

S.Y. Agnon

A BOOK THAT WAS LOST
THIRTY-FIVE STORIES

EXPANDED EDITION, INCLUDING ALL STORIES FROM *TWENTY-ONE STORIES*

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The Signature Story

Our anthology opens with “Agunot,” Agnon’s first publication in the Land of Israel and the story whose title he adapted to form his own name. “Agunot” marks the artistic birth of the writer and shapes his unique relationship to the traditional Jewish world. The title “Agunot,” derived from *agunah*, the legal term for a woman whose status in the community is indeterminate, highlights themes of disconnection and lack of wholeness. These themes enter indirectly into the story’s account of souls who are set adrift and unable to find their anchors. The narrative is prefaced by an exquisite passage that draws on the imagery of the Song of Songs to depict the close relationship of God to Israel. We might almost think we were reading a classical midrash—a rabbinical expansion on the biblical text. Indeed the story opens with the traditional phrase “It is said,” an expression used by the rabbis to introduce a quotation from Scripture. But rather than a biblical citation, “Agunot” crafts its own combination of images drawn from rabbinic commentary and mystical writings. This opening paragraph engages in an intricate piece of interpretive play, what we might call, following the critic Gershon Shaked, a pseudomidrash.

Endowing the relationship of God to Israel with a sense of radiant wholeness, the opening passage traces for the reader the tender desire with which God weaves a prayer shawl for Israel. The image of the prayer shawl portrays the interwoven relationship between God and Israel as an intimacy that is disrupted by the introduction of a “flaw” in the weave, a defect that appears to be the product of human error or frailty. This notion of the prayer shawl as a fabric woven out of many strands is a suggestive one: it can be taken further to suggest an emblematic image of Agnon’s writing as a weaving out of many sources.

The image of the flawed prayer shawl and the loss of wholeness in the relationship of God to Israel provide a backdrop against which the kinds of loss that the story depicts can be measured. Thus we find in “Agunot” lovers who are mismatched or who undergo separation. We see the imbalance and disconnection that are the result of the excessive attachment of an artist to the holy ark he crafts, a woman’s jealousy of the artist’s commitment, and several pairs of mismatched lovers.

Desire figures prominently as a driving force in “Agunot,” but the aims and objects of desire are quite varied. They include certainly the desire of one person for another, but the story also demonstrates the rivalrous desires for glory in Torah learning felt by Jews in the Diaspora and those in the Land of Israel, as well as the desire of the artist to complete the perfect work. Nowhere do these desires find fulfillment. And so desire itself becomes a subject of the writing in this delicately wrought tale of attraction, investment, and frustration. Agnon returned to “Agunot” over the years, revising it in 1921 and again in 1931, each time rendering it a more concise and highly crafted text. The story that we have before us, rewritten twice over, weaves elements of hasidic storytelling and European romanticism into a narrative mode that is uniquely Agnon’s.

Agunot

I

It is said: A thread of grace is spun and drawn out of the deeds of Israel, and the Holy One, blessed be He, Himself, in His glory, sits and weaves—strand on strand—a tallit all grace and all mercy, for the Congregation of Israel to deck herself in. Radiant in the light of her beauty she glows, even in these, the lands of her exile, as she did in her youth in her Father's house, in the Temple of her Sovereign and the city of sovereignty, Jerusalem. And when He, of ineffable Name, sees her, that she has been neither sullied nor stained even here, in the realm of her oppressors, He—as it were—leans toward her and says, “Behold thou art fair, my beloved, behold thou art fair.” And this is the secret of the power and the glory and the exaltation and the tenderness in love which fills the heart of every man in Israel. But there are times—alas!—when some hindrance creeps up and snaps a thread in the loom. Then the tallit is damaged: evil spirits hover about it, enter into it, and tear it to shreds. At once a sense of shame assails all Israel, and they know they are naked. Their days of rest are wrested from them, their feasts are fasts, their lot is dust instead of luster. At that hour the Congregation of Israel stays

abroad in her anguish, crying, "Strike me, wound me, take away my veils from me!" Her beloved has slipped away, and she, seeking him, cries, "If ye find my beloved, what shall ye tell him? That I am afflicted with love." And this affliction of love leads to darkest melancholy, which persists—Mercy shield us!—until, from the heavens above, He breathes down upon us strength of spirit, to repent and to muster deeds that are pride to their doers and again draw forth that thread of grace and love before the Lord.

