list of ten reasons for sounding the *shofar* in Agnon's *Days of Awe*, 70–72.

[9] Reb Zalman produced several edited volumes on Hasidic life and thought, often blending different genres, including homilies and tales. See, for example, Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Netanel Miles-Yépez, *A Heart Afire: Stories and Teachings of the Early Hasidic Masters* (Jewish Publication Society, 2009).

[10] For more on the subject of the presentations of non-Jews in Hasidic literature, see note 23 in the introduction to this volume (p. 14).

[11] See, Diana Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (Harper Collins Publishers, 2001).

Rachel

Carol Rose



You drew his love at the well,
Generously bringing it to Leah
Under *Shekhinah's* canopy;
A union of mystery.
Like Jacob you wrestled
and sacrificed for blessing.
You birth the future
dying on the way, like Moses,
You struck the rock
And forced the waters flowing
Mingling waters flowing
with tears—ours/yours.
Your eternal cry urges
And bids us return, Mother.

Editorial Note:

The biblical matriarch Rachel appears in the *haftarah* reading for the second day of Rosh Ha-Shanah, Jer. 31:1-19. In this poetic tribute, Rose gathers biblical, midrashic, and mystical traditions about Rachel into a compact lament of maternal intercession. The poem begins at Jacob's first meeting with Rachel at the well in Genesis 29, but immediately rereads that scene through the rabbinic memory that Rachel surrendered her place to Leah under the canopy by giving Leah "secret signs" to allow her to pass as Rachel under the *huppah* and in the bridal chamber (Rachel originally devised the signs with Jacob to outwit her untrustworthy father Laban). This act of radical sisterly compassion is explored in bMegillah 13b, Rashi on Gen. 29:25, and elsewhere. The line "Under *Shekhinah's* canopy" invites the reader to reflect on Rachel's capacity to evoke and/or channel God's merciful presence in this complicated moment.

The middle of the poem braids Rachel with Jacob and Moses. "Like Jacob you wrestled" recalls both Rachel's own language of struggle in the naming of Naphtali in Gen. 30:8 and later interpretive traditions that cast Rachel as a participant in covenantal struggle

rather than as a passive figure. “You birth the future / dying on the way, like Moses” joins Rachel’s death in childbirth and burial on the road to Efrat in Gen. 35:16-20 and Gen. 48:7 with Moses’ death before entry into the land in Num. 20:12 and Deut. 34, making both guardians of a future they do not themselves inhabit. When the poem adds, “You struck the rock / And forced the waters flowing,” it fuses Moses’ negative water-from-the-rock episode in Num. 20 with Rachel’s tears in Jer. 31, so that water becomes at once miracle, grief, and redemptive tenderness.

The closing appeal, “Your eternal cry urges / And bids us return, Mother,” reaches most directly toward Jer. 31:15-17, where Rachel weeps for her children and is promised that they “shall return to their own border.” Rabbinic tradition deepens that image by explaining that Rachel was buried on the roadside so that, when the exiles passed that way, she could emerge from her grave and plead for mercy on their behalf (see Rashi on Gen. 48:7). Read in that light, the poem presents Rachel not only as mourner but as theological mother of return: her tears do not merely express loss, they summon God and Israel home.

רוחל מבכה על בניה

Your eternal cry urges

