

לכה דודי

LECHAH DODI

**1 SONG,
2 LETTERS,
3 DREAMS**

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*Lechah dodi, likrat kalah
penei shabat nekabelah*

DREAM 1

I was lying on my stomach, sifting silt from my fingers, looking out upon gray, craggy stones—to my left a stone sculpted into a forearm coming out of the ground with a hand cupping the sky—

I was excited because I thought I was in Tsfat, the kabbalistic center in Israel, ten minutes from my mother's kibbutz—

My mother asked, "How do you know where you are?" which was when I answered, "I remember certain stones."

I walked over to a cave, took off my necklace, made of glass, very heavy, more like a hanging ornament. I placed it on a seat in the cave, asked my mother to remind me to remember it was here, but as I looked at it, I looked into what it was—the Hebrew letters SHALOM, and I reflected that SHALOM was itself an instrument of remembering—so I told my mother she didn't have to remind me. Later in the day, out of dream, my sister telephoned me, asking if I could remember what I had written on a pair of red converse sneakers I had once given her.

I could not remember, so asked her if she had any sense of the words—if she could remember anything—and then suddenly she remembered.

"If what we see remembers us half as well as it remembers itself."

She or the words remembered.

When I was a child, I lived four houses away from the synagogue. I was proud but also perturbed that I lived so close to the temple. I remember the square cut outs of rainbow glass in the otherwise white structure. I remember, my teacher, Francie, her bad knees, writing the word God on the chalkboard with a dash instead of an "o," writing the word for God in Hebrew, then instantly erasing the word. The eraser dust like mist. I remember curiously eyeing the letters of the dreidel cocked on its side after having being spun, how vulnerable I was to letters eagerly in need of knowing if I was going to get all the chocolate, or half of it, or have to give away mine, or do nothing at all, have none, and give none.

Each week after Hebrew School had finished, it was dark. All the kids had to stand behind a rope. The head of the Hebrew School, Nancy Levin, furiously darted around like a chicken, her panty hosed ankles pinched into her low, modest heels, chaperoning children to the vehicles in which their mother or father waited behind the wheel. The rabbi had a parking spot reserved for himself. The word "rabbi" was painted in white on the gravel. I remember staring at it every time I walked up to it "rabbi," I thought, I didn't understand. I thought it was a disease I feared, which raccoons or sometimes dogs, contracted, involving a lot of foaming at the mouth. Why was this man I was meant to revere also a disease I feared but had never seen?

I am thinking of poetry as mysticism inside of religious history, as what is most alive, and religion as the dying of life. In his *Major Trends of Jewish Mysticism*, Gershom Scholem, on the subject of mysticism, writes, "Dr. Rufus Jones, in his excellent "Studies in Mystical Religion" defines his subject as follows: "I shall use the

word to express the type of religion which puts the emphasis on immediate awareness of relation with God, on direct and intimate consciousness of the Divine Presence. It is religion in its most acute, intense and living stage. He later writes, "Moreover, as Evelyn Underhill has rightly pointed out, the prevailing conception of the mystic as a religious anarchist who owes no allegiance to his religion, finds little support in fact. History rather shows that the great mystics were faithful adherents of the great religions." P. 6, "Religion's supreme function is to destroy the dream-harmony of man..." P. 7.

More than any other emotion, in Hebrew School, I was bored. Was I surrounded by instruments, prayers, histories, meant, not to inspire devotion, but to decompose my dreams? Was I in attendance, hour after hour, to feel the division between what I felt, and the language to feel it with?

Iris hour

Concuss

Pizazz Asterisk

The chair the chair the chair the door the door.

Exiete

I bus risk

LETTER 1

I go to phonemes as authorities of origin as others may go to authors. Though, yesterday, Robert Duncan's *Collected Later Poems and Plays* arrived, and I found it on my doorstep, the box opened – the image attached to this e-mail. In the Introduction to the book, he is quoted:

"I belong to a community that has never come into being, that thruout history I find just "coming into being"...I am not my

character, my personality, my mind, my psyche, my spirit, my body, but as in the writing."

What strikes me in the attached image was the box the book came in, the double facing "A"s with the "1"s next to the "A"s, and Robert Duncan's face in between the symbols. The poet framed by the number and the letter. The other day I was substituting at a school near Land's End, way out in San Francisco. Mid-day a Kindergartner, working on her handwriting, looked off dreamily, then turned to me and asked, "How do you spell the letter A"?

