

FIRST PRIZE — *Yiskah Rosenfeld (USA)*

**The Morning After a Vipassana Retreat**

Always sit by the south window  
where the ferned stone staircase leads up,  
eucalyptus trunks even more so, to see how  
the magnolia blossoms contemplate attachment,  
pink petals scattered on the dark ground.

Those twisted branches could be snakes,  
succulents sewn from ribboned tongues.  
Still, this garden tells no stories,  
the vast left wall swathed  
in hushed, green moss.

On the table, a bowl of thin porridge steams,  
applesauce pooling its middle,  
salt crunch of almonds, tart melt  
of cubed cheddar, all this in one bowl,  
one mouth, quietly chewing.

Conversations ring out  
like the full-throated frogs in last night's pond,  
a din not unlike silence in its thick uniformity.  
If I were a small, egg-shaped stone in the garden,  
no one would notice me but me.

*SECOND PRIZE — Amy Small-McKinney (USA)*

**Small Stone**

I have no idea where you came from  
 or why I didn't think of this before:  
 how grief has forced me to become the other —the thing —

white dolomite, coarsely crystalline,  
 pleated through with gray.  
 I don't mind gray; I am grayer now too.

My body all sharp points, broken crests,  
 shaped into jagged angles. Without him,  
 I am both primitive and new.

Stone, I don't know where my beloved found you  
 but know where I am taking you.  
 In July when the air is too moist for movement,

I will move with you anyway toward  
 his headstone, place you on its crest with certainty.  
 What does certainty have to do with death? Or stones?

I want to fill myself  
 with something he touched —an assurance of atoms —  
 as if I could become that tap or trace or air between them.

Stone, if I eat you, will you become  
 perfect wisdom inside of me?  
 How does a thing vanish?

I don't know, but you my stone  
 blotched through with agreeable gray,  
 won't petal-drop or fade away,

even when I am lost or becoming.

THIRD PRIZE — *Elizabeth Edelglass (USA)*

**No Mention**

I was named for Queen Elizabeth,  
 Defender of the Faith  
 and Supreme Governor of the Church  
 of England, which seems an odd choice  
 for a Jewish father just back from the war  
 and a mother whose relatives  
 may or may not have flamed  
 in the furnaces of that war  
 (no one spoke of it).

They called me Elisheva  
 in Hebrew school.  
 Elisheva rates only one  
 line in the Torah –  
 and that just to name her father,  
 her brother, her husband, her sons.  
 Later, when her sons are consumed  
 by fire,  
 Elisheva isn't mentioned at all.

Imagine –  
 at the joyous  
 inauguration of the Tabernacle,  
 two of her sons bring fire  
 as a gift to God,  
 and God, instead, incinerates them.  
 If Elisheva weeps or wails  
 or rends her cloak,  
 no one speaks of it.

The usual translation of Elisheva  
 is *God is my oath*.  
 But you can also translate the name  
 to mean *my God is satisfied*.  
 I'm a mother now,  
 I have two sons.  
 I rail at God  
 for giving one a disease  
 I dare not mention.  
 My oaths are curses,  
 and I will never be satisfied.

HONORABLE MENTION — *Avraham Schonbrunn (Israel)*

### **The Return**

It resonates across the land  
 From the Jordan  
 To the great sea  
 It cajoles and coaxes  
 From Eilat to Galilee  
 “Return, return to me”

From the womb  
 Of my hills and valleys  
 Across my fields  
 Your first steps  
 You trod hesitantly  
 “Come, come to me”

O wandering daughter of Zion  
 Enough of your poems  
 Composed in praise of me  
 Inditing my beauty and glory,  
 My beloved Yeshurun  
 “Return, return to me”

From your lips  
 Let me not hear  
 Yet another psalmody  
 Of your persistent yearning  
 By the rivers of Babylon,  
 “Come, come to me”

I do not require your tongue  
 To cleave to your palate  
 Nor your right arm  
 Lose its cunning  
 My only desire is...  
 That you return, return to me

HONORABLE MENTION — *M. Greenberg (Israel)*

### **The Kibbutz**

Salah was a *mashtap*, a *collaborator*.

At least, that's what Harry told me,

and Harry, since, has died,

and Salah, too, I guess.

When Arabs were under military rule,

the kibbutz men smuggled Salah in the hay

to work in fields throughout the day.

I worked in chickens. Yitzki was in charge.

Each day began with coffee,

strong and black. Hungarian Jews.