And this is the theme of the tale recounted here, a great tale and terrible, from the Holy Land, of one renowned for his riches—Sire Ahiezer by name—who set his heart on going up from the Diaspora to the holy city Jerusalem—may she be rebuilt and established—to work great wonders of restoration in the midst of her ruins, and in this way to restore at least a corner of the anteroom which will be transformed into our mansion of glory on the day when the Holy One, blessed be He, restores His presence to Zion—may it be soon, in our day!

And credit him kindly, Lord—credit him well for his wishes, and for his ministrations to his brethren, sons of his people, who dwell before Thee in the Land of the Living, and this though he ultimately failed.

Sire Ahiezer fathered no sons, but he praised the Ineffable sevenfold daily for the daughter who fell to his lot. He cherished her like the apple of his eye, and set maidservants and tirewomen to wait on her, that her very least wish might be honored. And, surely, she was worthy of all this respect, for she was the pattern of virtue, and all the graces were joined together in her person: princely the radiance of her countenance; like the matriarchs' her straitness of virtue; her voice pleasing as the harp of David; and all her ways modest and gentle. But all this pride was inward, and dwelt apart, in the innermost chambers, so that only the intimates of her father's house might behold her, at twilight, when, at times, she went down to walk in the garden, among the spice trees and the roses, where the doves fluttered about her in the twilight, murmuring their fondness in her ears and shielding her with their wings, like the golden cherubs on the ark of the sanctuary.

And when her season came, the season of love, her father sent couriers to all the dispersions of Israel, to spy out a youth that would be her match, such a paragon, a cluster of virtue, as had no peer in all the world. Here it was that the evil one intervened, and not in vain were the words bruited about, by the men of Jerusalem, to the effect that Sire Ahiezer had slighted all the seminaries and academies, all the seats of learning in the Land of Israel when he sent to find a match for his daughter among the sons of the exile abroad. But who might admonish so mighty a man—who might tender him counsel? They all began eagerly to await the match that the Holy One, blessed be He, would provide for this cloistered grace, glorious child, vaunted daughter of Jerusalem.

And then, months having passed, a scroll was received from the emissaries, declaring: “We hereby proclaim with joy: with the aid of the Lord we have found in Poland a boy, a wondrous lad, in virtue clad, with wisdom blest, head and shoulders above all the rest; pious, modest, pedigreed; model of virtue and good deed; paragon and worthy son, wreathed in blessings from the sages, who bless this match with all their hearts and wages.” And so forth.

The grandee, Sire Ahiezer, seeing his designs were prospering, thought it only fitting that the above-mentioned bridegroom hold forth at a great academy in Jerusalem, that scholars might stream from the ends of the earth to hear the law from his lips. What did he do? He convened all manner of craftsmen, built a great mansion, adorned it inside and out—painted it and gilded it and furnished it with several cartloads of precious texts, no jot of godly wisdom lacking among them. And he designated a hall for prayer, adorned it with all manner of adornment, and called on the scribes to prepare the scrolls of the law, and on the gold- and silversmiths to design the ornaments of the scrolls—and all of this in order that the prayers of the sage might be neighbor to his studies, so that he might truthfully say, “Here is my God, and I will praise Him.” The grandee, wishing to consummate his work of glorifying the sanctuary, set his heart on an ark for the scrolls—an ark such as the eye of man had never seen.

He began to ask after a proper craftsman. Among the journey-men he came on one said to be versed in the subtlest of crafts, one

Ben Uri by name—a man both modest and diffident, a mere craftsman as met the eye were it not for the spark that flashed from his glance and was reflected in the work of his hand. Ahiezer took note, and placed the work of the ark in his hand.

2

Sire Ahiezer took Ben Uri and lodged him by the garden at the bottom of his house. Ben Uri brought his tools and readied himself for the task. Immediately, another spirit possessed him. His hands wrought the ark; his lips uttered song all the day.

Dinah, lovely child of Ahiezer, stood by her window, gazing into the trees, and heard. Dreaming, she was drawn to the singer as though—God save us!—a spell had been cast. So she went down, she and her handmaidens with her went down, to examine the work of the man. She peered into the ark, she stirred his paints, examined his carvings, and picked up his tools. All the time Ben Uri worked, singing as he worked, working even as he sang. Dinah heard his song and did not know her heart. And he, even as he wrought, all the time aimed his song at her heart, to wrap it in his rapture, so that she might stand there forever, never depart.