Jacaranda Apocrypha

Quanta Arena

Promplaining double-breasted boustrophedon navy blue

Showstone cockadoodledoing

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LETTER 2

I may have been born hyperbolically, or, birth is hyperbolic, but your last e-mail was the most stirring e-mail, or note in general, I can remember receiving. To be invited into, and to even feel like company can be had within the space of the phonemically free, or rather, bound, is the invitation, formed by a question, I was so heartened to hear.

So much has happened since I last wrote, from the world of children, to the realm of my peers, and outwards. The day after I wrote to you I was at recess with a kindergartner at The Laurel School in San Francisco. I was holding the kindergartner's hand, or I took his hand, as he was walking, stumbling around the playground. He was so small. Other kids were playing soccer and

basketball oblivious to him. I was worried he would get hit. When I took his hand, I saw that he had been walking on, tracing, letters written on the pavement, with his feet. The letters were large and said something to the cars parked just beyond them. Something like "DO NOT PASS." When I took his hand, he screamed and said, "NO! I wanted to DO the letters! I wanted to DO the letters!" And then as I gently pulled him away, to my dismay, but wanting him to be safe from the battleground playground, he added, "The letters are not in the words!! The letters are not in the words!!"

Each afternoon before Hebrew School began, we recited prayers. We recited the Shema, considered the holiest prayer. I wanted to write about the Zohar but then I discovered that much of Jewish liturgy, rituals performed in synagogues, are derived from ecstatic, mystical texts and experiences. I am wagering that before prayer there is poetry.

Loud chords funds bank

Obsess

Still-shatter

Bathtub gloryography stageland

Vulnerable insinuated cloth headache secrets lost on the furniture

Bee-line

A library of goodness waltzing sexually white light down the sides

Of his eyes, slowed down hope raccoonning

Obsessional lava

DREAM 2

I was in a small, seaside town by the harbor. I was with Z. We were watching his parents interact with one other. We were children, but our presence, our participation in the action, was not apparent. We were onlookers. Z.'s mother was beautiful. The wind was blowing gently, brushing her hair across her face. She was peaceful. I could see houses built into the dark green forest cliffside. Z.'s father is moving around. I notice his legs are strong, the legs of a hiker.

Softly his father, then his mother too, become my friend D.'s mother and father, then gently change back into Z.'s. His father walks over to his mother, tells her he is learning something new, asks if he can try it on her, if she's willing. She agrees, and he asks her to hold her hands gently over his. She does, then he asks, "What do you feel?" She says she feels "stressed." He asks her then, "What does this mean?" She answers, "There is another Torah there."

What the Zohar teaches is that there is always another meaning. Kabbalists studied meaning, and the language that gave way to it. Abraham Abulafia did not exactly think, but was more concerned with what was actively concealed within the letters of his thought. The Torah, the written word, was said to exist before the world. Studying the written word meant coming to be in touch with what was before the world. "Before the world" is a strange, teleological fragment implying a belief in a beginning of a world. The Zoharic commentary on Genesis dismantles the beginning line as meaning, "at the head", so it suddenly becomes unclear if Genesis is mapping the human body, painting the brain as the origin of creation—or if the beginning of life is not exclusively the making of the human form, but just as it lays out the sequence of days in the making of the world, it also shows how the human body mirrors this sequence of time. The text is often referred to as pseudepigraphic; quotes from authorities of the past are made up, marooned. The weight of the world bears down on those who study the letters. Kabbalists have to write furiously more and more combinations of magical symbols in order to be relieved of the weight of the words of the world. Each letter in Hebrew has a numerical value. Alef is 1. Beth is 2.

There are 7 days of creation. There are 7 days of the week. The Sabbath is the day when God rested, beginning 17 minutes before sundown on Friday and when three stars rise in the sky on Saturday. It is on this day that individuals are said to be filled with "additional souls." The Sabbath is the day in which the other world pervades. It is the guiding light, the inspiration for the remaining days.

Friday, looking through the window of Thursday to Friday, looking through the glass doors of Wednesday to Friday, looking through the peephole of Tuesday to Friday, looking through the mountain of Monday to Friday, looking through the Wall of Sunday, from the message Saturday coined, lying on the other side of the wall, to now, within the wall, inside the medium, firmament, filament –

*The weather affects a quiet symbolized, dryness
Violin colloquial old soul terrarium*

Gematria obsequious we climb inside to crack the batty acrobatic acoustic acrostic accosting, daze of days, ignominious aria, a body where the first letter of every person's name is every person smiling, a single purple petal he strips for the red; falsehood blur in flashes; tail lights; day and night, diurnal jacks.

