

Before He thought, about this world
An idea arose in His mind, Israel.
In the silence of shtok kach ala bemachshava
He thought of the martyrs, Rabbi Akiva, and the mothers
who would sacrifice their children in the churches of
Mainz, Speyer and Worms, and the babies who would go
up in the flames of Hitler's inferno.

In that first breath of life He too had to die a bit. In His
plenitude, in His pleroma He too had to make room, of
Not-Him, an internal dying to the self.

From His breath, I breathe...
That unconscious deep inhalatory gasp recognized only
when I surface after being too long submerged
In the purifying waters of the supernal mikveh,
When I realize just how primitive this reflex gasp is,
Unable to control it.
(And they say water boarding is not torture!)

But in that breath-His exhalation into my lungs comes at a
price-
For He demands, requests, begs,

We live, and return the favor!
But how! We finite creatures living out our puny lives
At the end of which we too must "give up the ghost"
And breathe that last breath
When that very last exhalation gets no inspiration and
We stop....breathing
We ex-pire.

Yet taught in the secrets of Torah about the "kiss of death"
reserved for the precious few, the Patriarchs, Moses, the
Tzaddik/saints and Reb 'Melech', (even my wife's
grandfather! was witnessed)-in whose death mirrored that
primordial act of creation- in the kiss- the breath is literally
sucked out, sucked back into the divine. misas neshikah

But those chosen received this gift precisely because they
lived each moment,
Each breath as if...what was being asked,
What was being demanded,
Was a readiness at any moment,
For mesiras nefesh
To give infinite pleasure back to the divine
By self-sacrifice

To give up the ghost immediately upon request.

As the martyrs were so ready- the daily rituals and customs seem to focus on training us for the possibility for such similar demands at focal points in history- (do we need to rehearse them again?)

The martyrs argue among themselves as to who should go first,

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel or Rabbi Shimon the High Priest,¹

Who should be first to die, and

As the Piacezna mourns his son in the fall of 1939, in the Ghetto Warsaw,

He rereads the death of Sarah our matriarch²

As one of possible suicide in order to confront her Maker

With the real question behind the Akeda, the binding of Isaac.

Not his survival rather his descendants' martyrdom!

She foresaw in her prophetic mind

Generation after generation of blood, and man's inhumanity to man.

This was not the blessing promised to her husband!

She was to present herself prematurely to protest and complain

That this might be the lot of her descendants.

"And the remaining of her years did not protest."

But God demands no less of what He himself gave in creating this world.

Mesiras nefesh as imitatio dei,

A true replication of creation, in the very act of dying.

By dying and giving Him our last breath

We, too, act in creation in the very surrender to creation.

We, too, breathe back into God what He had given so painfully

By limiting Himself in this world.

By transforming our desire for self preservation

Into the desire to breathe back into Him

We are replicating His desire to create

Resulting in His dying-if only a little.

When the angels then protest citing "zu Torah vezu schora!"

Is this Torah and is this its reward"

God's response remains "shtok! Kach ala bemachshava.
Be silent!

For thus it arose in My mind".

A silence that is so deafening it can shatter a universe.
But the shtok refers to the silence of withholding, waiting,
holding back...

"Be silent" meaning "it is not yet time to breathe it back
into Me!"...

"I am waiting for my martyrs!"

Creating the world dying and breathing,

The inspiration and exhalation

The pulse of life itself

Includes the dying

For all is mirrored in the divine in that original thought.

1 Avot deRabbi Natan 38:3. the reason being "not to watch the death of my friend" but reworked in Eish Kodesh By R. Kalonymous Kalman Schapiro Succos 5702 as "I want to be t'chila the first to be martyred because being first forges new paths in worship. Alluding to the death of his beloved son; who also was meant to forge new paths in hassidut."

2See Rashi to Gen. 23:1-2. and midrashim op cit.