

I AM A JEW

The wine of countless generations
Has strengthened me in my wandering,
The angry sword of pain and sorrow
Could not destroy my existence—
My people, my faith, and my flowering,
It has not chained my freedom.
From under the sword I shouted:
I am a Jew!

Neither Pharaoh's plagues, nor Titus,
Nor Haman could break my proud spirit,
Eternity carries my name in her hands,
My zest has not decreased
On the black gallows of Madrid,
My glory resounds through time and eternity:
I am a Jew!

When the Egyptian built
My body into the walls, it hurt,
And I sowed the raw earth with my pain
And a sun arose,
Under the sun a path stretched out
Scattered with barbs,
They would prick me in the eyes—
I am a Jew!

The forty years of a former life
Which I suffered in the desert-sand
Have given me the courage of my years
Bar Kochba's call has cast its spell
On each kernel of my suffering,
And more than gold have I preserved
The stubbornness of my grandfather—
I am a Jew!

What do I need gold for? I gathered that
When I did not even have a corner.
Could gold satiate
My high spirits or my gloom?
Samson's hair which Delilah stole
Glowed and satisfied more than
Than cold, golden coins—
I am a Jew!

The wrinkles in the brow of wise Rabbi Akiva
The wisdom of Isaiah's prophecy
Have quenched my thirst—my dear
And have matched it with hatred;
The zeal of the Maccabean heroes
Still seethes in my rebel-blood,
From all pyres I have announced:
I am a Jew!

The marvelous judgment of our Solomon
Has not abandoned me in my wandering
And Heinrich Heine's crooked smile
Also cost me much spilled blood.
Through the centuries I have heard Yehuda Halevi's call
And I have not tired of it,
I have withered often but have not perished—
I am a Jew!

The noise of Amsterdam's marketplace
Did not disquiet my Spinoza
Space itself makes things bigger;
Marx's sun upon the earth
Refreshed with new redness
The ancient blood in my spirit
And my unextinguished fire—
I am a Jew!

There is in my eyes the glow,
The serenity, and the stress
Of Levitan's sunsets,
Of the blessed path which Mendele took
The blade of Russian bayonets,
The dazzle of the rye at harvest,
I am a son of the Soviets,
I am a Jew!

The echo of Haifa port
Resounds with the ring of my voice
Unnoticed telegraph wires
Carry me over sea and dale
The heartbeat of Buenos Aires,
And from New York a Yiddish song,
The horror of Berlin's edicts,
I am a Jew!

I am a Jew who has drunk
From Stalin's magic cup of joy,
Whoever wants to let Moscow sink,
To turn the world backward,
To him I say: No! To him I shout: Down!
I go with the Eastern peoples,
The Russians are my brothers—
And I am a Jew!

My glory a ship on both streams,
My blood lights up eternity,
My pride is Yaakov Sverdlov's name
And Kaganovich—Stalin's friend.
My youth floats over the snows,
The heart is full of dynamite,
My luck quivers in the trenches,
I am a Jew!

I am not alone! My heroism grows,
The struggle today is for an honest piece of bread,
I glorify the flame, I raise the storm,
Which brings death to the enemy in brown,
My strength no longer lags behind,
The blood of Papernik and Gorelik
Cries and seethes from the earth:
I am a Jew!

And to spite the enemies
Who already prepare graves for me,
I shall still have pleasure without end
Beneath the red banner.
I shall plant my vineyards
And be the forger of my destiny,
I shall still dance on Hitler's grave!
I am a Jew!

translated by Thomas Bird