Unravel the insult of sunset; faint screech of an electric saw far enough to sound soft; Tetragrammaton jackhammering waterfall traffic many memory vanish wavelength faith Infinite commonplace weakness of weeks

The other days of the week are engineered to correspond with the 6 sefirot of the Tree of Life. Each day corresponds to a different sefira. Sefira in Hebrew means “number” but what is number? The Tree of Life is laid on its side.

Z., was accompanying me on the ferry from Oakland to San Francisco. On the ride over I spoke to him of Binah, the sefira, which I read, was the only way to get to the sefirot in the higher worlds not included on the tree. “Binah” is sometimes translated simply as “intellect,” sometimes as “recompense.” We wondered why. Z. commented that maybe the higher world was necessarily apologetic that the rest of the world couldn't see it.

When we exited the ferry, I turned to Z. and whisperingly asked if he thought all the people boarding looked strange, each a distinct strangeness. We walked towards the exit as two streams of people

boarding conducted a current on both sides of us. As we continued walking, drawing closer and closer to the doors that led to the exit, it was suddenly unclear to me how we would get out. Through both doors people entered, poured in, teeming, eager to board. I was stifled, stopped before a man-sized window of glossy glass that met my face and my body's gaze, then Z. said to me—*I think that is a door.* I walked up to it, and it was a door. We walked through. "This must be Binah," he said, "what leads you to the higher worlds."

Gershom Scholem writes, "Man becomes aware of a fundamental duality of a vast gulf which can be crossed by nothing but the *voice.*" P. 7, "Jewish mysticism, in its various forms represents an attempt to interpret the religious values of Judaism in terms of mystical values. It concentrates upon the idea of the living God who manifests himself in the acts of Creation, Revelation, and Redemption. Pushed to its extreme, the mystical meditation on this idea gives birth to the conception of a sphere, a whole realm of divinity, which underlies the world of our sense data and which is present and active in all that exists. This is the meaning of what Kabbalists call *the world of the Sefiroth.*"

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LETTER 3

Please forgive me as I thank you! Your letter is pointed, starred, by moments of which I will return to in a closer, more paced engagement, but for now, am inspired by your stages of letters, to also respond in stages, so this letter will be the first, a response of

surface bound to yours by the tie that is time, and the information of events and thoughts that made this cross.

What most quickly arts the foreground is a house I visited today.

Upon passing through the front gate, I remembered/realized it was the house in a dream I had months ago. Outside of dream, the house was designed by my sister's best friend's father. He is a lawyer. He was designing the house with his partner at the time. When the foundation was built, their relationship dissolved, but he continued to have the house built.

His older daughter was my best friend in high school. We lost touch when we went separate ways for college, at the point of which my little sister became close with her little sister.

The address of the house is 2424 Clement. When turning onto the street I looked up the definition of "clement" and found, "inclined to be lenient or merciful." The repetition of "24" felt like it was strengthening the inclination towards this disposition.

My friend was there. I had seen her over Thanksgiving when she had been visiting her sister in Oakland, but we still have been very out of touch. Before going over to their house, my sister briefly told me that she had not been doing very well.

We gave each other a warm hello, but she quickly lay down on the couch and went to sleep. Her sister said that she had been feeling very tired. We let her have her space.

Then the three of us—myself, my sister, and her friend, walked outside to the back of the house. I asked them if they wanted to go on a tour of my dream. I told them my dream as we walked around the house, to the different places where the dream took place.

.....The dream began in a shack, with an old wood stove, a television on, faintly-listened to—exposed plumbing, the detail which made me feel most sorry for this place of living. I see my mother—she turns—I see she is pregnant, and then realize she is

pregnant with me. Instantly the dream becomes filmic. The "camera," the point of visual focus, veers away from her shelter, out to the window through which she looks. She gazes up to a magnolia tree, or maybe oleander – large white flowers. The camera recedes, back to her body, to her dwelling, her indwelling, then to the window, out again, up and blissfully almost diving upwards into the flowers – a vision extended. The eye begins breathing, and I realize her breathing is guiding appearance, and that I am the not-yet-born within her, experiencing this, one body removed from her, within her, and I begin to not feel as sorry for the shack she lives in because she gazes up to, in to, such a beautiful tree.