Thick cream and noodles on Saturday mornings

topped with peanuts, poppyseed, and sugar.

Who was crazy? Who was not?

Tatyu's brother killed himself – as did others.

Yitzki escaped to discover no one close had survived.

Robbie had been in Mengele's keep.

After the war, that war, when Robbie had been taken in

because they spoke Hungarian

and were asked to be a refuge for the enfeebled man –

“Castrated!” Salah said –

Robbie's father came

and watched his son from afar,

the fat phantom of whom he had been.

Who was sane? Who, insane?

Alex came on Kastner's train. Erna was saved by Wallenberg.

At Mauthausen, Ronchi sneaked one night into his father's place;

the following day, he found no more children lay

where he had lain. Empty – all gassed.

Shoshana went from camp to camp, cutting the SS hair;

and over the mountains, somewhere, on her escape after the war,

that war, she lost the only photo of her parents she possessed.

They came to Israel, young, parentless,

always asking why they had survived.

HONORABLE MENTION — *Judith R. Robinson (USA)*

**Poem for My Father**

My father smoked Camels, two packs a day.  
He wore a fedora, worked like crazy,  
and believed he was lucky,  
that his life was better than his father's.  
*They're not as hard on the Jews now –*  
I heard him tell my Uncle Dave, many times.  
Actually, they discussed how good or bad things  
were for the Jews for forty years.  
And who the enemies were,  
which ones were worse than the others,  
and the Pirates, the poor Pirates,  
always in the cellar, year after year.

HONORABLE MENTION — *Reuven Goldfarb (Israel)*

### **Red Bead**

*“And they set in the breastplate four rows of stones.*

*The first row: carnelian, emerald, topaz.”*

– Exodus, 39:10

In Jerusalem, seven millennia ago,  
long before the city had acquired its name,  
there was a precious bead, made of a gemstone,  
carnelian, shaped by a craftsman – carved,  
drilled, and polished – for a woman’s necklace,  
to adorn her bosom and throat,  
to decorate her mortal body;  
a treasured object, one that has long lain  
beside her bones. Today, chipped and scarred  
but still intact, and deep red to its core,  
balanced between the thumb and forefinger  
of an archeologist, it’s conveyed  
by a high-resolution photograph,  
taken by the woman who led the dig,  
flashed through a fiber-optic cable to me,  
and soon to rest on a museum shelf,  
displayed in a secure vitrine –  
for how many millennia more?

HONORABLE MENTION — *Robert Dashevsky (USA)*

**Arabic 1973**

If you insist on learning Arabic  
 your goal should be to read the Guide in its  
 original, my Rosh Yeshiva said,  
 admittedly perplexed at my request.  
 Professor Othman taught the rudiments  
 of what I sought – the serendipity  
 of daily conversation: *Ana kaman*  
*Amerikani wa-kaman Yehud*,  
 I haltingly declared. My gracious host  
 who served me tea, his family gathered round –  
 their town: Battir/Beitar, Bar Kokhba's final  
 stand – the Ruin of the Jews, renowned  
 for ancient terraces, ingenious use  
 of flowing springs; a rail stop to Jerusalem.  
 I took my leave and walked the quiet street;  
 a stone that came from nowhere grazed my cheek.



HONORABLE MENTION — *Dina Yehuda (Israel)*

**Rachav**

I have lived  
in the narrow  
in-between places

traded in secrets  
picked up and discarded  
like cats in the alleyway

But when the spies came  
I could not abandon them  
I hid them from my people

for they seemed, not strangers  
but familiar, having seen them  
in a dream past

the future blazing  
in their eyes  
I saw Jericho burning

So I turned my back  
on the gods  
I grew up with

on my childhood friends  
on the family next door  
I could not save.

Now my destiny hangs  
on a fragile scarlet  
thread of hope.

HONORABLE MENTION — *Celia Merlin (Israel)*

**Things It Sucks to Hear**

(after Andrea Gibson – Things that Don't Suck)

Your parents having sex. Man spewing spit on the sidewalk. Sighs of your dying dog. The DJ saying – This crowd sucks. The saleslady telling the vagrant to leave. The umpire yelling “Strike three!” at your team. The pop of your tooth while you’re biting a bone. The fart of your lover in bed. The whimpers of kids in their sleep. An alarm at airport security. The doctor – We did what we could. The crash of a car off the road. The words of a sinner in prayer. The husband whispering “Can’t talk now.” The spray of cologne as he dresses. The close of the door as he leaves. The tick of the clock while waiting. The tick. The tock. The tick of the clock while waiting.

