Conjuring the Natural World in Words

Animal: The Dove as Symbol

1. Shabbat 49a

וְאַמַּאי קָרֵי לֵיהּ ״בַּעַל כְּנָפַיִם״? — שֶׁפַּעַם אַחַת גָּזְרָה מַלְכוּת רוֹמִי הָרְשָׁעָה שְׁמָד עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁכָּל הַמַּנִּיחַ תְּפִילִּין יְנַקְּרוּ אֶת מוֹחוֹ, וְהָיָה אֱלִישָׁע מַנִּיחָם וְיוֹצֵא לַשּׁוּק. רָאָהוּ קַסְדּוֹר אֶחָד רָץ מִפָּנָיו וְרָץ אַחֲרָיו. וְכֵיוָן שֶׁהִגִּיעַ אֶצְלוֹ נְטָלָן מֵרֹאשׁוֹ וַאֲחָזָן בְּיָדוֹ. אָמַר לוֹ: מַה זֶּה בְּיָדְךָ? אָמַר לוֹ: כַּנְפֵי יוֹנָה. פָּשַׁט אֶת יָדוֹ וְנִמְצְאוּ כַּנְפֵי יוֹנָה. לְפִיכָךְ קוֹרִין אוֹתוֹ ״אֱלִישָׁע בַּעַל כְּנָפַיִם״.

The Gemara asks: **And why did they call** Elisha **Man of Wings? Because on one occasion the evil kingdom of Rome issued a decree against Israel that,** as punishment, **they would pierce the brain of anyone who dons phylacteries.** Nevertheless, **Elisha would don them and** defiantly **go out to the marketplace.** One day, **an official [*kasdor*]** who was appointed to enforce the decree **saw him;** Elisha **ran** away **from him, and** the official **ran after him. When** the official **reached him,** Elisha **removed** the phylacteries **from his head and held them in his hand.** The officer **asked him: What is that in your hand?** Elisha **said to him:** It is merely **a dove’s wings.** A miracle was performed: **He opened his hand, and,** indeed, it **was found** to be **a dove’s wings. Therefore,** in commemoration of this miracle, **they** would **call him Elisha, Man of Wings.**

וּמַאי שְׁנָא כַּנְפֵי יוֹנָה מִשְּׁאָר עוֹפוֹת? מִשּׁוּם דְּאִמְּתִיל כְּנֶסֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְיוֹנָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: ״כַּנְפֵי יוֹנָה נֶחְפָּה בַכֶּסֶף וְגוֹ׳״ — מַה יּוֹנָה כְּנָפֶיהָ מְגִינּוֹת עָלֶיהָ, אַף יִשְׂרָאֵל מִצְוֹת מְגִינּוֹת עֲלֵיהֶן.

The Gemara asks: **And what is different** about **doves’ wings from** those of **other birds** that led Elisha to say that he had doves’ wings in his hand? The Gemara answers: **Because the congregation of Israel is likened to a dove, as it is stated:** “You shall shine as **the wings of a dove covered with silver** and her pinions with yellow gold” ([Psalms 68:14](file:////Psalms.68.14)). **Just as this dove,** only **its wings protect it** and it has no other means of protection, **so too the Jewish people,** only **mitzvot protect them.**

