

THE REFORM JEWISH QUARTERLY

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of the drama of history as well and made their own contributions to it. The book invites us to see the arc of Jewish history, and the historical moments in which we have participated, in a dramatic new light. For that we can be grateful to Ringler for this remarkable labor of love.

RABBI DANIEL POLISH (C68) is the recently emeritized rabbi of Congregation Shir Chadash of the Hudson Valley, LaGrange, New York.

Headstone

by Mark Elber

(Baltimore, MD: Passager Books, 2022), 112 pp.

Post High Holy Days I dove into Rabbi Mark Elber's collection of poems in his latest compilation, *Headstone*. The themes of the season—returning, remembering, and renewing ourselves and our people—remain with me a month after the holy days. Perhaps not intended, Elber's collection helps to keep those themes fresh. In particular, "Headstone," pulled me back into the holy day season with its images of Elber's father's last day at synagogue on Yom Kippur. The importance of that day for him and his family ripples off the pages.

Full of alliteration, secret metaphors, and revealing imagery, Elber describes different parts of his life. He begins with his birth in Astoria, Queens, aligning his birth with the wrestling of Jacob, resulting in a new life for Jacob. Throughout his collection, Elber connects with the words of the *Tanach*, especially the well-known lines from Exodus—"I am that I am" (Exodus 3:7–8, 13–14). He aligns this phrase with Descartes's words, "I think, therefore I am," showing how he has been inspired by both these phrases.

He continues to use unique words to convey his love and awe for his father and their connection. Elber invites us to learn about their relationship through the transportation system of New York. In "Further Notes from the Underground," one sees the city through Elber's young eyes as he rides with his father on the subway. The reader learns more about his father in the poem, "Red Hair," where his father yearns to stay young as he realizes parts of his life are foreshadowing his death. The collection's title poem, "Headstone," describes his father's experience with World War II and his time in

concentration camps. In this poem, the reader learns Elber's life history through his father's life. It is effectively a eulogy to his father.

Because so many of the poems include scriptural references, it is easy to see how they could be utilized in our rabbinic work. For example, as a Pittsburgh native, I am inspired to use Elber's poem "Pittsburgh" in the coming years as we observe the anniversaries of that horrific attack. Aside from this personal connection, I hope to use his poems about his wedding and his relationship with his family in upcoming life-cycle ceremonies. "Your Small Hands" would be a great poem for a baby naming or a bris with its images of a "five pound, small lipped, and cheerios."

Rabbi Elber was ordained by ALEPH in 2012 and is the rabbi of Temple Beth El, a Conservative synagogue in Fall River, Massachusetts. He is a certified Jewish meditation teacher. Elber has been writing poetry since he was a teenager, yet this is his first book of poems to be published. I can see his expertise and am in awe of this work. Readers will be able to get a glimpse into Rabbi Elber's life through reading his poetry. More than that, his work offers us the following lesson using High Holy Day themes—to remember is to return to our past. Returning to our past allows us to feel renewed in the new year.

RABBI NATALIE LOUISE SHRIBMAN (C20) is a hospital chaplain at the Marshfield Clinic and a rabbi at Temple Sholom in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. She lives in Wausau, Wisconsin, with her rabbi partner and cat.