

הַלֵּלִיךְ רַחֲמֵי לֵבָב

THE SENSITIVE DOE

הַלֵּלִיךְ רַחֲמֵי לֵבָב שְׂבָגְתִּי מִדֹּדֶיךָ.
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O graceful doe, pity this heart in which
 you have dwelled all your life. Know
 that the day you leave me, your going
 will be my ruin. And even now, when
 my eyes dare to glance at your splendour,
 I am stung by the serpents that
 guard your cheeks, for their poison
 burns like fire and they drive me out.

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She envied my heart with the breasts
 that lie upon her heart - a heart of
 stone, and yet it put forth two apples!
 They stand guard, to the left and to the
 right, like lances. Their fiery [apples
 burn] in my heart, though they have
 never come near me. Their mouths
 have drunk my blood, they felt no
 shame at all!

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This doe violates the laws of God with
 her eyes: she kills me with malice
 aforethought, yet no one avenges me.
 Have you ever seen the heart of a lion
 joined to the eyelids of a gazelle? Her
 eyelids have learned to tear like a lion,
 they hurt sharpened arrows at me, they
 drain my heart's blood to the dregs.
 They are out for my life.

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One day, when I was reeling like a
 drunkard, longing for the wine of her
 love, she dispatched envoys to me
 bearing greetings and complaints; and
 when they returned to her, she begged
 them: 'O messengers of peace, come
 again and yet again!' These tidings
 reduced my heart and revived my spirit.

יֹם אֶמְצֵא רַחֲמֵי לֵבָב שְׂבָגְתִּי מִדֹּדֶיךָ:
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But one day when my hands were
 grazing in her garden and fondling her
 breasts, she said: 'Now take away your
 hands - they are not skilful enough.'¹
 And her words were so seductive that
 they melted my heart: 'Do not touch
 me, friend, I do not like those who
 hurt me. My breasts are soft and
 sensitive. Enough! I shall refuse one
 and all!'²

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THE LAUNDRESS

My love washes her clothes in the water
 of my tears and spreads them out in the
 sun of her beauty. She has no need of
 spring-water - she has my two eyes;
 nor of the sun - she has her own
 radiance.

כֹּחַ לֵךְ, אֲבִיבָה

SONG OF FAREWELL

כֹּחַ לֵךְ, אֲבִיבָה, מִכֹּחַ דִּינִי
 מִכֹּחַ דִּינִי, אֲבִיבָה, מִכֹּחַ דִּינִי
 לֹא תִדְעֵנִי בִּי אֵין לִינִי מִכֹּחַ
 מִכֹּחַ דִּינִי, אֲבִיבָה, מִכֹּחַ דִּינִי
 אִם תִּדְעֵנִי עַל שְׂמִינִי מִכֹּחַ
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 לֹא תִדְעֵנִי אִם בִּי אֲבִיבָה, מִכֹּחַ
 לֵךְ, אֲבִיבָה, מִכֹּחַ דִּינִי

Why, O fair one, do you withhold your
 envoys from the lover whose heart is
 filled with pain of you? Do you not
 know that Time means nothing to your
 beloved, unless he hear your welcoming
 voice? If we two are doomed to parting,
 stay a while and let me look at your
 face. I do not know if my heart has
 come to a stop between my ribs, or
 else has wandered off with you. Oh,

¹ Oh, 'they [my breasts] have not yet experienced such things'.

² The last two lines are in mixed Arabic and Romance. The meaning is uncertain.

נחר בקראי גרונ

דבק לחצי לשוני

היה לבדי סחרחר

מרב כאבי ואוני

גל יגוני וחול

מחת תנומה לעיני

כמה איחול וכמה

ידער כמו אש חרונ

My tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth,
my throat is parched with pleading,
my heart is loud, my mind confused
with pain and continual grieving.
My sorrow swells and will not bear
sleep's gift to my eyes:
How long will this rage and yearning
like fire inside me burn?

אצמא לרע ואכלה

טרם בלות צמאונ

באלו שחקים וחילם

בין תאונתי וביני

נחשב כמו גר ותושב

יושב בשבת יעני

בין כל פתלתל וסכל

לבו בלב תחפמוני

זה ישקן ראש פתנים

זה יחליק ראש הנגיא

ישים ארבו בקרבו

יאמר לו: "בי אדוני".