1. Medieval Poetry- Yom Shabbaton by Yehuda haLevi

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| Yom Shabbaton ein lishkoach, zichro k'reiach hanichoach, yonah matz'ah vo manoach v'sham yanuchu y'giei choach.Yonah matz'ah vo manoach v'sham yanuchu y'giei choach.Hayom nichbad livnei emunim z'hirim l'shomro avot uvanim, chakuk bishnei luchot avanim, merov onim v'amitz koach.Yonah matz'ah vo manoach v'sham yanuchu y'giei choach.Uvau chulam bivrit yachad, na'aseh v'nishma amru k'echad, ufat'chu v'anu Adonai echad, baruch hanotein layaef koach.Yonah matz'ah vo manoach v'sham yanuchu y'giei choach.Diber b'kodsho b'har hamor, yom hash'vi'i zachor v'shamor, v'chol pikudav yachad ligmor chazek motnaim v'ametz koach.Yonah matz'ah vo manoach v'sham yanuchu y'giei choach.Ha'am asher na k'tzon ta'ah yizkor l'ffokdo b'rit ushvua, lval ya'avor bam mikreh ra'ah ka'asher nishba'ata al mei noach.Yonah matz'ah vo manoach v'sham yanuchu y'giei choach. | יוֹם שַׁבָּתוֹן אֵין לִשְׁכּֽוֹחַ, זִכְרוֹ כְּרֵֽיחַ הַנִּיחֹֽחַ,יוֹנָה מָצְאָה בוֹ מָנֽוֹחַ, וְשָׁם יָנֽוּחוּ יְגִֽיעֵי כֹֽחַ.היוֹם נִכְבָּד לִבְנֵי אֱמוּנִים, זְהִירִים לְשָׁמְרוֹ אָבוֹת וּבָנִים,חָקוּק בִּשְׁנֵי לֻחוֹת אֲבָנִים, מֵרֹב אוֹנִים וְאַמִּיץ כֹּֽחַ.יוֹנָה מָצְאָה בוֹ מָנֽוֹחַ, וְשָׁם יָנֽוּחוּ יְגִֽיעֵי כֹֽחַ.וּבָֽאוּ כֻלָּם בִּבְרִית יַֽחַד, נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע אָמְרוּ כְּאֶחָד,וּפָתְחוּ וְעָנוּ יְיָ אֶחָד, בָּרוּךְ הַנּוֹתֵן לַיָּעֵף כֹּֽח.יוֹנָה מָצְאָה בוֹ מָנֽוֹחַ, וְשָׁם יָנֽוּחוּ יְגִֽיעֵי כֹֽחַ.דִּבֶּר בְּקָדְשׁוֹ בְּהַר הַמּוֹר, יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי זָכוֹר וְשָׁמוֹר,וְכָל פִּקּוּדָיו יַֽחַד לִגְמוֹר, חַזֵּק מָתְנַֽיִם וְאַמֵּץ כֹּֽח.יוֹנָה מָצְאָה בוֹ מָנֽוֹחַ, וְשָׁם יָנֽוּחוּ יְגִֽיעֵי כֹֽחַ.הָעָם אֲשֶׁר נָע כַּצֹּאן תָּעָה, יִזְכּוֹר לְפָקְדוֹ בְּרִית וּשְׁבוּעָה,לְבַל יַעֲבָר בָּם מִקְרֵה רָעָה, כַּאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּֽעְתָּ עַל מֵי נֹֽחַ.יוֹנָה מָצְאָה בוֹ מָנֽוֹחַ, וְשָׁם יָנֽוּחוּ יְגִֽיעֵי כֹֽחַ. |
| **Translation:**Fragrant thy memories,​ O sweet Sabbath day,Fragr​ant as incense, never to fade away;The wandering​​​​​ **dove** doth find her nestIn thee, the toilers cease their weary quest.Deep in thy children'​s hearts enshrined​ lies thy fame.Sires​ and sons faithful,​ linked, thy love proclaim,​Linke​d thy love proclaim.​Stron​g, in ne'er-wan​ing might, He graved thy name;Grave​d on twin tablets, still stands His sure behest.The wandering​​​​​ dove …Then to His covenant,​ abiding in stone,'We will swear fealty' answered they all as one,Answe​red they all as one.'He is our Lord' they cried, 'eternal His throne,'Peace​ to all care-worn​ He granteth,​ His name be blest.The wandering​​​​​ dove …Once on Moriah's peak He bade His folk heed;'Keep​ ye my Sabbaths,​ hallowed in word and deed,Hallo​wed in word and deed.Sacre​d her precepts all, for you, for your seed,Stren​gthen the feeble, comfort my folk oppressed​.'The wandering​​​​​ dove …We are Thy chosen flock, remember us still.Long have we wandered,​ O soon Thine oath fulfil,O soon Thine oath fulfil.Thou who did'st calm the flood, preserve us from ill,Safe in green pastures,​ safe by the brooks to rest.The wandering​​​​​ dove …1. Modern Art- Marc Chagall. Deux Pigeons, 1925
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Cosmology: Sun, Moon, Natural cycle of the day as awe inspiring and evoking human wonder

1. Tanhuma, Brachot 7

"What kinds of people are called dead even when they are alive? Those who see the morning sunlight...those who see the sun set...those who eat and drink, and are not stirred to say a blessing" --Tanhuma, Berakhot, 7