HONORABLE MENTION — *Rivka Nomberg (USA)*

### **Bookmark**

I find these in my books.  
 Stoppers. Starters. Secrets.  
 A feather. An art museum brochure.  
 Half a shopping list. A nail file.  
 A torn envelope. My AAA card.  
 Occasionally a photo.

When I close my eyes in bed,  
 last night's dream appears in my mind,  
 opening to yesterday's page,  
 a mental bookmark.  
 A map. A receipt.  
 Night introduces its successor.

My great-great grandfather,  
 the chief rabbi of Lodz,  
 spent days and nights studying Talmud.  
 He taught generations of boys,  
 but he secretly loved to teach  
 his granddaughter.

When they finished another  
 tractate, they would celebrate.  
 His wife would bring cookies.  
 He would pluck one of his  
 long, grey beard hairs, a promise,  
 and use it to keep her page.

HONORABLE MENTION — *Judy Koren (Israel)*

**A Gentle Villanelle**

*a reply to Dylan Thomas: "Do Not Go Gentle"*

The poet raged. He had no need to pray  
for gentleness when exiting the light,  
that peaceful sleep would mark the close of day;

he never met with friends at a café  
wondering if a firebomb would ignite.  
The poet raged. He had no need to pray

terrorists would not shoot him on his way,  
his child would safely from each bus alight,  
that peaceful sleep would mark the close of day;

he did not need to find words to convey  
his thankfulness at reaching one more night.  
The poet raged. He had no need to pray.

We rage at those who slaughter, burn and slay,  
who target innocents with dynamite  
though peaceful sleep should mark the close of day;

we rage when mothers die, children at play,  
not for old men whose lives were full and bright.  
The poet raged? He had no need to. Pray  
that peaceful sleep will mark the close of day.

*In memoriam: Guy Cafrey, January 2017*

HONORABLE MENTION — *Ian Rodney Pettit (Australia)*

### **The Bipolar Stingray**

It's the inshore waters, East Coast Australia, off Wollongong:  
 a mixed bottom of sand, gravel, weed, shell fragments, wobbecong  
 sharks, army camouflage pattern, red and black bream. Moon does limn,  
 cream eyeball between herringbone clouds over a fishing skiff.  
 Cubes of bait bounce amongst the fish's salty soprano riff.  
 My stingray father feels electrical signals from my mum.  
 He pursues her, nipping at her pectoral disc, inserts one  
 of his claspers into her receptive valve. She stores the sperm  
 for a year, waiting for better reproductive conditions.  
 I'm one of seven pups, coexistence womb content, digest  
 nutrients from the yolk sac, then from the 'milk' of uterus.  
 A female homunculus, I'm born over sandy bottom,  
 where I bury myself to hide from predators, venture out  
 gingerly to hunt by smell, ampullae of Lorenzini.  
 Grow to maturity, feel the pelvic hunger, psychic pain  
 of all the ovarian longing, hormonal males begin  
 lustily chasing me. I'm caught between maternal urges,  
 fear of virginity's loss, and the joys of copulation.  
 Bliss and sorrowful blood, a precocious stronger male succeeds  
 in restricting and penetrating me. An inner wave spreads  
 to my quivering wings, reverberates, magnifies and cues.  
 My mind and body race, while my mood is one of elation,  
 increased emotional sensitivity. Dermis too thin,  
 I think grandiosely, the queen of rays, libido surges.  
 I prance, nose-dance en pointe, pirouette and somersault, kelp vault.  
 I expose my valued vulval valve to all, thrall and sunny.  
 The waves, whipped egg whites, start whispering and get louder, 'Sing Rae  
 inhabits a world of abdominal darkness, stuck in muck.  
 Your eyes are unable to see your seabed or food, your gist  
 split like your moods,' the foreign voice relentless for a fortnight.  
 For a further one, my emotions become a neap tide, light.  
 Then my spirits plunge and bury themselves in the benthic base.  
 I am pessimistic, lethargic, appetite and weight lost.  
 My self-esteem low, I'm overwhelmed, my thoughts and speech lose speed.  
 My concentration suffers, my flat head and my wings' muscles  
 lengthily ache, I'm beset with beliefs of being futile,  
 worthless, my life empty. I believe I've committed grave sins.  
 I experience these phase pairs in autumn and spring lesions.  
 I consult a therapist, who suggests a mood leveler.  
 I find an outcrop of undersea lithium carbonate,  
 I happily chomp daily, perturbations abate.