עם - ומאסו לי אבותם

מהיות בלבים לצאני

לא יאדימו פניהם -

כי אם צבעום בשני!

הם בענקים בעינם -

הם בחננים בעיני!

בשאת משלי יריבון

עמי כמו עם יוני:

דבר שפת עם ונשמע

כי זה לשון אשקלוני?

עפה אדקם כמו טיט

כי קלשונני לשוני

אם אונכם לי ערלה -

מה יעשה פצמוני?

לא יוכלו צואניכם

לשאת זהב שהרונני

לו פערז הפתאים

פיהם למלקוש עוני

נטף בשמי עליהם -

בשם ענן קנמוני

אוי לתבונה ואוי לי

כי גוי כמו זה שכני!

דעת אלהים ישימון

באוב וכידעוני

על זאת איליל ואספד

אשית כמו שק מלונני

אכף באגמון ואצום

שני חמישי ושני

I'll be consumed in my thirst
before my thirst for friendship is quenched,
as though the sky and its hosts were arrayed
between me and all that I crave.
I'm treated here as a stranger, despised—
as though I were living with ostriches,
caught between impostors and fools
who think their hearts have grown wise.
One hands you venom to drink,
another strokes you with words
and lies in wait in his heart,
addressing you: "Please, my lord . . .";
people whose fathers were not fit
to be dogs to my flock of sheep—
their faces have never known blushing,
unless they were painted with crimson cheeks.

They're giants in their own eyes,
grasshoppers here in mine.
They quarrel with all my teachings and talk,
as though I were speaking Greek.
"Speak," they carp, "as the people speak,
and we'll know what you have to say"—
and now I'll break them like dirt or like straw,
my tongue's pitchfork thrust into their hay.

If your ears aren't able to hear me,
what good could my harmonies do?
Your necks aren't worthy of wearing
my golden crescents and jewels.
If these boors would only open their mouths
to the rain that descends from my clouds,
my essence would soon come through them
with its cinnamon scent, and myrrh.

Have compassion for wisdom, compassion for me
surrounded by neighbors like these—
people for whom the knowledge of God
is a matter of spirits and ghosts.
Therefore I mourn and wail,
and make my bed in ashes,
and bow my head like a reed and fast
on Monday and Thursday and Monday.

Solomon ibn Gabirol

ולב נבוב

ולב נבוב ותושֶׁיה סתומה / וגוף נראֶה ונפֶשׁ נעלמה,
 וארֶץ שותחיה ימצאו נע / ולא ששׁוֹן לאדם באדמה:
 ועבֶד יקרג היום אדוניו, / ושפחה יסדה מלכה, ואמה,
 ובן יקום עֲלֵי אביו ואמו / וכן הבת באביה ואמה.
 ידיד, ראֶתה עיני בתבל, / אשר הטוב בעיני כל — מהומה!
 מי חיי אנוש ישא עמלים / וישא אחריתו גוש ורמה.
 ותשוב האדמה לאדמה / ותעל הנשמה לנשמה.

HEART'S HOLLOW

And heart's hollow
 and wisdom is blocked;
 the body apparent
 but soul obscured:
 those who wake in the world
 for gain come to corruption.
 (On earth a man rejoices in nothing. . . .)

The servant, soon, will slaughter his master,
 the handmaidens turn on their mistress and queen;
 a daughter will rise—against her own mother,
 a son—against his father's name.
 My eye in the world dismisses
 what others most love,
 and all is labor, a ploughing for worms.
 Slime—to slime returns.
 Soul—ascends to soul.

Yehudah HaLevi ca. 1075- ca. 1141, Spain

I Lift My Cup

על אהבתך אשתה גביעי
שלום לך שלום יום
השביעי
מה נעמה לי עת בין
השמשות
לראות פני שבת פנים
חדשות
באו בתפוחים הרבו
אשירות
זה יום מנוחי זה דודי
ורעי.

I lift my cup to celebrate
my love for you,
and say:
shalom to you,
shalom, seventh day.

How pleasing to me
this moment of twilight,
ushering in Shabbat,
the world's new face,
beginning tonight.
Come, enter this orchard,
eat of its fruit,
for this is my companion,
my friend,
my time of quietude.