2. Siddur-- Evening Brakha before the Sh’ma **Ma'Ariv Aravim**

**Ma'Ariv Aravim**

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלקֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעולָם אֲשֶׁר בִּדְבָרו מַעֲרִיב עֲרָבִים. בְּחָכְמָה פּותֵחַ שְׁעָרִים, וּבִתְבוּנָה מְשַׁנֶּה עִתִּים וּמַחֲלִיף אֶת הַזְּמַנִּים, וּמְסַדֵּר אֶת הַכּוכָבִים בְּמִשְׁמְרותֵיהֶם בָּרָקִיעַ כִּרְצונו. בּורֵא יום וָלָיְלָה, גּולֵל אור מִפְּנֵי חשֶׁךְ וְחשֶׁךְ מִפְּנֵי אור. וּמַעֲבִיר יום וּמֵבִיא לָיְלָה, וּמַבְדִּיל בֵּין יום וּבֵין לָיְלָה. יי צְבָאות שְׁמו: אֵל חַי וְקַיָּם תָּמִיד יִמְלוךְ עָלֵינוּ לְעולָם וָעֶד. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, הַמַּעֲרִיב עֲרָבִים.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher bid’varo maariv aravim, b’chochmah potei-ach sh’arim, uvit’vunah m’shaneh itim umachalif et haz’manim, um’sadeir et hakochavim b’mishm’roteihem barakia kirtzono. Borei yom valailah, goleil or mipnei choshech, v’choshech mipnei or. Umaavir yom umeivi lailah, umavdil bein yom uvein lailah, Adonai Tz’vaot sh’mo. El chai v’kayam, tamid yimloch aleinu l’olam va-ed. Baruch atah, Adonai, hamaariv aravim.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe,
who speaks the evening into being,
skillfully opens the gates,
thoughtfully alters the time and changes the seasons,
and arranges the stars in their heavenly courses according to plan.
You are Creator of day and night,
rolling light away from darkness and darkness from light,
transforming day into night and distinguishing one from the other.
*Adonai Tz’vaot* is Your Name.
Ever-living God, may You reign continually over us into eternity.
Blessed are You, Adonai, who brings on evening.

3 Leah Goldberg( 1911-1970)*: The Moon Sings to the Stream*

<https://vimeo.com/266948532> (musical versión)

אני היחוד במרום,
אני הריבוי במצולה
תשקיף מן הנחל אלי
דמותי, דמותי הכפולה

אני האמת במרום,
אני הבדיה במצולה,
תשקיף מן הנחל אלי
דמותי בכזב גורלה

למעלה - עוטה דומיות,
הומה, מזמר במצולה
אני במרום - האל,
בנחל אני התפילה

I am unity on high,

But in the deep I am the multiple,

From the stream looks up to me

My image, my double.

I am truth on high,

I am fiction in the deep,

From the stream looks up to me

My image’s foiled destiny.

Above I am wrapped in silence,

In the deep I sing and murmur,

On high I am the Lord

In the stream I am the prayer.

---Translated by Ruth Finer Mintz

**More Sources for Natural Imagery:**

Biblical: Genesis 1, Prophets, Psalms, Song of Songs

Rabbinic: Talmudic literature, Midrashic literature, Siddur

Medieval: Sephardi poets, Rambam, Joseph Caro, Mysticism (Abulafia)

Modern Period: Zionist poets of Russia and Palestine, Israeli literature, song, poetry, essays, responsa literature

<https://www.sefaria.org/--a> collection of classical sources in Hebrew and English

**Tackling the Environmental Crisis: What’s a Jew to Do?**

ספירת העומר מלמדת ...תהליך, להאמין בדרך

Counting the omer teaches process, to believe in the pathway

--Sivan Rahav-Mei, 2016

1. **From 3rd paragraph of the Aleinu**

**עַל** כֵּן נְקַוֶּה לָךְ, יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהֵֽינוּ, לִרְאוֹת מְהֵרָה בְּתִפְאֶֽרֶת עֻזָּךְ, לְהַֽעֲבִיר גִּלּוּלִים מִן הָאָֽרֶץ, וְהָֽאֱלִילִים כָּרוֹת יִכָּֽרֵתוּן, **לְתַקֵּן עוֹלָם בְּמַלְכוּת שַׁדַּי**, וְכָל־בְּנֵי בָשָׂר יִקְרְאוּ בִשְׁמֶֽךָ

And so we hope in You, Lord our G-d, soon to see Your splendor, sweeping idolatry away so that false gods will be utterly destroyed, **perfecting the earth** by Your Kingship so that all people will invoke Your name.

1. **Mishnah Avot 2 (Pirkei Avot)**

הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, לֹא עָלֶיךָ הַמְּלָאכָה לִגְמֹר, וְלֹא אַתָּה בֶן חוֹרִין לִבָּטֵל מִמֶּנָּה

He [Rabbi Tarfon] used to say: It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it;

1. **Shabbat 63b**

רֵישׁ לָקִישׁ אָמַר: עַד כָּאן לְדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה, מִכָּאן וְאֵילָךְ לְמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים

**Reish Lakish said: Until here,** the verse [Ecclesiastes 11:9] refers **to matters of Torah.** One is provided the opportunity to study and involve himself in the Torah and rejoice in its innovations; **from here on,** “but know that, etc.,” **it refers to good deeds.** One will ultimately stand trial for that which he studied and did not implement.