I then walk to the front of a house, and register that it is a modern mansion in front of the shack, in which my mother was living. When I reach the front of the house there is a table, chairs, plates and drinks, on which a breakfast or brunch has been partially finished. It seems like the people sitting there were called suddenly away from their dining. I walk away from this ghostly evidence, and meet my father on the side of the house. He is much younger, probably the age he was when my mother was pregnant with me. He offers me marijuana. I refuse, but we walk together to the back of the house.

As we are walking to the back patio, I move slower, as I begin to see the backs of many people staggered and frozen, gazing upon something in the center of the space. As I inch closer I see that everyone is gazing into the mouth of a volcano. Their faces, and their bodies are completely stilled, entirely unreadable. They are not like zombies. They are purely inaccessible. Yet each of them are pointed towards, their attention directed to, transfixed by the volcano. Again, it was important to discern that they were not zombies. They were living, though not interpretable.

I asked my father who they were, what they were doing. He answered that he didn't know, or he didn't answer. Suddenly his spirit shot upwards into the air, a passionate parrot, with the colors of a parrot, and a manhole cover from a sewer was hovering in the sky. He, now parrot, hit the cover, and the sewer cover became a

mandala.

At the time I had this dream, I was reading an essay by Derrida, called, "The Eyes of Language," in the book *Acts of Religion* where he comments upon a letter that Gershom Scholem wrote to Franz Rosenzweig in 1926, in which he is ominously and urgently expressing his belief that if the language of Biblical Hebrew was taken and made into a conversational, colloquial form to be spoken in the state of Israel, then demonic, catastrophic forces would be unleashed—specifically that the sacred language which was uttered only in the space of prayer and study should not enter the space of casual exchange, or else the said forces would "erupt." In the letter, Scholem repeatedly invokes the image of a volcano, that would build in intensity and eventually erupt apocalyptically.

When I had this dream, this letter, and the essay, were fresh in me. I was thinking about the presences, or the non-presences of the people surrounding the impending catastrophe, the unreadable, unknowable figures and forces gazing upon the space through which the end of the world could arise. I drew upon the sewer that became a mandala, thought of the elements of human use drawn downwards into a subterranean network unseen by the public eye, the material of which in my dream became the symbolic vessel with the overt intent to be looked into, to become the universe by.

Now new freshnesses emerge, from having walked in the house today, the house of dream. That my friend's father is a lawyer, that his partner intended to build the house with him, though only stayed with him through the building of the foundation. What does this say about Law? Who is, or what is, the partner to Law? I think his partner was a lawyer too. So Law left Law. But to entertain, for a moment, that she was Poetry, or could be—that Poetry remains with Law only up until the building of the foundation, and then Poetry leaves, and Law continues, persists to live, build the house alone? Or is it more interesting that Law leaves Law and the house is built, and a Poet walks up to the house built by Law having left Law at its foundation, and says the words out loud, "This house was in my dream" ?

That the house is situated upon the disposition towards mercy. That my friend, whom I had lost touch with, has been struggling with an auto-immune disorder. Working through your insights into the psyche of immunity, that there is a fundamental flaw (f(law)?) in immunity (and please correct me because I am summarizing here) but thinking towards how to "un-think" immunity, how to learn how to talk to, take in, feel the "foreign body," as one's own body, and I feel this experience moves towards the boundlessness you speak of, which I aim aimlessly in aim to again and again become a convert of, to figure out new ways how to.....Tonight at dinner my sister was angry. I went to the restroom to wash my hands, and as I lifted up my hands some of the water on them, a single drop leapt onto the mirror, and as I watched the drop of water slide quickly and then slowly, and increasingly slower down the mirror, I prayed that the fire of my sister's anger, know the ever slowing water on the mirror, and I called to mind the space and openness of the ocean we drove to earlier in the day together, and how my throat has been feeling strangely sore, oddly hot—and called my throat "fire" relegated the pain of it to fire's orders, so as I was in the restroom, I made a sort of cross-wind prayer/pact between the fire in my throat and the fire of my sister's anger and the water on the mirror and the space of the ocean, because I knew I couldn't talk to her. I knew that whatever I said responding to her anger would get caught up in, or further inflame her anger. Moments like this, I find what I call prayer, in one form, in public, words said silently which could not work if otherwise spoken.