

Under Alien Skies by Yossel Birstein

The Blessing for my Toil

Translated by Miriam Leberstein

And I am akin to those
who, in our quiet town, would
go weeping soundlessly to God;
who, so as evil to assuage
recited prayers of consolation.
Devoutly they broadcast the news:
the wonder of another world –
in my kinship with these
lies the blessing for my toil.

And I am akin to those
who would innocently bless
the sweat of the brow, the taste of bread.
Had faith and praised. And longingly
wished for themselves a drop of joy,
wished another for themselves
as they swallowed back a tear –
in my kinship with these
lies the blessing for my toil.

And I am akin to those
who right until the very end
still believed that God is here.
God is here. He heeds, protects –
and a nation in the depths of night
it was such a desert night
breathed out its final prayer – (1)
in my kinship with these
lies the blessing for my toil.

(1)Birstein uses the name of the prayer, the *shma* (Heb. *Shema Yisroel*) a declaration of faith, which is recited twice daily, and on other occasions, including just before dying.