Al ahavatekha eshteh g'vi-i
shalom l'kha shalom yom
ha-sh'vi-i
mah na-amah li eit bein
ha-sh'mashot
lirot p'nei shabbat panim
hadashot
bo-u v'tapuhim harbu ashishot
zeh yom m'nulhi zeh dodi v'rei-i.

—YEHUDAH HALEVI

Gratitude

My instincts are from You,
my body was fashioned
by You,
the songs I sing reach up
to You,
and with offerings of
thanksgiving I greet You.

The air I breathe is Yours,
the light in my eyes reflects
Your glory,
my insights are formed
from Your mystery,
thoughts of You are guide-
posts of my life.

Whenever my love calls to
You, my heart finds You.
But my mind cannot con-
tain You.
And my thoughts and
conceptions can never
truly picture You,
or my errors and mistakes
ever diminish You.

—after YEHUDAH HALEVI

A MEDITATION FOR BAR'KHU

Almighty no thing exists
without You and none
can be like You the source
of all maker and creator

You have no image eyes
observe but the soul
lodged in the heart
recognizes You and sees

Prayer is for one's soul
what nourishment is for
one's body. The blessing
of one's prayer lasts until
the time of the next prayer,
just as the strength derived
from one meal lasts until
another....During the time
of prayer, one cleanses the
soul of all that has passed
over it and prepares it for
the future.

—YEHUDAH HALEVI

My Soul

On the day that I searched
for God—for I could not
see the Divine—
I turned to my heart and
my mind
and found Your throne
within,
a witness to You in me.

—YEHUDAH HALEVI

Your glory's breadth
encompassing all
for in You all finds its place
but You occupy no place

my soul seeing
but unseen come thank
the seeing but unseen
and bless

Solomon Ibn Gabirol, 1021-1058, Spain

This poem was written by Solomon ibn Gabirol (1021–1058, Spain), among the greatest of Jewish medieval poets. It is taken from his masterpiece, Keter Malkhut, a philosophical work written in poetic meter. In it, Ibn Gabirol talks of the moment we might see God.

אַתָּה אֹר עֲלִיּוֹן

Atah or elyon

וְעֵינֵי כָל־נֶפֶשׁ

זָכָה יִרְאוּךָ,

וְעֵנֵי עֲוֹנִים מַעֲיִנֶיךָ

יַעֲלִימוּךָ.

אַתָּה אֹר נֶעְלָם

Atah or nelam

בְּעוֹלָם הָזֶה

וְנִגְלָה בְּעוֹלָם

הַנִּרְאָה,

בְּהֵר יְהוָה יִרְאֶה.

אַתָּה אֹר עוֹלָם,

Atah or olam

וְעֵינֵי הַשָּׁכֵל לָךְ

תִּכְסֹּף וְתִשְׁתַּאֲזֶה,

אֶפְסֹ קִצְהוּ תִרְאֶה

וְכֵלּוּ לֹא תִרְאֶה.

You are the celestial light—
innocent eyes see You;
clouds of sin hide You.

You are the hidden light
of this world,
revealed in visions,
seen on God's mountain.

You are the eternal light—
the mind's eye searches
and seeks;
only an aspect ever seen,
never all.

—SOLOMON IBN GABIROL

God's Mystery

I called to You to reveal the
mysteries
never hidden from You,
instead, I uncovered the
deep within me
and did not depart empty-
handed
for in the songs I sang to
You, I saw
a vision of a ladder.
I offer thanks for Your
wonders
though I do not under-
stand them
but I will not forget what
You whispered to me
as my heart dreamed its
dream.

—SOLOMON IBN GABIROL

Who Is Like You, Almighty?

Who can know the won-
drousness of all You have
fashioned?
You formed our bodies in
ways that can serve You:
giving us eyes to see Your
miracles,
ears to hear of Your awe-
inspiring deeds,
a mind to understand
some of Your mysteries,
a mouth to speak Your
praise,
and a tongue that can
speak of Your deliver-
ance.
Today, I, Your servant,
child of Your handmaiden,
describe according to the
meagerness of my ability,
a bit of Your greatness,
a fraction of Your ways.

—SOLOMON IBN GABIROL