But as Ben Uri pursued his work, he cleaved more and more to it, until both eyes and heart passed into the ark; no part of him was free of it. Memory of Dinah fled him; it was as though she did not exist. Not many days passed before he stopped singing altogether; his voice rang out no more. Ben Uri stood by the ark all day, carving figures on the ark and breathing the soul of life into them. Lions mounted upon it, a mane of gold on each of the pair, their mouths brimming with song, uttering the glories of the Lord. On the hangings that draped the doors of the ark, eagles poised above, their wings spread, to leap toward the sacred beasts above. At the sound of the golden bells when the ark was opened, they would soar in their places, flap their wings, and wrap the universe in song. Already the worthies of Jerusalem awaited the day the ark would be borne up to the house of the Lord the hand of the grandee had builded, when the scrolls of

the law, crowned with silver and lapped in gold and decked out in all the jewels of sanctity, would find their place within this ark.

Rapt, Ben Uri wrought, possessed by a joy he had never known before. In no kingdom, in no province, in the course of no labor had he exulted as he exulted here, in the place where the Shekhinah was revealed and then reviled, in the multitude of our transgressions. Not many days passed before his labors were ended. Ben Uri looked at the work of his hands and was astonished how the ark stood firm while he himself was like an empty vessel. His soul was sad and he broke out in tears.

Ben Uri went out to seek the air among the trees in the garden, to restore his spirits a little. The sun set in the west; the face of the heavens crimsoned. Ben Uri went down to the far corners of the garden, he laid himself down, and he slept. At just that moment Dinah left her chamber. Her robe clung to her flesh; fear was on her countenance. It was many days since she had heard Ben Uri's voice, since she had looked on the man. She went to his chamber to look at the ark. She came, but did not find him there. Dinah stood in Ben Uri's chamber, and the ark of God stood at the open window, where Ben Uri had worked. She stood near the ark and examined it. The evil one came and poured a potion of vengeance into her heart. He pointed at the ark and said, "It is not for nought that Ben Uri takes no thought of you; it is the ark that separates you twain." At that moment Dinah lifted her arms and smote the ark. The ark teetered and fell through the open window.

The ark fell, but no part of it was broken, no corner of it was blemished. It lay there among the trees in the garden below. Roses and lilies nodded over it, like mourners at the ark of the dead. Night drew a mantle of black silk over the ark. The moon came out of the clouds and, weaving its silvery web, traced a Star of David on the shroud.

3

On her couch in the night Dinah lies and her heart wakes. Her sin weighs heavily upon her: who could bear her burden of guilt? Dinah

buries her head in her pallet, oppressed by sorrow, by shame. How can she look to Heaven, how call to it for grace? Dinah springs from her couch and lights the taper in her room. In the mirror opposite, light flares out in her eyes. It had been her mother's glass but held no trace of her mother's glance. Were Dinah to look into it now, it is only her own countenance she would see—the countenance of a sinner. “Mother, Mother!” her heart cries out. But there is no answer. Dinah rose and crossed to the window; she rested her chin on her hands and looked out. Jerusalem is cradled in mountains. The wind swept down and entered her chamber, extinguishing the light, as in a sickroom where some invalid sleeps. It played around her hair and through her ears, whispering sweet melodies, like the songs Ben Uri had sung. Where, oh where, is he now?

Among the trees in the garden he sleeps, like a lyre whose strings are rent, whose melodies have forsaken it. And the ark lies prone, in the garden. The Guardian of Night unfurls his pinions of darkness, and the lions and eagles in the ark nestle under his wings. An unspotted moon slips out of the clouds; another moon rises to meet her in the waters of the pond. They stand, face to face, like a pair of Sabbath candles. To what might the ark have been compared at that moment? To a woman who extends her palms in prayer, while her breasts—the Tables of the Covenant—are lifted with her heart, beseeching her Father in heaven: “Master of the Universe, this soul which Thou hast breathed into him Thou hast taken from him, so that now he is cast before Thee, like a body without its soul, and Dinah, this unspotted soul, has gone forth naked into exile. God! Till when shall the souls that dwell in Thy kingdom suffer the death of this life, in bereavement, and the service of Thy habitation sound out in suffering and dread?”

