

*Breath in a Ram's Horn* texts by Paul Pines

1. What Do We Know

What do we know  
that we shall keep?

Does a housefly  
have a heart?  
A dragonfly?  
A flea?

My father as a boy  
sold apples  
on the street  
after his father  
ran off as

later  
in his heart  
he ran from me

As a boy  
I ran away  
hoping he'd find me

(he never did)

and found instead  
my grandfather Marcus

lost  
in my heart  
searching for him

## 2. Old Medals, Prayer Shawls

Old medals  
prayer shawls  
letters from Warsaw

locked behind a closet door

my father's chipped phylacteries  
he put on one morning  
to show us

he was bound  
by law

(no less  
than Laius  
killed by the son

he left out  
to die)

that destiny  
is not arbitrary

but what  
we build  
bound  
hand and foot

my father  
thus

swaying  
as he prays  
to a strange god  
in a strange tongue

### 3. Job Longed for the Grave

Job longed for  
the grave

would've  
preferred it

to the lesson  
David

learned  
throughout

his life  
as King

among  
The Chosen...

that the Lord  
whose

unmediated  
suffering

flows through  
Creation

requires  
us

blossoms of  
his sorrow

to  
open in praise

#### 4. Yom Kippur

at year's end  
we put all other things aside  
to remember  
our origins

Abba/ Eli

you listening  
to Jan Pierce sing Kol Nidre  
the bitter sweet meal  
sadness  
of a people

I fled

finding their sorrow  
too much in  
my youth

breath in a ram's horn  
who calls?

elegies  
echo in my throat  
father father

dead at fifty five

as I approach  
the age at which

you died

I listen for  
your prayers

## 5. My Father's Name Was

My father's name was  
Bernard.

He screwed up  
in certain ways  
but he was a good man,  
gave me what he could.

My mother's name was  
Charlotte.

She screwed up, too,  
but carried me

in her womb  
and afterward  
tried to keep in touch.

These were my parents,

Charlotte  
and Bernard. They

fought but never  
apologized,  
died young and  
left me behind like  
a clue

at the scene  
of a crime. Bernard  
and Charlotte  
a long time dead  
and buried  
inside of me. I am  
their tomb.

Charlotte and  
Bernard. My mother  
and father who  
laugh when I insist  
I'm nobody's baby now.