

The Golem Psalms
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Music by Andrea Clearfield

PROLOGUE:

MON SEMBLABLE, MON FRERE

My name is Joseph the Golem,
but what does that tell you
except that I am raw potential,
waiting to be shaped by need?

What does that tell you
except that I am mute
unless others speak for me,
unless I am the *shofar* for my creator's breath?

What does that reveal
except that I came into being by magic,
and was kept secret by those who conjure under threat of death?

Am I so different from you,
shaped by the circumstances of your birth,
subject to the whims of power, the burdens of history?

Am I so different,
invisible but for an act of grace,
doomed to wait for redemption
beneath a shroud of prayers?

1. THE CREATION OF THE GOLEM

In the beginning was chaos,
unformed and mute,
water and wind,
And then--Creation,
the divine will,
form and life and change and death—
a world.

Where was I at the beginning?
Not a seed in God's mind,
not a creature in paradise,
I was nothing,
not even part of chaos.
Eons later,
after life had chased its tail and swallowed it,
one man arose,
a weaver of spells, master of chaos, redeemer of his people—
and called me forth,
a golem.

2. ABRACADABRA

Ayra ke-dayra.
Thus spoke my master,
Judah Loew,
the Maharal,
the lion-hearted rabbi of Prague.
I will create as I speak.
In the beginning God created,
b'reshet bara.

So did Rabbi Judah wrest me from the mud of the Moldau,
and circling seven times,
bring me to life.
Alef, bet, gimel, dalet, hay, vav, zayin.
Eyns, tsvey, dray, fier, finef, zeks, zibn.
Seven gates, seven planets, seven earths, seven heavens,
Seven lands, seven rivers, seven seas and seven deserts,
Seven days, seven weeks, seven years, Jubilee.
Shabbat, Shavuot, shiva, seven-branched menorah.

Ayra ke-dayra.
Abracadabra—
my skin of mud glowed red with blood,
my lungs drew air, I sprouted hair.
Yet still I was but cold, dead clay, until--
My master etched upon my brow:
Emet, Truth--
I breathed,
and knew life.

3. THE DANGERS OF THE NAME

Name--nombre—nomos--numinous.
Moniker--alias—nom de plume--Shem.
Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh,
Tetragrammaton, the Four-Letter Name,
The Four letters, twelve letters, twenty-two letters,
Forty-two letters, seventy-two letters.
The Adam to Zion of Torah,
The Awesome Name that Cannot Be Said,
The Name that grants life and cancels it.
Gematria of hidden connections,
Gamma equals tria,
Divine geometry.
How terrible is Your Name, O Nameless One,
The whole world is filled with Your names.

4. THE FOUNTAIN OF VOICES

[Inspired by Psalm 150]

Praise God, all you harps, flutes, and violins!
Praise God, you French horns, bassoons, and oboes!
Praise God, you cymbals and tympani!
Praise God, you mighty chorus of voices!

But as for me, I am dumb,
Incapable of praise or thanksgiving or curse.

*The heavens declare the glory of God,
The sky proclaims His handiwork.
Day to day makes utterance,
Night to night speaks out.
There is no utterance,
There are not words,
Whose sound goes unheard.
Their voice carries throughout the earth,
Their words to the end of the world.*

May the words of my mouth
And the prayer of my heart
Be acceptable to You,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Remember the words of Your psalmist David,
sweet singer of Israel:

*I praise You, for I am awesomely, wondrously made;
My frame was not concealed from You when I was shaped in a hidden place,
Your eyes saw my unformed limbs; they were all recorded in Your book;
In due time they were formed, to the very last one of them.*

Golmi--“my unformed limbs”;
Golmi—“my golem”--
Your golem.
You divined me and wrote me in your book,
knowing I would be summoned
when Your people needed me.

5. AMOK

How was I to know,
when Mrs. Judah Loew
sent me after fish,
that she didn't know
how to make me stop or go
when it was her wish
to stop the flow
of scales and roe
for her Sabbath dish?
And so
her house began to overflow
with endless fish
in bowls and pots and hallah dough,
until she sent for Rabbi Loew
to finish
what she'd set in motion.
The moral of this tale is: Know
that when intent to best your foe
or see your fortunes grow,
be careful what you wish,
for we don't always know
that what we mean to sow
may be our finish and our woe.

6. SOUNDS OF CLAY/ALAS POOR JOSEPH

Abracadabra--*ke-dayra*--cadaver.
Abracadabra--*abra--bara*—*b'reshheet*.
Muddy--ruddy--bloody--body.
Moldau--mold--molder--old.
Blood libel--Bible--rival--survival.
Yosef--Joseph--seraph--sheriff.
Name--defame--deform--forlorn.
Yisra'el--travail--reveal--redeem.

Alas, poor Joseph!
Born without a soul--
the lot of golems
since time began.
Alas, poor Golem!
What a tragic fate was his--
Like the angels,
Singing at God's right hand,
but tone-deaf to the pleasures of the flesh.

7. THE UNCREATION OF THE GOLEM

How did it end—this miracle of kabbalah and clay?
How did they uncreate the Golem?
As they created him--
seven circles in reverse,
bloody flesh returned to earth:
Zayin, vav, hay, dalet, gimel, bet, alef.
Zibn, zeks, finef, fier, dray, tsvey, eyns.
Aryad ek-arya,
Arba-da-carba.

And then, the end:
Alef rubbed out,
Mem and *taf* left alone on his brow.
Mayt--dead.
Shaykh-mayt, endgame.

And what remained?

Formless clay,
Tohu ve-vohu,
Ayin, the void.

Legend has it that the Golem's waiting still,
waiting to redeem or be redeemed,
Still waiting, waiting still...