All Israel that was in Jerusalem had foregathered to consecrate the ark, to bear it up from Ben Uri's chamber to the synagogue. They thronged into Ben Uri's chamber, but the ark was not there. Bewildered, they cried, “Where is the ark?—the ark of the Lord?” “Where is the ark?” “The ark, where is it?” They were still crying out when they spied it, under the window, prone in the yard. Directly they began to heap abuse on its creator, saying that the ne'er-do-well, the

scoundrel was surely an infamous sinner, quite unqualified for the hallowed work of the ark: having presumed to undertake it, he had surely called down the wrath of the heavens, which had overturned it. And, having revered the ark, they loathed it. The rabbi immediately condemned it to banishment. Two Ishmaelites came and heaved it into the lumber room. The congregation dispersed in torment, their heads covered with shame.

The morning star glimmered and dawned, lighting the skies in the east. The folk of Jerusalem awoke as from an evil dream. The ark had been banished, their joy had set, Ben Uri had vanished, none knew whither. Misery reigned in the house of the Sire.

Night and day Dinah keeps to her window. She raises her eyes to the heavens and casts them down again, like a sinner. Sire Ahiezer is dogged by worries. The synagogue his hands had builded stands desolate, without ark, without prayer, without learning. Sire Ahiezer bestirred himself and commissioned an ark to replace Ben Uri's. They installed it in the synagogue, but it stood there like an emblem of loss. Whoever comes to pray in the synagogue is at once struck by dire melancholy; he slips away from that place and seeks some place of worship, humble and poor, where he can pour out his heart before God.

4

The time of rejoicing is come; the wedding day is near, and in the house of Sire Ahiezer they knead and they bake and they dress all the viands, and prepare fine draperies to hang in the gateway, for the day his daughter will enter under the bridal canopy with her partner in joy, the esteemed and the learned Ezekiel, God preserve him.

And—see!—upon the hillsides the feet of a courier—a special emissary with scroll in hand: “Twill be the third day hence!” They were preparing themselves to delight in the bride and the bridegroom on the day of their joy, saying, “A precious pearl it is the couriers have drawn from the sea of learning that is Poland, and the festivities will be such that as Jerusalem shall not have seen the likes of, since the

day her sons were driven into exile.” All the men of Jerusalem went forth to welcome the bridegroom, and they brought him into the city in great honor, with tabor and cymbal and dancing. They escorted him to the house of Sire Ahiezer, and the great ones of the city, assessing his virtues, were dazzled by a tongue dropping pearls, and by his regal presence. Then the wedding day arrived. They accompanied the bride to the house of the rabbi, to receive her blessing from his lips. Suddenly, she raised her voice in weeping and cried, “Leave us alone!” They left her with the rabbi. She told him all that had happened, how it was she who had overturned the ark. The rabbi stood mute with terror, his very vision was confounded. But, deferring to the eminence of the bride on this, her day of grace and atonement, he began to ply her with comfort. “My child,” he said, “our sages of blessed memory tell us that when a person takes a wife to himself, all his sins fall away. Notice that it was ‘person’ they said, not ‘man,’ and thence we gather that it was not man, the male, that was meant, but mankind in general, so that man and wife are one in this, that on the day of their marriage the Holy One, blessed be He, pardons their sins. And should you ask, How is a woman to earn her absolution, on whom the yoke of works weighs so lightly?—know that the good Lord has called you to the greatest of all works. And should you ask, What could that be? I will tell you: it is the rearing of children in the ways of the Lord.” And he proceeded to speak the praises of her bridegroom, to endear him to her and draw her heart to his virtues. And when the rabbi came to the matter of the ark, he intimated that silence would be seemly and held that the ark would be restored to its rightful place, to the synagogue, and that merciful God would grant Dinah forgiveness. After the bride had left the house of the rabbi, the latter sent Sire Ahiezer word regarding the restoration of Ben Uri’s ark to the synagogue. They sought it, but did not find it. Stolen? Hidden? Ascended to heaven?—who could presume to say?

