

How uncanny, these sacred texts  
black ink on sallow aging parchment  
between the scrolls the heavy long *atzei chayim*  
this Torah,  
parallel lines on which the Sofer's quill hangs his letters  
etched into the calf skin  
on these lines the black letters suspended  
like laundry lines in the gardens of suburban estates,  
forming words that speak of the mythic journey  
and biography of the human/divine failure.

Put aside the doubts!  
those lingering academic questions  
hovering as they still do in your head,  
from a previous century's scholarship,  
as to the archeology of these texts  
their provenance  
their literary conventions-whether exilic, post exilic,  
the strands and strata of authorship,  
criss crossing the page  
violently dissecting the body of even a verse  
with no respect for the integrity of the final redaction.

Let go of the literal finally!  
give up the addiction to the plain meaning as is...  
surrender the belief system that accompanied the text,  
forgive all prior readings,  
let not the "anxiety of influence" paralyze you further  
despite the weighted authority of La Nom du Pere  
the overbearing presence of the black suited Father-in-Law!  
Accept your own prejudice and now sustained inner baggage  
your sense of the prosidy of the text,  
its lyricism, its poetry, its tone,  
as you begin to read once more.

Become conscious!  
bring awareness of the enormity of the weight of tradition  
on your shoulders,  
of the combined millennia of rabbinic and church commentary  
of the super-commentaries surrounding the text, like chatting housewives,  
of the writings of those stern faced bearded men  
peering down at you from glass enclosed frames  
in the dark corridor of your father in law's New York apartment.

Begin to feel the lightness of your own fresh reading!  
as it confronts you with the recycled problems of plot and justice  
each time the weekly portion greets you.  
Feel the comfort in the Midrashic musings as you see through their hermeneutic tricks  
and literal triggers and semantic puns that opened their one time fresh discourse.  
Be excited by the cosmic implications and daring risks the Zohar takes in its imaginative  
misreadings as it opens up hidden worlds of desire and connections.  
Follow the Hassidic masters as they read their own struggles into the narrative of  
biblical personalities.

For your task maybe the most important most critical ever!  
For the sake of the very survival of that same text.  
Yes, your reading and your baggage, your prejudice and hauntings  
may determine its future.  
For having been born to that last generation of survivors,  
in earshot of the screams,  
only once removed from their cries and shrieks  
and the deafening silence the mornings after  
the theological absence the decades after  
the divine remaining "in absentia",  
you now have the impossible task of bringing  
meaning to this text once again.  
Impossible you say!  
to bring meaning to their lives and deaths  
to their memory,  
their trace, here!  
gazing at the columns of black letters?  
like the columns of smoke that arose from the crematoria,  
etched in the space between the Holy letters  
of the fractured covenant  
the broke promises  
the absent Messiah.

And, as you pass your white tallis over the black letters  
don't forget this space in between...  
the silent presence, before you make the blessing over the Torah,  
in this silence, in this absence of meaning  
your presence  
your reading  
your blessing despite,  
your *keriah*  
your interpretation is, once again called for.

Yes, you maybe asked to do violence to this sacred text  
for the sake of its very survival  
like no generation before you.  
For the sake of the sacred text itself.  
For Her sake.

Don't worry She can handle it  
She, who needs rescuing, is in that sacred space,  
in between the blackness.  
(Was it not Glen Gould who taught us how to read and play Bach anew?  
by paying close attention to the pauses and spaces between the notes  
unlike his contemporaries who remained in the classical tradition  
of technique. His new midrashic version of the Goldberg Variations  
brought new life to the ossified traditions of the Baroque).  
Pay attention to these spaces!  
Play the music of Torah, with them in mind!  
Attend to what was not written  
what was not said  
what could never be said  
between the divine lover and Her sacred people.

Be that surgeon!  
Sharpen the steel!  
Here in this sea of blackness, the sharper the knife you bring to the dissecting table  
the keener the scalpel you apply in your hermeneutic operating room technique,  
the deeper the secrets She will reveal!  
for she is ever open to new readings, however violent,  
and our post Holocaust generation has solace only in Her.  
In the presence of the divine absence,  
we must find refuge in Her sacred spaces,  
we must find new keys to read our selves  
our fractured lives  
our broken souls  
In Her alone  
in Her sacred Torah text.  
For the black letters on white parchment is Her love poem to us  
despite the suffering  
in spite of the torture  
a love letter all the more.

We will be held accountable  
by our children  
were we to settle for those old readings  
abdicate our truths for comfortable and familiar exegesis  
for the sake of imitation piety.  
Do not give up on the text!  
She feels uncannily sacred despite scholarship  
despite history  
despite dissection!  
despite Mengele  
for She too is a survivor!

A rush of excitement flows over me  
as the *Baal Koreh* chants the text,  
those familiar black notes  
bending to his received cantillation tradition  
line after line,  
the holiness is found between the etched lines  
and She demands we continue to fill the gaps and lacunae  
and once again bring fresh answers to the age old questions posed to the text  
the issues and plot lines  
the structures and conflicts  
the redundancies and questions of justice.  
All this in light of the age of technological genocide we inhabit.  
All this in the presence of our lack of faith  
yet our being present to this very absence of the divine.

Only by such violent reading of our sacred texts  
(a Post-Holocaust Midrash of sorts),  
will we be able to maintain the integrity of this sacred space  
and Torah herself,  
for only by emptying ourselves into the space between its black letters  
can we too infuse Her with our lived albeit broken lives  
for this She needs too.  
This is our response to Her loving.