Day ebbed and the sun set. All the great ones of Jerusalem foregathered with Sire Ahiezer in his house to celebrate his daughter’s marriage. Jerusalem glowed in precious light, and the trees in the garden were fragrant as spices. The musicians plied their instru-

ments, and the servants clapped for good cheer. Yet nonetheless a sort of sadness has found a place among them. This sadness attacks the bridal canopy and rips it into shreds. They assemble at the grandee's table, to partake of the wedding feast. The throats of the scholars are filled with delicate viands and wines, with song and hymns of praise. The jester calls for a dance for the righteous, and they move out in a ritual ring to cheer the bride and the groom. But this dear pair are afflicted by some sadness; it drives a wedge between them and forces their elbows apart. And neither drew near to the other all that night, even in the seclusion of their chamber. The groom broods in one corner, his thoughts straying elsewhere. He dwells on his father's house, on Freidele, whose mother had tended his father and him since his sainted mother had died. And Dinah broods in the other, her thoughts going back to the ark and its builder who has vanished from the city, no one knowing where he has turned.

At morning prayers the young man stood wrapped in a prayer shawl and crowned with tefillin. He reigns as bridegroom all the seven days of the feast, and is not left alone, lest envious spirits assail him. But how to ward off the spirits that hold sway in his heart and afflict him greatly? Just when he is preparing to give himself over, heart and soul, to the Shema and shields his eyes with his palms in order to shut out anything that might intrude on his devotions—just then his Freidele slips into the palm of his hand and stands there before his eyes. And once she has accommodated herself there, she stays there till the end of the service, when he unwinds his phylacteries and lays them in their reticule. This reticule—Freidele has made for him with characters embroidered upon it! He folds the reticule, and wraps it in his tallit, and furtively puts it away. His father, come from Poland for the nuptials, watches him, angry and troubled. What might he be wanting in the house of Sire Ahiezer? If wealth he craved, here was wealth, so prodigal; if love of woman, his wife was comely and gracious; if a home, this one was fit for a king. Why, then, was he restless? They went in to breakfast, and chanted the seven blessings of nuptial felicity, and seated the couple side by side. Their bodies are close, but their hearts have been given to others.

5

And they never drew near. Month comes and month goes. In numbers the scholars assembled, to attend the law from Ezekiel's lips, and the academy was filled with holy lore. Gracious learning was on his tongue, and whatever his mode of expounding—simple or subtle or mystic—bright angels gathered around him, shedding the light of the law on his brow. But even as he teaches, anguish gnaws at his heart, as though—God forbid!—he lacks gratitude for having been deemed worthy to go up to the Holy Land.

And Dinah—Dinah sits, despondent. At times she goes out for a while, and stands by the spot where Ben Uri had wrought, and stares at his implements, which are gathering dust. She clasps her hands and murmurs some few of the songs Ben Uri had sung, sings until her eyes are dimmed by tears. Her soul weeps in secret for her pride. Once, as Rabbi Ezekiel was passing by, he heard a pleasing melody rising within that chamber. When he paused to listen, they told him that it was no mortal voice he heard singing, but rather the evil spirits that had been created out of Ben Uri's breath as he sat and sang at his work. Rabbi Ezekiel hastened away. Thenceforth, when forced to walk in that part of the house, he averted his head, in order to avoid lending his ears to the chants of such as these.

Toward evening, Rabbi Ezekiel goes to walk in the hills. The mighty ones of Israel walk out at that hour, and their retainers go before them, striking the earth with their staffs, and all the people hasten to rise in awe and deference before them, and the sun casts purple canopies over each of the righteous as it goes down to greet its Creator. The elect, who are deemed worthy of this, are granted the privilege of finding their place in the Holy Land in their lifetime, and not only this, but those deemed worthy of dwelling there in their lifetime are privileged to enjoy the Holy Spirit forever and ever. But Rabbi Ezekiel? His feet are planted in the gates of Jerusalem and stand on her soil, but his eyes and his heart are pledged to houses of study and worship abroad, and even now, as he walked in the hills of Jerusalem, he fancies himself among the scholars of his own town, strolling in the fields to take the evening air.

It is told once they found there Freidele sitting with her friends, singing:

*They have borne him far away
To wed a dowered maiden.
His father did not care to know
Our hearts were heavy laden.*

One day an emissary of the rabbis returned to Jerusalem from the Diaspora and brought a letter for Rabbi Ezekiel. His father was pleased to inform him that he had negotiated the home journey in safety and now, as ever before, was bearing up under the burdens of justice and learning in their town. In passing, he thought his son might care to know that Freidele had found her mate and had moved—together with her mother—to another city, so that the sexton's wife was therefore looking after his needs. Rabbi Ezekiel read the letter and began to weep. Here was Freidele, decently wedded, and here was he, fancying her still. And his own wife? When they pass each other she stares off in one direction, he in another.

Month comes, month goes, and the academy grows ever more desolate. The scholars, one by one, steal away. They cut a staff from some tree in the garden, take it in hand, and set off on their separate ways. It is obvious for all to see—Heaven help us!—that Rabbi Ezekiel's soul is tainted. Sire Ahiezer perceived that his works had not prospered, that the couple was ill-matched, that the marriage, in fact, was no marriage at all.

The couple stand silent before the rabbi, their eyes downcast. Rabbi Ezekiel is about to divorce his wife. And just as he did not look at her at the hour of their marriage, so he does not look at her in the hour of their parting. And just as Dinah did not hear his voice as he said to her, "Lo, thou art sanctified unto me," so she does not hear it as he says, "Lo, I cast thee forth." Our sages of blessed memory said that when a man puts his first wife away from him, the very altars weep, but here the altars had dropped tears even as he took her to wife. It was not long that Sire Ahiezer left Jerusalem with his daughter. He had failed in his settlement there; his wishes had not prospered.

He went forth in shame, his spirit heavy within him. His house was deserted, the house of study stood desolate. And the quorum that had gathered in the synagogue to honor Sire Ahiezer so long as he was there, now did not assemble there for even the first round of afternoon prayers on the day of his departure.

6

That very night, after the departure, the rabbi, seated at study, nodded over his Talmud. In a dream he saw that he would suffer exile. Next morning, following the counsel of our sages, he put the best possible interpretation on his dream, and fasted all day. After he had tasted a morsel and returned to his study, he heard a voice. He raised his eyes and saw the Shekhinah in the guise of a lovely woman, garbed in black, and without adornment, nodding mournfully at him. The rabbi started out of his sleep, rent his garments, again made good his dream, and sat fasting for a day and a night, and in the dark of the following evening inquired as to the signification of his dream. Providence disclosed to him a number of things concealed from mortal sight, and he beheld with eyes of spirit the souls of those bereaved of their beloved in their lifetime groping dismally in the world for their mates. He peered hard and saw Ben Uri. Ben Uri said to him, "Wherefore hast thou driven me out, that I should not cleave to my portion of the Kingdom?" "Is it thy voice I hear, Ben Uri, my son?" the rabbi cried, and he lifted his voice and he wept. Weeping, the rabbi woke out of his sleep and knew that his doom had been sealed. He washed his hands, drew on his mantle, took up his staff and his wallet, and, calling to his wife, said, "My daughter, seek not after me in my going forth, for the doom of exile has been levied upon me, to redeem the forsaken in love." He kissed the mezuzah and slipped away. They sought him, and did not find him.

They say he wanders still. Once an aged emissary from the Holy Land stopped at a house of study in the Diaspora. One night he nodded at his devotions, and in his sleep he heard a voice. He awoke and saw that selfsame rabbi holding a youth by the hem of his robe and

trying to draw him away. Frightened, the emissary cried out, "Rabbi, are you here?" The rabbi vanished. The youth then confided to the emissary that when the house of study was emptied of its worshippers, he had begun to fashion an ornament for the easterly wall of the synagogue, and the emissary had borne witness to the loveliness of that ornament and to the craft with which it was fashioned. But as soon as he had begun, that old man had stood at his side, drawn him by the hem of his robe, and whispered, "Come, let us rise and go up to Jerusalem."

Since that time innumerable tales have been told of that rabbi and of his sojourning in the "world of confusion," Mercy shield us! Rabbi Nissim, of blessed memory, who traveled about in the world for many years, used to say, "May I forfeit my portion in the redemption of Israel, if I did not behold him once floating off into the Great Sea on a red kerchief, with an infant child in his arms. And even though the hour was twilight, and the sun was setting, I swear by all that we yearn for in prayer that it was he, but as for that child—I do not know who that was."

At the present time it is said that he has been seen wandering about in the Holy Land. The world-wise cavil and quibble, and even—some of them—mock. But little children insist that at times, in the twilight, an old man hails them, and peering into their eyes drifts into the gathering dusk. And whoever has heard the tale here recounted surely knows that the man is that rabbi, he, and no other. But God alone knows for a fact.

Translated by Baruch Hochman